



WILLIAM'S *House*

HIDDEN MAGIC SERIES

AMBER KELL

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HIDDEN MAGIC 1

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DEDICATION

For my paranormal-loving fans.

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CHAPTER ONE

William Stamson never thought he'd fall in love with a lady.

After being a gay man for the first twenty-five years of his life, he met a tattered painted lady with three broken windows and a gap-toothed fence, and fell illogically, irrevocably in love.

"I'll take the house," he told the realtor who stood, waiting patiently, for him to finish examining the front of the mansion.

"B-but you haven't seen the inside. The house needs a lot of work," she sputtered. "There are several in much better shape if you like this neighborhood." He watched her wrestling between wanting an easy sale and her moral obligation not to sell a decrepit house to a client.

He wondered if her reluctance stemmed from the magic pulsing through the property, like a beating drum, pounding out a complicated rhythm. Hearing the underlying music wasn't an ability everyone had. Most days William wished he were one of those talentless people. Although he could hear the power thrumming through the air, his strange immunity kept him from using the magic. He wasn't surprised no one could live in the house. The

mansion all but seethed with energy, an uncomfortable experience for magic wielders, while giving non-magical people the eerie sensation of a haunted house. Electricity crackled in the air, arcs of energy dancing around him. The house's magic reached out to him, invisible fingers ruffling his hair, like a human petting a favored child.

Closing his eyes he opened his senses to the entity.

A soft gasp, a pleased hum, and the pounding rhythm smoothed to a quiet whisper. A hush filled the air like the silence after a tornado or maybe the eye of the storm.

Acceptance.

The sensation sank into his bones, warm and loving like a mother's hug. Well, maybe other people's mothers. His didn't give actual hugs. Physical contact might wrinkle her designer clothes.

"Are you sure you want to put in an offer?" The realtor's anxious voice broke up the moment, the magic dissolving. Her tone wavered between hope and desperation. For the first time he noticed the worn cuffs on her green suit and the faded color of the shirt tucked underneath.

"Yes," William insisted. Despite the building's odd power, the place felt as if he were home. Besides, writing scary detective stories could only be easier living in a

spooky mansion. He smiled when he thought about his relatives' future reaction.

William was the dreamer, the only exception in a family known for controlling powerful people across the globe. As a result of his carefree approach to life, everyone thought he needed someone to take care of him. Not a relation on either side of his family forgot to leave him a small inheritance when they died.

In Will's family "a little money" was a minimum of two million dollars. His Great-uncle Frederick was particularly generous, even as he addressed Will as "his idiot nephew." He willingly overlooked the condemnation for the cool one hundred million his uncle left in his account.

However, as much as Will loved them, and appreciated their acceptance of his gay lifestyle, if he didn't move out of town soon, he was going to go to jail for fratri-patri-matricide. William longed to settle down with the Mr Average of his dreams, and none of the doctors, stockbrokers, or lawyers paraded in front of him by his hopeful mother and calculating father met his needs. After fucking them, they really served no purpose. He knew his behavior made him a slut, but hell, he didn't golf, and after humiliating them by comparing stock portfolios, there wasn't anything left to do, so he cut them loose, went about

his day, and ignored them when they called.

After going through most of the successful gay men in Seattle, Will decided maybe he should try something different. Besides, the zombies were starting to creep him out. As a void, a person who could nullify magic, William's blood was the essential ingredient in unbinding spells. A few times lately the hairs on his arms stood on end from the sensation of something with a strong magical presence watching him. Another reason he searched for a new home. He needed to lure whatever followed him away from his family.

The search for a place to live brought him to this small town east of Seattle. Unable to find a man, Will planned to settle down with an old painted lady needing a fortune in upgrades.

Luckily, he had a fortune.

"This house has been on the market for a while." She quickly consulted her notes as if they held the secret to William's desire to purchase the old mansion.

He gave her his pants-dropping smile, more than a little surprised when his charm worked on the realtor. Her skin turned an interesting shade of pink. "Then they should be happy to receive an offer. Let's go back to your office and get the paperwork going." He could feel vibes of anticipation coming from the house as if the building sat

waiting for him to come by and save it from ruin.

Poor house.

"What's the asking price?"

She mentioned a ridiculous amount, considering the condition of the house, but he figured the place must have sentimental value to someone, and this one time he didn't feel the need to bargain. He wanted the house.

"I'll take it."

"There might be some delay. I'm not sure a bank will approve such a large amount for the place." The realtor gave the house a dubious look.

"No problem. I'll pay cash."

"Oh." She looked surprisingly flustered. "Then let's draw up the paperwork."

* * * *

A week later, Will happily drank hot coffee in his freezing kitchen. Apparently the heater had died several years ago and no one had the funds or interest in fixing it. He wasn't much of a breakfast person, aside from the occasional cold cereal, but he would definitely go into town for a hot lunch. He needed the stove looked over professionally before he'd willingly trust the appliance with his favorite teakettle. Small town diners were the perfect

place to find out the latest gossip and help him discover whose second cousin twice removed had a son good at fixing stuff.

* * * *

The diner was everything he'd ever seen in the movies.

Old movies.

From the cracked retro fifties booths, to the aging waitress with frizzy hair and attitude, the place appeared as if it were something out of a film. She gave him a slow once over like she didn't know what to make of him. He didn't know why. He wore a plain pair of jeans and a red polo. He'd even left his handcrafted Italian leather shoes at home and wore his plain white Nikes.

He was the epitome of ordinary.

"Have a seat anywhere," the waitress told him. As Will passed her, he caught the faint scent of cigarettes and chewing gum. He held onto his composure by a thread, hoping she didn't snap a bubble at him.

He settled comfortably on a carefully duct-taped vinyl bench seat and accepted the faded menu. The table was the kind of molded plastic some inventor on crack must have thought looked like real wood.

Scanning the list of food, he was almost certain the menu exceeded the abilities of any cook. Eight pages long, the extensive volume listed everything from a thick steak to poached eggs. He couldn't even imagine the cost of keeping so many ingredients on hand.

"Have you decided, hon?" the waitress asked. She pulled a cheap ballpoint pen out from behind her ear and a pad of paper from her apron pocket. Pinning him with a surprisingly clear gaze, she waited for his order as if he were going to reveal the secrets to the universe in six easy steps.

"I'll have a burger, medium rare."

Even an inept cook could make a decent burger.

She nodded, quietly applauding his choice as waiters sometimes do. "Potato salad or fries?"

"Are they thin or thick?"

"Steak fries." Her tone implied disapproval of anything less.

Will reflectively nodded along with her like one of those bobble headed dolls before he caught himself. "I'll have those with ranch dressing."

"Anything to drink? We make a nice milkshake."

He shook his head. "Too heavy. I'll have to jog at least ten miles to burn off the burger calories."

The waitress looked him over again. "I don't think

you have anything to worry about, hon."

"Not if I jog," Will said with a laugh. Although he had a reputation in his family for laziness, he took care of his body with weights and running regularly. "I'll take a diet soda."

As she scribbled down his order, Will wondered if her mother had a premonition at her birth. Why else would you look at your newborn infant and think, "I'll name her Hazel"?

As the waitress turned away, Will grabbed her wrist.

"Sorry," he said, letting go at her surprised look. "Could you tell me who's good at fixing things around here?" Every town had one. A Mr Fix-it who could drive by your house and tell you your water heater was set too high and your air conditioner would die next month.

"What kinds of things?"

Thinking over the condition of his house, Will flashed a self-conscious smile. "Someone who's good with plumbing, flooring, painting, drywall, roofing, that sort of thing."

"Good lord, what house did you buy?"

"The painted lady on Mulberry Street." Another reason he bought the house. Who could resist living on Mulberry Street? *And to Think That I Saw It on Mulberry*

Street was his favorite Dr Seuss book as a child.

"You bought that!" The waitress's voice scraped like rough sandpaper across his senses.

"Yes," Will admitted.

"You are either the richest man I ever met, or the dumbest."

He couldn't help laughing. "I'm probably a mixture of the two."

A considering look entered Hazel's eyes. "Let me put in your order and I'll be right back," she said, hurrying off as quickly as her orthopedic sneakers could carry her.

Not five minutes later she returned, sliding into the seat across from him.

"I have a nephew who has a knack for fixing things," Hazel stated in a low, confidential tone. "He's been laid off, but he worked for a homebuilder before the housing crash. I know he'd do a good job for you." She twisted her fingers together as she spoke. "If you could hire him to help around your house and let him rent one of your rooms, I'd be mighty grateful. His landlord just sold the place he was renting, and I live in a one-bedroom apartment. "

Will thought about the situation for a moment. Having another person in the enormous house would be comforting. "Is he likely to kill me in my sleep and steal

my china set?"

Hazel laughed, a low smoke-roughened sound. "No. He's a good boy, but he's big and some people find him scary." She frowned for a moment, looking concerned. "That isn't a problem for you, is it, mister?"

"Call me Will," he said with a smile. "I'm sure everything will work out fine." Will found the situation touching. How bad could a guy be with an aunt this sweet? "Tell your nephew he can come work for me. I'll give him a few jobs around the house and see how things work out. What's his name?" If the guy turned out to be a creep, Will could call a few of his cousins and have the jerk evicted.

"Cassius, but everyone calls him Cash."

Of course they did.

"Order up," the cook called from the order window.

Hazel got to her feet. "Thank you, Will. I'll tell Cash to come see you. When is a good time?"

"Whenever," Will said with a shrug. "As long as it's after noon." He didn't do mornings.

"Thanks. The burger is on me."

He would've objected, but he could see her pride was on the line after she all but begged a total stranger to hire her nephew.

"Thank you, Hazel."

She gave him a nicotine-stained smile, even more

charming for the faded dimples and the sparkle in her eyes.

Moments later she put a burger in front of him, and Will found a new respect for the little diner. Polishing off the entire thing, including the steak fries, he tossed a twenty on the table for her tip and waddled to the register.

Hazel looked up from counting the cash drawer.
"What did you think?"

"I think your cook is a genius. That was the best damn burger I ever ate."

Will didn't exaggerate either. The man was magic in the kitchen.

"Good. I'll send Cash by your house later today."

"Thanks, Hazel," Will said, flashing her a smile.

With a nod, he left the restaurant.

CHAPTER TWO

There are some events in life a person is never prepared for. Being born, dying, and meeting the one person you know, deep in your gut, will change your life completely.

Will's fate rode up to his house on a Harley at two in the afternoon.

A deep rumbling sound had him walking to his porch to see what kind of vehicle could possibly make so much noise. His sweet lady sat on a quiet street, and he rarely heard more than a few cars the entire day through the open window of his office. A big red Harley, without a muffler, came to a stop in front of his house. Its chrome gleamed in the sunlight from where the motorcycle squatted beside his front walk, but despite the bike's shiny glory, the man on the vehicle received all of Will's attention.

"Oh, wow."

Really, what could you say to such magnificence? The body encased in tight blue jeans and an even tighter white shirt, was any gay man's dream come true... or, at least this one's.

The amazing creature swung his leg over the

motorcycle with easy grace and headed towards Will. He walked like a big jungle animal with all the majestic elegance the big cats have right before they leap and rip the throat out of their prey.

Will stood at the top of the steps while the man, who could only be Cassius, approached.

"Hello there," he called out. Will had a feeling this wasn't the sort of man you surprised. Not without disastrous consequences.

"I'm Cash," the man said, and that was all he said, like he was throwing down the gauntlet to see if Will would accept the challenge. Little did he know Will would take anything Cash wanted to throw at him. His hormones were singing several choruses of Hallelujah and he damned well almost saw angels, or maybe they were devils and he was going to hell like his childhood preacher said. Unfortunately for him, the idiot said those words not knowing Will's mother stood behind him. Last he heard the preacher worked in a war-torn third world nation trying to teach English to the natives. For a man who prized fine wine and advising the social elite, Will was pretty certain the preacher now lived in hell.

Will turned his attention to the man hunk in front of him.

"I'm William, but you can call me Will. If this

works out, you'll be working for me for a long time. My lady needs a lot of work."

Cash flashed him a hot smile, exposing a set of dimples like his aunt's, but with a whole extra level of sexy. His chocolate-colored hair hung to his jaw line. William's fascinated gaze followed Cash's long fingers as he tucked a length of hair behind his ears displaying a row of studded piercings along each rim. A vision of licking his way down the shiny beaded path to nibble on Cash's naked lobes flashed into his mind with startling clarity. Will loved a man's ear, loved sinking his teeth into the meaty piece of flesh and claiming a lover as his own. Mirrored glasses covered Cash's eyes, reflecting Will's lustful expression back at him.

Damn the man pushed all his buttons.

Cash stopped a few steps away from Will, close enough he had to fight the urge to throw himself at the sexy man and shorten the unbearable distance between them. Unfortunately, he needed his house fixed more than he needed a good hard fuck. He didn't want to ruin their working relationship by sleeping with Cash. In a town this size, finding another dependable handyman could be difficult. He could drive to Seattle to find a bed partner if he got desperate.

Cash's voice was low, gravelly, and made heat

ignite in Will's gut like an out of control wildfire. "Aunt Hazel said you had a lot of work needing to be done, but she wasn't specific."

He slid off his glasses with the sex appeal of a stripper removing his g-string. Black, black eyes traced Will's body slow and easy like Cash was memorizing the crease of his pants and which way he dressed in the morning. Up close he could see the man was easily three inches taller than his own six foot frame and twice as broad.

"Come inside. We can talk there," Will managed to say without choking on his own drool.

The quirk of the gorgeous man's lips told Will Cash didn't only want to talk.

Turning around he walked into the house, trying to calm his racing pulse before he confronted the other man again.

The sound of the front door closing behind Cash echoed in the old house.

"Follow me and I'll take you to the kitchen. I want to start renovations there. The stove looks questionable. I think the kitchen plumbing, hell all the plumbing and electrical, needs to be redone, the floors resurfaced, and there's a spot on the ceiling in the northern bedroom I think might be water damage."

A deep laugh sounded behind him. Will's body thrummed from the sound, heat racing down his spine. Damn, sexy didn't begin to describe the man

"Is there anything that doesn't need to be redone?" Cash asked with amusement.

Once they entered the kitchen, Will turned to face Cash. "Probably not, but I fell in love with the place, and love is worth any price."

Cash's black eyes stared at him as if he could see directly into his soul. "You really believe that?"

Will shrugged. "In theory. I've never been in love with an actual person so I'm going to lavish affection on my house."

"What are you going to do once you have the house fixed up?"

Cash looked genuinely interested in his answer, so Will shared the dream he didn't tell many. "I want to settle down, find myself a nice man, get a dog, adopt a few kids, and live happily ever after."

"Do you think it'll happen? There aren't a lot of choices in our small town."

Will shrugged. "If I find the right man, he'll relocate for me. Speaking of travel do you think we can build a helipad out back?"

"What the hell do you need a helipad for?"

Will couldn't hide his shock. "For visitors of course." Cash stared at him so long he became uncomfortable. "What?"

"Who do you know that will visit you by helicopter?"

"My father, my brothers—not my mother because she doesn't like heights—and a couple of my friends."

Cash rubbed his forehead with one calloused hand. "I'm not sure how we get permission for it. I'll check with city hall tomorrow. The house sits on a pretty big chunk of land so I'm sure you'll have the space. The question is if you can get air traffic permission."

"I'll get the permission. Just make sure there's room."

He wasn't a Stamson for nothing. He knew his way around authority figures and red tape.

The rest of the day he spent showing Cash around and resisting the urge to jump the man.

* * * *

Cassius Grant drove his Harley up Mulberry Street for the second time, cursing the entire way. After meeting William Stamson yesterday, he mulled over his options while fuming over the entire situation. How could they sell

the house? What were they thinking? The real estate listing was only supposed to be a cover so the rest of the townsfolk didn't think the house abandoned and try to raze the mansion to the ground. In reality the place was built on the largest ley line intersection in the Pacific Northwest. A massive place of power, the strength of the magic alone was enough to drive most people away. Unfortunately, the company they listed the house with teetered towards bankruptcy, and the desperate realtor needed the commission from the mansion's sale.

His Aunt Hazel, who worked as an agent for the Magical Council of Wizards, said little about William Stamson except he had good taste in burgers. This left Cash completely unprepared for the gorgeous blond with a runner's body and a smile sexy enough to convince angels they wanted to visit hell for vacation. Further research last night uncovered the Council's need for delicacy. William Stamson was the youngest pampered son of a powerful senator and a preeminent witch. The Council instructed Cash to convince Mr Stamson he made the wrong purchase, using persuasion, not force. Gentle persuasion wasn't the way he operated. The entire setup stank of failure. As one of their top enforcers, Cash had as much subtlety as a sledgehammer.

Unfortunately, when your boss, the head of the

Magical Council of Wizards, calls and tells you to get rid of an intruder, you do what you're told.

Turning off his Harley, Cash examined the house, surprised once again at the change of energy. He hadn't noticed the shift yesterday, watching William made a stunning distraction, but power usually pulsed from the house in uncomfortable waves. Now the energy felt muted, the ragged edges of power, calm, as if the presence of the newcomer had tamed the wild magic.

His mind wandered back to William. Finding the man attractive wasn't shocking to Cash. There were cover models ugly in comparison to this guy, but he didn't expect his dick to try to leap out of his pants and greet the stranger.

Swallowing hard, he tried to get moisture down his suddenly dry throat.

He was hard... for a man.

That had never happened before.

His heart battered against his chest as moisture coated his palms and slid down the center of his back. Still staring at the house, he wondered how Will greeted the morning. Carnal images of the beautiful man wrapping his lean-fingered hand around his morning erection flashed through Cash's mind, followed quickly by the memory of their meeting yesterday.

Electricity had jolted through Cash's body when

they shook hands, and he realized his usual approach wasn't going to work. William Stamson was a void, a rare human born immune to all magic.

Cash's greatest power was his ability to influence the small thread of magic running through every human he'd ever met. He could bend another's will, using their own energy against them. Unfortunately, the man he met yesterday with his white, white teeth and clear, bright eyes had absolutely no magic.

None.

A non-magical person choosing to live in a magical intersection was both strange and wonderful. At least he knew the man hadn't picked the house in order to use its power. Unfortunately people would come after him to drain his blood. Cash still remembered the last void discovered. Soon after the magical community announced the void's existence, they discovered his bloodless corpse abandoned in the river. Even though he'd only met the man once, Cash was determined the same thing wouldn't happen to Will.

Cash climbed off his bike, grabbing a small suitcase and a tool belt out of his saddlebags. He strapped the belt around his hips. At least he had enough maintenance experience, growing up the son of a plumber, to pull off his cover. His aunt's fast thinking landed him a good reason to stay at William's house. He explained his lack of luggage

yesterday by telling the other man he wanted to make sure they were compatible before moving in.

Now he worried about how compatible.

After promising the Council he would get the intruder out of the house, he figured he'd wander by, press his will on the other man, and move on as the interloper scrambled to pack all his stuff and find a new place to live. Unfortunately, not only couldn't he read the other man's mind, but without magic, he couldn't control him even a smidgen.

The flare of interest in William's eyes didn't go unnoticed. Maybe there was more than one way to persuade a person to move. If he convinced William the house couldn't be repaired, he might decide to cut his losses, especially if the Council gave him a better offer. Will's claims of loving the house wouldn't hold beneath the offer of cold hard cash. The Stamsons were known for their cold, calculating personalities, and since Will couldn't use magic from the ley lines, there was no reason for him to covet the property. In the meantime he needed to get as close to Will as possible. He'd done a lot of strange jobs as an enforcer, but this time he really looked forward to working undercover.

CHAPTER THREE

Will woke to the sound of someone pounding on his front door.

To say he wasn't a morning person was an understatement of monumental proportions. He was barely an afternoon person. He really didn't even get moving until around four pm, then he stayed up until the early morning and started the process all over again. Some people needed eight hours of sleep, Will needed ten to twelve... desperately.

Wearing nothing but his rubber ducky pajama bottoms, he dragged himself downstairs and opened the door. Anyone who bothered to wake him at this obscene time of the morning deserved what they got.

"What?" he growled, ripping open the front door. He probably should've checked who was there first, but this early he really didn't give a flying fuck.

Cash stood on the doorstep wearing a tight t-shirt, a pair of jeans, and a manly tool belt Will knew would picture in his fantasies for the rest of his life.

Yum.

"Not a morning person, are we?" Cash purred.

Will resisted the urge to deck him. After all, he

wasn't a violent man, and he had a feeling Cash would hit back.

"What are you doing here?"

Cash made a production out of looking at his watch. Bastard.

Will didn't even know people wore watches anymore. Didn't everyone use their cell phones to tell time now?

"It's nine in the morning, not exactly the crack of dawn. When I talked to you yesterday, you said to come over whenever. I was going to start examining the kitchen plumbing." He shook his bag at Will. "I brought my stuff."

Will wasn't about to mention he was too busy checking out Cash's body to really pay attention to the conversation. A man had his pride.

"Umm, sure, come on in. Forgive me if I don't go with you to the kitchen. I'm not a morning person."

Cash laughed. "I kind of figured that out on my own."

"Good, then I'm going back to bed."

Will turned and headed for the stairs.

Cash's voice stopped him on the first step. "By the way, I love the ducks."

Will gave him the finger as he walked away. He didn't have to be polite in the morning. If God wanted him

to wake up, he would've made him a morning person.

Crawling back into his still warm sheets, Will sighed as he enjoyed their smooth texture. His bed was the one thing he made sure to bring from his Seattle home when he came the first time. The mattress was a study in perfection from its pillow top to its memory foam base, ungodly expensive, but worth every blissful penny.

Within minutes he sank back into a blissful sleep.

* * * *

Cash stood in the kitchen trying to calm his racing heart and get his body to behave. The attraction he felt for the other man was ridiculous. He'd dated beautiful women before. Of course they didn't have smooth golden skin and sleek defined muscles he felt compelled to trace with his tongue. If he didn't know the man had absolutely no magical ability, he'd suspect William Stamson of putting a spell on him.

As the situation stood, he had to use all of his much-vaunted control to resist the urge to follow the younger man back to his bed and ravish him. He only had a foggy idea what ravishing entailed, but he was pretty sure he could figure things out once he had Will's sexy body beneath him.

"Fuck."

The image of a naked William pressed into the mattress beneath him made him harder than granite.

"Think unsexy thoughts," he muttered. He didn't want Will to come downstairs and find his handyman with a raging hard-on, or maybe the sight would get him an invitation back to bed.

After calling the Council last night and assuring them he could handle Stamson, he wondered if he really could. Seeing the man in his ducky jammies should've made him laugh, not nearly choke him with lust. He knew he stared when Will answered the door. Good thing sleeping beauty was too tired to notice Cash's dick standing at attention.

He wondered if Will tasted as sweet as he looked.

Letting out a groan, he took a glass from the cabinet and poured some water out of the ancient faucet. He pushed out a trickle of power to examine the pipes. There was no contamination, but there could easily be a busted pipe if they didn't soon get an overhaul. The ley lines pulsed in reaction to Cash's magic. He held his breath, waiting for the sleeping giant to decide the disturbance was nothing needing magical attention. When the spiked magic smoothed out again, he released the breath he'd captured in his lungs.

"I think I'll stick with a non-magical inspection," he

muttered to himself.

Although he'd walked through the place with William yesterday, more of his attention was focused on a tight ass and a pair of sparkling green eyes than the condition of the property. Looking around he could see the house needed a lot of work. The sheer number of problems should send the pretty boy running, or maybe not. The man loved the stupid house and apparently would pay whatever he needed to get the mansion back into shape. A helipad, Christ. Cash was way out of his league, and he knew it. A gorgeous man with buckets of cash would have no interest in an enforcer who worked as the Council's bitch even if he didn't have ulterior motives.

Cash reflected on his phone call last night. He didn't get the impression they knew Will was a void. He had to make sure they never knew.

Voids were highly prized in battle situations because they not only could see through magical spells, they weren't affected by them. He wouldn't be responsible for the younger man's capture by the Council and used as their pawn.

Scrubbing his hands over his face, Cash sat in a chair left by the previous owner. Somehow he couldn't see Will picking out red and white-checkered vinyl-covered chairs. His were probably imported from Italy and

handmade by nuns or some crap like that.

"I'm in so much trouble," he said into the empty room. As an enforcer he was used to taking anything he wanted or convincing someone to give it to him. William Stamson was a different story. He wanted to touch the man so bad his hands shook with the need to stroke Will's skin and see if the texture was as soft as it looked. The other man was like a purebred racehorse, all lean muscles and shiny hair.

"I have to pull myself together." Cash looked around. "And stop talking to myself."

Looking at the stove, he decided he needed a professional gas guy to come and look at it. He knew enough to fix the roof and redo the flooring, but he wasn't going to risk Will's safety by messing around with a gas line that might not be up to code. He could magic it, but if the spell unraveled a few years down the road, the results would be catastrophic. Some things were worth doing the old-fashioned way. Besides, repairing the house was in everyone's best interest so the town didn't have the mansion razed as an eyesore.

This was a bigger project than he imagined, not one he could do himself unless he wanted to be working on repairs for the rest of his life and never move onto another assignment. Images of Will flashed through his mind. Well,

maybe he didn't need quite so much help. At first glance, he noticed the place still had all of its original woodwork and the ley lines probably kept pests away. Often the vibration of magic didn't settle well with lower life forms, which meant at least the foundation should be sound.

Cash took a deep breath. First, he had to get permission to hire all the workers if he wanted to give the impression this was a real job. Climbing the stairs, his cock led the way despite his admonitions to it. The idea of seeing Will half naked in bed made him ache with need. Finding him in bed was better than imagined. The beautiful man slept in a four-poster monstrosity probably worth more than the house surrounding it, but the real treasure lay tangled in the gold-tinted silk sheets, tousled hair peeking out of the covers.

Cash had to fight the urge to crawl into bed and wrap himself around the other man. Tender, unfamiliar feelings rushed through him as he put a knee on the mattress, leaned over, and touched Will's shoulder to wake him.

"Wake up, Will." He suppressed the many pet names rising to his lips. He wasn't a man who called other men cute names, despite the urge to call William honey.

His honey.

"Go away," Will murmured sleepily, pulling the

blankets farther over his head.

Laughing, Cash shook Will again.

"Go away."

"I need you to look at your plumbing." And electricity and stove. Cash thought he'd break the news gently before he told Will his house was a disaster area waiting to come crashing down.

"I'm getting black out curtains and anti-handyman spray," Will muttered from beneath his blanket barrier.

"Luckily for me you don't have any right now." Cash couldn't stop the smile spreading as he looked at the adorable sleepy man.

Cash snuck his hand beneath the covers, encountering, silky warm skin. He couldn't resist the urge to stroke it, biting back a moan. Will Stamson had the softest skin he'd ever touched. Better than any girls'. Yanking his hand back, he tried to focus on his real reason for coming into Will's bedroom.

"Stamson, your plumbing sucks."

"That's not what guys usually tell me," was his sleepy reply.

Cash laughed. "Come on, I promise you can come back to sleep afterwards." The urge to get into bed with Will was strong, but the timing was still too early for that tactic. He should get to know the guy a little better before

trying to seduce him. For a brief moment he considered confessing all, but habit, and the possible repercussions from the Council, held him back. He would be in big trouble if Will found out who he worked for and tossed him out.

Groaning, Will flipped back the covers and gave Cash a baleful glare. "I'm too awake to sleep now anyway, but you're a horrible alarm clock. Any self-respecting gay man would wake me with a blow job."

Cash didn't mention he wasn't gay. He didn't want to ruin his later seduction. He did try one last time to influence the man with magic but once again... nothing.

"I'm here to fix your house, not your dick," he growled. Cash didn't want Will to think he was too easy. He had no doubt the other man only had to snap his fingers to have men lining out the door, remote small town or not.

Will blearily blinked at Cash as if the man's usual quick wit wasn't up to a battle of words when his brain still slept.

"Then I obviously need to shop around in town," Will said, before slipping out of bed, marching to the bathroom across the hall, and slamming the door shut.

"Don't take too much time making yourself pretty," Cash shouted, stomping back downstairs. Images of Will having sex with any of the available gay men in town made

fury burn in Cash's chest. He'd visited the town on and off for the past five years to see his aunt for holidays. He knew about five men who might make a play for the sexy millionaire and not because the guy oozed money.

Shit he had it bad. Now all he had to do was figure out how to deal with his infatuation. The more he turned the idea around in his mind, the more he disliked the idea of Will shopping in town for a lover. He might not have experience with male lovers, but he knew he wasn't the type to share. While he was romancing Will, no one else had better touch the beautiful man. Cash didn't know what his long-term goals were in regards to their relationship, but he wasn't going to let anyone else interfere.

By the time Will found him sitting on the porch steps thirty minutes later, Cash had a plan of action.

"You're plumbing is in crappy shape. I wanted to show you what's going on before I called to get you an estimate." Cash wasn't a licensed plumber, and he wasn't going to let anyone less skilled touch Will's pipes.

The blond followed him sleepily to the kitchen as Cash pointed out all the places needing further investigation. He could see by Will's bored expression he didn't care about the details even as he politely examined where Cash pointed.

"My looking at the plumbing is not going to help. I

don't know anything about pipes. Whatever you decide is fine," Will said, frowning at the copper nest of his plumbing.

"I'm afraid it's going to cost a lot of money to fix. It might be easier to raze the house to the ground." Cash had planned to break the news to the other man in small chunks, drawing out the explanation, but one look into those sleepy green eyes and he decided to try the "rip off the Band-Aid" approach.

Will shook his head. "I can't do that to Harriett."

"Harriett?" For a moment Cash's heart stuttered in his chest. No one said anything about a woman in Will's life. What if he was bisexual? Nausea churned his stomach. He didn't like the thought of a woman lying next to the other man. He didn't want anyone else to touch William.

Fear coated his tongue as his stomach tried to revolt. His hands shook as realization set in. The complete possessiveness didn't make any sense unless Will was the one person Cash thought never to find.

His soul mate.

He clutched the doorframe as the truth imprinted in flaming letters in his mind. William was his mate. He'd bet all of the Stamson fortune his deceptive boss knew they were mates before he sent Cash to this location.

Bastard.

Will continued talking through Cash's quiet crisis.

"Harriett's my house. A grand lady needs a name."

"Of course she does," he agreed with a smile, hoping his inner turmoil didn't show on his face. Shit what was he going to do? The more he thought about his reaction to Stamson, the more he was certain he was right. He only had one chance to bond with his mate, and he wasn't going to ruin their future relationship over whatever the Council wanted. If Will wanted to keep this house, it was his.

* * * *

Will's cell phone rang, pulling him from the entrancing smile of his handyman. His oldest brother's name popped up on the screen.

"Good morning, Gil," Will said into the phone.

"William." His brother sounded terse, but then he usually did. Will loved his older brother, but Gil took things way too seriously. As the oldest child in the family, responsibilities fell to him, often at the expense of his own relationships. At thirty-two, Gil was on his second wife, and last Will had heard, the marriage had its own issues.

After a few minutes of socially polite patter where Will almost fell back to sleep, his brother came to the point of his early morning call. "I'm in trouble, Will. My company is going belly up, and the stock market slump has destroyed my portfolio. I-I was wondering if you could

loan me a few thousand."

There was an unfamiliar doubt in his brother's voice. In general Will might not be the closest to his oldest brother, but he thought they were close enough Gil didn't have to worry whether his brother would loan him money or not.

"Is there some reason I might not loan you money?"

There was such a long pause on the phone, he wondered if they were still connected. All the money in the world can't buy a decent cell phone connection. Some days Will wished he had one of those magic phones like they had on *The X-Files*. Mulder could get a clear connection in a basement, three stories underground with no windows, while Will couldn't avoid a dropped call three feet from a cell phone tower.

"I told Mom where you moved."

"Gil!" He specifically told his brothers not to inform their mother about his move. Will wanted to settle in before she descended.

"She's talking about visiting you this weekend."

Will sighed. He couldn't blame Gil for tattling. There were tornados with less destructive force than their mother. "Is she coming here for a visit?"

"Not yet, but I think she's planning the trip over. Expect her call, and know she's aware you moved and

didn't tell her."

"I shouldn't give you a dime," Will threatened. The silence on the phone told him Gil wasn't completely ruling out the idea. After a few seconds, he relented. "How much money do you need?"

"How about a hundred thousand? That should keep me ahead of my bills."

That's what he loved about his family. They never took advantage. He promised to wire the money later in the day and hung up.

"I'd better send him two hundred thousand in case he runs into trouble," Will muttered to himself. Gil always underestimated the cost of things. Could be one of the reasons his company kept swerving into the red or maybe he was focusing too much on magic instead of money.

"I can't believe you're going to send your brother that kind of cash. What if he never pays you back?"

Will turned to see handyman watching him with an angry expression in his dark eyes. "Gil's good for it. He's having a rough time right now. He'll land on his feet." He couldn't figure out why Cash cared; it wasn't *his* money.

"Two hundred thousand doesn't even make a dent in your checkbook, does it?" Cash looked at him like he'd found an interesting new bug and was trying to figure out the species before he squished the creature with his boot.

Will wiggled uncomfortably beneath his dark-eyed stare.

"I have a healthy bank account, though if what you tell me is true, the balance won't be healthy much longer with a whole new pipe system." Will downplayed his wealth. He figured telling Cash he wouldn't miss the money if he had to have the entire house rebuilt from the studs, might break his brain.

"It'll cost a hell of a lot less than two hundred thousand," Cash muttered with a scowl.

"What's wrong?" Will sighed in exasperation. Barely awake and already having an argument with his handyman didn't promise great things for his day. He wasn't sure how they'd gone from good morning to snarling at each other like angry cats, but he didn't like the transition.

Cash shrugged. "Sorry, you seem like a nice guy, and I hate to see someone taking advantage of you."

Will laughed, unable to keep his amusement inside. "I would only give out money to a relative, so you can relax in your concern of my naïveté."

Cash shot him a disappointed look as if he felt Will had let him down by not allowing the other man to be his knight in shining armor and rescuing him from his nefarious relations. For a brief moment he felt a pang of disappointment too. He'd never had a man wanting to

rescue him before.

"As long as you're feeling like making money donations, your house could use some. Besides your plumbing, we'll have to have someone come in and do your electrical and gas."

The notion struck Will how ill-equipped he was to deal with a project of this size. "Can you do it?"

Cash shook his head. "I'm not a trained electrician, but I know someone who can do the work for you. He won't gouge you like Mr Sanders across town. He'd take one look at you and fleece you right down to your toes."

Relief left him light-headed. He hated dealing with crap like that. He excelled at hiring competent people and writing checks. He didn't like to deal with the details. "I trust you to act as general contractor. I'll have paperwork drawn up to give you the authority to make decisions about hiring and firing people. You know better than I do what needs to be fixed."

Surprise flared in Cash's stunning black eyes. "You'd trust me to do that?"

"Yes, I trust you. I have a good feel for people, and I'm sure I can depend on you to do a good job. Just keep the noise down in the morning. There's an extra key in the kitchen drawer for you. I'm sorry I forgot to give the key to you yesterday."

"Why do you sleep so late? This place isn't exactly party central."

"I'm a writer. I like to write at night. There's something about the dead of night that calls to me." He didn't know why, but in the quiet from the midnight hour until around four, his creative juices pumped the most. In those hours he kept his window open, listening to the stillness of the night and feeling a kinship with the creatures moving about in the darkness, which could be why his mystery books were so creepy or as one reviewer stated, "...a hair-raising chiller." Since he didn't have to work around anyone else's schedule, in his job or personal life, Will was free to do as he saw fit and stay up as late as he wanted.

"What kind of books do you write?" Cash's expression showed a flattering interest.

"Mysteries." A yawn broke free as he struggled to stay awake. His stomach growled, reminding him he hadn't eaten yet. "I don't suppose you know someone who can cook?"

Cash shrugged. "I can whip up a meal."

"No. I mean like full time. If I'm going to live here, I'm going to need someone to make my meals."

"You can't cook?" The shock in Cash's voice was almost as amusing as his expression. He didn't further

torture the man by telling him Will hadn't even seen a washing machine until he moved to college and he still had no idea how to use one.

"Not a bit. Have you seen the amount of cereal in my pantry? I'll need someone to clean too." The size of the house, not something he considered at purchase, made McMansions look small. There was no way he could keep the place clean, even if he wanted to, and still meet his publishing deadlines.

Cash laughed, but the sound held more nervous energy, than true amusement.

"Look, if you don't know a cook, I can ask around town. Surely someone needs a job." There weren't a lot of employment opportunities in a place like this. The few people who lived here were retired, commuted, or owned a business and needed to live there. This wasn't a town of fresh blood. This was a place where kids moved out to the big city and occasionally found their way back because the bright lights weren't as great as they were hoping.

Cash shook his head. "I'm not sure. I'll check with some people I know. I'll find someone."

"Make sure the person can do laundry too?"

Cash raised one dark eyebrow. "Can't you do anything?"

Will shrugged. "I can do things I find important." In

a childhood filled with butlers, maids, and nannies, he never needed to learn how to do things other people considered basic skills. Earning his own money writing was his one bid for independence. If he lost his fortune tomorrow, he still had enough income to live quite comfortably and still not cook and clean for himself.

Life was good.

Looking his handyman over, he decided his world could only get better.

"Until we find someone, I can put together a meal. If I'm working late, you'll have to settle for food from the diner," Cash said, crossing his arms. Will struggled to focus on the conversation and not on his handyman's muscles.

"I've eaten the diner food so that's just fine. Besides, you're already doing extra as my general contractor. I don't want to overwork you. Ask around and see if you can find someone, or I can put an ad in the local paper." He vaguely remembered seeing a town circular.

"I'll ask my aunt. She knows everyone in town."

Will laughed. "I bet she does."

"Which room did you want me to stay in?"

"You've been in my bedroom, and my office is on the south end. You can have any other room." There were a lot of rooms Will didn't have a use for, but with his relatives, he knew eventually they'd all be used, and when

his mother came to visit, decorated. "Do you have any furniture?"

Cash shook his head. "I was using rented stuff."

"I'll order you a bed. You can sleep on the couch until the bed gets here." The couch wouldn't be the most comfortable place, but Will wasn't going to be the slimy rich guy who hits on his help, even if he really wanted to be.

Oblivious to Will's indecent thoughts, Cash nodded. "Sounds good. I'll pick a room and then we can go grocery shopping."

Will thought he hid his horror well, but maybe not as well as he'd hoped, since Cash started roaring with laughter.

"It's not a death squad. We're just going to get some food. The process works best if I know what kind of food you like. Besides, there might be a sale on cereal." He gave Will a taunting smile.

Will detested grocery stores. They were loud, smelly, and there was always someone trying to run him over with a cart. Suppressing his shudder, he gave Cash a weak smile. "Sure, it'll be fun."

Still laughing his ass off, Cash left to pick a bedroom and put his stuff away.

Bastard.

He hoped the handyman picked a room with at least a couch until they could order him a bed. He didn't want the man sleeping on the floor.

CHAPTER FOUR

The grocery store was as horrible as he remembered the one time his roommate dragged him to a store in college. After his first visit, he paid his friend to do the shopping for them both. Now he was touring the fruit aisle trying to figure out which apple was better than the other. How did a normal person choose? There were about a thousand names for yellowy-red apples, and they all pretty much looked the same.

Deciding to wait for Cash's return to solve his apple dilemma, Will settled against his cart and watched the other shoppers. People all around him were stuffing produce into thin plastic bags with frenetic speed as if they were going to beat everyone else to the last piece of celery on the planet.

While avoiding thoughts of the brand of beer his handyman would pick up, a blond with brown eyes and a cantaloupe scoped him out. His approach was painfully clichéd, but the other man did manage to make it charming.

"Hello," the man said, approaching, melon in one hand. "Do you know how to pick out a cantaloupe?"

"Nope," Will told him cheerfully. Part of the fun of having guys try to pick you up all the time was watching

them squirm. It was petty of him, but so much fun.

"Oh." The blond looked taken aback for a minute as if he expected Will to have some arcane knowledge of all fruit, and his lack of information let the other man down somehow.

"I'm Dr Frank Mathews, the town's resident physician."

"William Stamson, the new town eccentric," Will said, smiling. In his experience, men who introduced themselves as doctor anything were selfish lovers.

They shook hands, and there was no electric buzz at all. In fact, there was so little sexual attraction he wondered for a moment if the poor boy was straight, and no one ever told him.

His statement about being the town's eccentric went right over the doctor's head. He was too busy looking into Will's eyes, or checking out his lips or whatever distracted men when they stared at him. He'd asked a few of them, but they were never able to give him a firm answer. They stared like he was a cell under a microscope and they were expecting him to spontaneously divide or do something fascinating they'd never seen before.

"It's very nice to meet you, William," the doctor said, flashing perfect white teeth. Mathews squared his shoulders and adopted the stance Will liked to call, the

"pony up to the bar" approach. Shoulders back, chin up and feet centered like he was bracing for the body blow of Will's rejection.

Before he got the chance, a familiar voice sounded behind him. "Hey, Will, I see you got a chance to meet the doc."

Cash kept his voice cordial, but Will could see the tension in the doctor's body as he watched the other man approach. Wondering if there was a history between them, he watched the handyman as he joined Will at the cart. Other than a cautious glance at the larger man, Frank's gaze didn't hold any hostility, which didn't explain the anger he could feel all but oozing from Cash.

"Dr Mathews was friendly enough to introduce himself," Will said, trying to smooth things over. Why he thought his lame explanation would help he didn't know, but his mouth was running and he couldn't stop it.

"I just bet he was," Cash said.

* * * *

Cash wanted to rip off Mathews' head and roll the decapitated orb down the alley like a bowling ball. He couldn't remember ever being so angry in his life.

Will was his.

According to his aunt, the doctor had moved into town only a few weeks ago. If Cash had his way, he'd be

moving back out. The gall of the bastard to think he could make a move on William.

He didn't care if no one else was aware of the fact yet, not even Will, but he wasn't going to allow William to pick up someone else in this town, not while there was still breath in Cash's body. Not liking the proximity of the doctor to his man or the look in the other man's eyes, he projected his magic. With careful precision, he pushed his power into the other man. There was a slight resistance, telling him the doctor had abilities of his own, but not strong enough to block Cash.

Mathews' eyes rolled into the back of his head. Falling backwards, he hit the linoleum floor with a thud. The cantaloupe slipped out of his hand and traveled down the aisle as if seeking a new owner.

"Oh my God!" Will shouted, kneeling beside the convulsing man as Mathews fought Cash's control. "Cash, get a doctor."

Will sneezed between each word.

"He is a doctor," he responded calmly. Maybe he should get some apples. They looked particularly good. "Are you okay."

"I mean another doctor." Will sneezed again while sounding a bit panicked so Cash let up his stream of magic.

"I'm okay," the doctor said in a raspy voice. His

skin looked whiter than the store's linoleum as he slowly sat up. Mathews gaze snapped to Cash.

He let his grin show how much he enjoyed his power over the other man. Mathews was a low-level healer. His aura said as much with its pale pink color, along with some gray tones Cash couldn't identify but didn't worry over. They both knew who the stronger magic wielder was and who would get crushed if he continued flirting with Will.

"Are you feeling better?" Will asked. The sweet man looked so worried Cash almost felt bad for causing him concern, but he lost his guilt when he remembered the doctor smiling at his future lover.

"I'm fine." Fear shone in Mathews' eyes. He quickly got to his feet, brushing off Will's helping hand. Without another word, he rushed away.

"Do you think we should follow him?" Will asked blinking his watery eyes as he watched the doctor leave. "He looked upset."

"No, he'll be fine."

"What do you think that was all about?"

"Maybe something he ate didn't agree with him?" Cash bagged some apples. They did look good.

"Maybe, but the whole situation was rather strange. What kind of condition could cause something like that? I

hope he has his health checked out."

With great restraint, Cash resisted the urge to set the doctor on fire as he scurried away.

The temptation was huge.

"Did you get your beer?"

Cash made an effort to answer through gritted teeth as he tried to unclench his jaw. If he kept up this behavior, the Council would catch wind and send another to take care of Will. They wouldn't like the carnage if someone else tried to take his man. He put his apples in the cart and tilted his head. "I got the fancy imported stuff for you."

Will gave him a brilliant smile. "Thanks."

He was glad to see Will's allergy attack cleared up, but images of the beautiful man giving the same smile to someone else made a vein throb in Cash's forehead. He could feel the vein pulsing along with his temper. Still raging, he grabbed Will and all but dragged him to the checkout line. He now understood the saying about seeing red.

* * * *

Cash stopped his car in front of the house with a screech of brakes. Shutting off the engine, he turned to face Will. "You can forget about letting Dr Mathews into your

pants."

"What are you talking about?"

He continued talking as if Will hadn't spoken. "Or getting into his pants, or any other combination you can think of. He's not to touch you unless it's for a medical exam, and even then, I'm going to be in the room."

"But you and I aren't even dating," Will protested, somewhat unwisely. He didn't even have any interest in the doctor. At this point, he was poking the bear just to hear him roar.

Cash's eyes narrowed dangerously, a sexy look.

"I saw the way he looked at you. Don't tell me he isn't attracted."

"I won't tell you that, but it doesn't mean I was attracted back. Trust me when I tell you I've already had my share of doctors, and I don't need any more." If Cash was interested, Will wasn't going to do anything to mess the potential relationship up, but he wasn't going to be a pushover either.

He got out of the car, scooped up some groceries, and went into the house, knowing Cash was close behind. He wasn't going to defend himself. He'd done nothing wrong. They weren't in a relationship. Hell, they'd only exchanged a few words. Despite the sparks flaring between them, he wasn't totally convinced they should even try.

Only a few minutes passed before he heard the stomp of booted feet behind him.

"I'm a jealous bastard."

Will turned to see a chagrined look on the big man's face.

"Yes, Cash."

"Is that all you're going to say?"

Will shrugged. "What do you want me to say? You don't have the right to be jealous? We both know you don't."

Cash's brows lowered, and his hands bunched into fists at his hips. "I don't know if I can do this," he said, shaking his head.

"Do what?"

"Be with someone like you."

This was an unpleasant first. Will was usually the one who walked away from relationships. No scratch that, he was *always* the one who walked away from relationships. How could you declare a relationship over before anything even happened?

"What's wrong with me?" Will blithely ignored the fact they really weren't together. It seemed rude to bring it up.

"That's just it," Cash said, pacing the floor. "There's absolutely nothing wrong with you. You're gorgeous, you

probably have more money than I will ever see in my entire life and," he said, pointing his finger at Will, "you're a nice guy. It's the last one that's the biggest problem. I've never been attracted to a guy."

"Never?"

Cash shook his head.

Will was stunned. He'd thought their attraction was mutual. "But you're attracted to me?" He wanted to make sure he understood correctly before he embarrassed himself.

Cash nodded, but for the first time, Will noticed the nervousness in his eyes. Not the dreaded "I want you to stop drooling on me" kind of nervousness, but the excited kind of nervous, with his eyes lit with interest and his hands shaking slightly by his sides.

"If you've never been with a man, why don't we start with something simple?"

"Okay." Cash let out a long sigh and stood with his feet apart as if bracing for a body blow.

"Relax," Will whispered.

Luckily there were only a few inches between their heights, even if Cash looked almost twice as wide.

Stepping forward, Will slid his fingers into Cash's thick, wiry hair. With gentle insistence he pulled the other man down, brushing their lips together, barely touching.

Trying to acclimate Cash to his touch before going in for the kill, Will kept his fingers gentle, barely stroking the other man's body.

Lapping at the man's lips, Will persuaded him to open his mouth, moaning softly when Cash allowed his tongue to slip inside.

Cash tasted insanely good. He didn't know what the other man had eaten from car to kitchen but whatever the flavor, he wanted more. Will gasped as two strong arms swept around him, yanking him hard against Cash's firm chest. The larger man let out a sound verging on animalistic as he held Will tight and took control of the kiss.

Desire burned through Will's body. He couldn't remember the last time a strong rush of desire filled him. His body hardened as he struggled to get closer to the man devouring him.

When oxygen became a necessity, he was released. They stood there for a moment gasping for breath, staring into each other's eyes, their bodies inches apart but not touching. Cash's black gaze bored into him; Will felt as if he were the most important person in the world. A whispered sound and a flash in the corner of his eye had William turning.

Nothing.

Cash plunged his fingers into William's hair,

turning his head back towards him. As warm lips enveloped his, he forgot all about anything other than the man clutching him in his arms.

"I think we can agree I'm attracted to you," Cash said, licking his lips. Will barely understood the words as he focused on the moisture tracking across the other man's mouth. He needed that mouth on him again. Needed Cash's mouth more than the air they broke apart to gasp.

He couldn't resist leaning forward, as if Cash were his personal gravitational field, pulling him closer.

Cash's hands grabbed his upper arms, holding them apart.

"We need to have an agreement."

Will nodded. Anything. Anything at all, as long as Cash's mouth pressed against his again. Anything the other man wanted, he wouldn't deny.

"While we're together I'm the only one who touches you."

Will couldn't hide the joy brimming over inside. Cash not only wanted to kiss him, he wanted to keep him.

"There's one thing you should know, Cash," Will said, looking into those beautiful dark eyes.

"What's that?" He could feel Cash's body tremble beneath his fingertips, his rough voice barely a whisper in the air between them.

Will leaned closer to whisper in Cash's ear, relishing the contact between their bodies. "I'm not perfect. I'm petty, self-absorbed, and spoiled, and I like me like that, so don't even try to make me self-sufficient and crap because I don't want to be. I want a man who can coddle and take care of me so I can write and sleep late." He decided to get everything out in the open so there weren't any unpleasant surprises later. This way he could say his lover was warned.

Cash's lips twitched. "Spoiled, huh?"

"Yes, and I intend to stay that way."

Cash laughed. "I wouldn't expect anything less. Did I mention I like having someone to spoil?"

"See? I knew we could work something out."

"So are you looking for a pierced bad boy to rock your world?" He placed his hands on Will's hips, pressing their bodies together.

"I wouldn't be opposed to giving you a spin."

Cash's smile was wicked and lit up his whole face. "Then let's concentrate on today and we'll let tomorrow worry about itself."

"Perfect." Will was notoriously bad at relationships.

He hoped there was some magical blood in Cash's family. His mother would only approve someone with a magical background, and in Will's family, you needed

motherly approval if you didn't want your date to disappear. His mother always worried if he didn't match with a person of magical blood he wouldn't have anyone to protect him from danger. There was more than one reason he had a hard time finding a guy in Seattle. They didn't pass the mother test.

Will nipped at Cash's lower lip, bringing the other man's attention back to him. Obliging his mouth opened, allowing him access to the finest mouth ever to grace the planet. Moaning, Will rubbed against the strong form shamelessly, trying to make as much body-to-body contact as possible. Sparks danced up and down his spine before settling heavy in his balls. He let out a whimper of discontent as firm hands pulled him away, just as he was getting to the good stuff.

"Ready to take this upstairs?" Will asked. He went the whole nine yards with eyelash batting and a sweet smile.

"You are pretty as a picture as my grandmother used to say, but I have to stick to my guns. I'm fairly certain I won't win very many arguments so let me tell you how things are going to be."

Will didn't really care how Cash thought things were going to be, because he had a strong pair of arms wrapped around him and cuddling him closer. Surely

nothing could be bad if it involved being held.

"I'll continue to let you be spoiled, but if you become bratty, I'll turn your fine ass over my knee and spank you until you glow like a lightning bug. Also there will be no flirting with doctors, or lawyers, or anyone other than me. I'll not spend time chasing after a lover who's chasing after others. I have too much pride." He held Will a little bit away, lifting his chin so Cash could look him in the eyes. "Do we have an understanding?"

"Yes, Cash," Will said, obediently. The rule was easy to obey since he never flirted when he was dating someone else anyway. "I don't get in trouble if other men flirt with me though, right?" It was important to know the rules. He didn't want to get into trouble over things out of his control.

"As long as you don't encourage them, I won't hold you accountable. You're too attractive for the occasional man not to hit on you. Do we have a deal?"

"Deal," Will whispered against Cash's mouth.

He gave a surprised shout when steely arms swept him off his feet and carried him upstairs.

Damn, he loved a man with muscles. Cash was the first lover he'd ever had who was strong enough to lift him. His runner's body made him heavier than he looked.

"Just a quickie and then I'm going to make you

dinner."

"Yes, Cash," Will said, agreeably.

He wasn't sure if he liked being carried up the stairs like a bride, but he quickly forgot any objections when Cash laid him on the bed. A soft sound of laughter whispered on the breeze.

"Did you hear that?"

"Relax, gorgeous, no one is here but us." Before he could insist he heard something, Cash started undressing him like he was the Christmas present he'd waited for all year.

"I'd better invest in a bigger wardrobe," Will commented as a button flew off his shirt.

"Good plan," Cash agreed. After stripping Will, he stood beside the bed and stared. Normally he liked the attention, but the staring went on for quite a while. "Getting nervous? If you take off your clothes, we can get this party started. I know I'm more than ready," he said, pointing to his hard cock. The hard rod stood straight up, begging for attention.

"Oh yeah," Cash sighed. He started stripping as if he'd just come out of a trance. Under Will's avid gaze, he tore off his shirt, exposing piercings on both of his nipples. Tiny hoops stabbed through each hard nub making Will's mouth water from the longing to pull at them with his teeth.

He settled with reaching up and tugging on Cash's right nipple.

His lover hissed his pleasure. "Keep it up, boy, and it will be over before we begin."

Will laughed and reached for the snap of Cash's pants. "You only got halfway undressed." His arm was batted away.

"Let me do it. As soon as you get your hands on my dick, I'm done."

"You really did mean a quickie," Will said with a laugh.

"Don't worry, beautiful, I recover fast. We'll have plenty of time for slow sex after dinner. Besides we left all the food out."

Will laughed. "Hopefully the ice cream won't melt."

"Hopefully." Cash didn't sound like he cared one way or the other. Will had to agree. Who cared about drippy ice cream when you could have a hot man?

His mind went completely blank when Cash stripped off the rest of his clothes and the gorgeous hunk of man crawled into his bed. Even if this thing between them didn't work out, the time was worth that one memory.

"Wow," he whispered.

Cash's mouth tilted up in one corner. "Like what you see?"

"How could I not?" Will answered honestly. Not giving Cash a chance to comment, he pounced, knocking Cash over and landing on top of the other man. He stayed there for a moment, luxuriating in the feel of the strong body beneath him. Looking down into a pair of laughing black eyes, his heart tumbled in his chest. "Gotcha."

"You definitely do." The smile faded from Cash's face. He was dead serious.

In order to break the solemn mood, Will slid down and gave the man a raspberry right below his belly button.

Cash's entire body jerked, a strangled scream ripping from his throat.

What fun!

"I have something else needing your mouth," his lover panted.

Cash's cock rose up to meet him, long and slightly curved, from a nest of black curls. A bead of liquid dotted the mushroom tip, luring Will's tongue in for a taste like a siren call.

"Mmm," he hummed. Reaching out he gently gripped the base of Cash's cock and licked it like a lollipop.

So good.

Closing his eyes in bliss, Will absorbed the flavor and scent of his lover. He would've been happy to stay there the rest of the night enjoying the taste and feel of

Cash, but a firm hand gripped his hair.

"Suck me properly. I want to feel those pretty lips wrapped around me."

Hell, how could he resist that?

Taking the tip into his mouth, Will swallowed Cash down, feeling the welcome sensation of the hard shaft filling his throat. The smell of hot male and musk filled his nostrils as wiry curls tickled his nose.

"Oh, fuck."

Warm fluid rolled down Will's throat in a steady stream. Once he was certain his lover was finished, he slipped Cash's cock back out so he could suck on the head and savor the thick liquid across his tongue. He didn't remove his mouth until the other man was completely limp.

Will smiled at the dazed expression in his Cash's eyes, accepting the silent compliment as his due.

"Let me take care of you." Cash started to sit up, but Will held up a hand. "You can take care of me after we eat." His stomach growled. The organ sounded as if it were going to crawl out and seek food on its own soon. As much as he wanted the other man, anticipation would make the passion hotter.

"You got it, honey." Cash gave him a kiss so carnal, Will checked to see if the sheets were on fire.

They weren't.

While he was distracted, Cash pulled on his underwear and headed for the door. "I'll get stuff started. Come downstairs when you're ready." His hot black eyes skimmed William's body, making him harder.

Will laughed. "I'll be right there after I go to the bathroom."

Cash gave him a wicked smile. "Call me if you need help with anything."

Will threw a pillow at him.

Laughing, Cash left the room.

Flopping on the bed, Will let out a sigh. He didn't know where this was going, but he could already feel his heart beating faster when the gorgeous handyman came near.

"I'm in so much trouble."

"That you are," a female voice spoke.

"Ahh." Will scrambled for the sheet to cover himself while he frantically looked around for the source.

"You don't need to cover up, boy. You've got nothing to be ashamed of."

"Who are you?" His eyes scanned the room. "Where are you?"

"I'm your house." A shimmer grew in the middle of the room coalescing into the form of a young woman with bright red hair and shining blue eyes. She was glowingly

translucent with the complexion of a true redhead and a welcoming smile. "I've waited a hundred and sixty-one years for you and finally you've come."

"Ummm, sorry for making you wait." He was surprised he could get the words out with his heart beating like thunder in his ears, so loud he could barely hear his own voice.

"That's all right. You're a well-mannered young man. You'll do just fine despite your bachelor ways."

"My bachelor..." Will thought over what she'd just witnessed. "Yes, my bachelor ways. Sorry about that."

A cheeky grin crossed her face. "I've a mind to stay away from your bedroom anyway. A lady shouldn't see such things."

Will laughed even as he could feel his cheeks burning. "Why have you been waiting for me?"

"Because you're a void. You're the only one who can control the wild magic."

"I can't control any magic." William frowned. "That's the essence of who I am, sort of the anti-magic." To be the magicless one in a family known for their power was more of a stigma than being the only admittedly gay one, though he had doubts about Uncle Mike.

"You tamped down the power and gave me my freedom. You brought the spirit of the house alive."

"Now that you have it, what are you going to do with your freedom?"

The woman laughed. "Watch over you of course. You can help me be beautiful once more. I used to be the place where all the magic users came to meet. When the ley lines shifted, I became the place to avoid because they couldn't stand the pressure. With you here, the magic users will return. Look at your handyman; he returned. Of course he's your mate so your situation might be different."

"What do you mean mate? We're not wild animals; we don't have mates. We have people we marry with careful pre-nups and divorce a few years later with lawyers masquerading as sharks." At least that was how they did relationships in his family. His father was on wife number four, and both of his brothers were on their second time around.

"Not with you. You have a soul mate, and he went downstairs to make you dinner."

Will laughed. He quickly swallowed his amusement under the stern look in the lady's eyes. "Sorry. I'll admit I'm attracted to Cash, but I don't know about my soul mate. We only met yesterday."

"Soul mates don't need years to get to know each other, which is why you felt comfortable enough to share your body."

Will thought he felt comfortable more because he was a slut than any special feelings on his part, but looking into her blue eyes, he just couldn't say the words. "So are you just going to hang out then? And what should I call you?"

The girl laughed. "You can call me Harriett. After all your love brought me to life." She gave him a quick curtsy before vanishing like a ghost.

"Just when I don't think my life can get any weirder."

Will decided not to tell Cash about Harriett yet. Most people contained some magic, but not everyone could use it. He didn't know yet if Cash was a magic wielder, despite the suspicious grocery store incident. His gut told him his handyman wasn't just a handyman.

Quickly pulling on his clothes, Will headed downstairs. He didn't want Cash to think he forgot about him.

Cash was stirring pasta sauce as he entered the room. Leaning over Will placed a kiss to the exposed nape of his lover before tugging at one of the rings embedded in his right ear.

"If you don't want me to burn the sauce, you better stop that."

Will stepped back. "I wouldn't want that."

Dinner was a simple meal of pasta and a loaf of crusty bread they'd picked up at the market. The food was good, filling, and Will knew he'd have to jog a lot if this was how he was going to eat from now on.

"Do you jog?"

"Do I what?" Cash looked at Will like he asked if he wrangled ferrets with spaghetti lassos in his spare time.

"Jog. I jog every evening."

"Nope. But make sure you tell me what path you take so I don't worry if you're back late."

"Yes, Dad." Will rolled his eyes. Living with someone else was a big adjustment. Used to coming and going as he pleased, he hoped adapting to another person wouldn't prove too difficult. "I've never lived with another person before," he confessed.

Cash stared at him. "So I'm your first?"

Will laughed until he couldn't draw any more breath into his lungs. He was still holding back chuckles when he said, "Yes, dear, you're my first."

"I'm glad I could be your first something." Cash wasn't as amused as Will.

Knowing he needed to do some damage control, he left his seat and slid onto his lover's lap, straddling Cash's thighs he leaned down and gave him a quick kiss.

"You think you can just climb onto my lap and

sweet talk me into a better mood?"

"Yep." Will nibbled Cash's lower lip, worrying the flesh with his teeth.

That elicited a low growl. Cash gripped the back of Will's head and took control.

He let him. There was nothing sexier than a man who knew what he was doing.

Sliding his fingers down William's spine, Cash cupped his ass with his large hands and stood, lifting him up as he went. Will helped by wrapping his legs around Cash's waist, holding on tight as his lover walked him up the flight of stairs to the master bedroom.

"I like a big strong man," Will whispered in his ear.

Cash dropped him gently on the bed and stripped Will of his jeans.

"Fuck, you're the most beautiful man I've ever seen," he moaned as his large hands roamed Will's body.

Within seconds, he lay on the bed completely naked, watching with anticipation as Cash removed his shirt and then his pants, pulling his underwear down in the same motion.

Will didn't have any complaints of his own. The man's pebbled abs were drool-worthy.

"Join me on the bed." Will beckoned him closer. "I want to thank you for making me dinner. I like a man who

can cook." He couldn't stop a nervous glance around the room, letting out a soft breath when he saw no sign of Harriett.

Cash gave Will his dimpled smile. The situation struck him odd, a rough-looking man with dimples.

"If it gets you naked in bed, I'll cook you dinner every night."

"It's a deal," Will promised. "There's lube in the side table."

"You haven't had time to buy furniture for the rest of the house, but you have lube?" Cash teased, his black eyes sparkling.

"I have priorities."

Smiling, Cash popped open the cap, liberally covering his fingers. "Lift your hips, baby, I want to look into your eyes while I fuck you."

Will was quick to obey Cash's command. No one had ever gotten him so hot so quickly. Damn, he couldn't remember the reason he thought this was a bad idea. Obviously he was an idiot.

Cash scissored his fingers inside Will until he was panting and pumping his hips to the motion of Cash's touch.

"Inside, now!" Will demanded, unable to focus on anything other than Cash's touch and aching for more.

"Bossy thing."

"Uh." His concentration was too scattered for words. Forming syllables and vowels took more effort than he could manage when his body ached to merge with the man above him.

"Like that, darlin'? I'll make you forget all of those fancy boys who've touched you before. They weren't strong enough to keep you. Not like I'm gonna."

Will almost believed him, his pierced, muscled lover who knew exactly what to do to make him lose every single thought in his mind.

Cash slipped out his fingers and slid in his cock.

Perfection.

Cash pounded Will into the mattress, his large hands cupping his ass while he told him how things were going to be. If Will could have caught his breath, he might have argued, but instead he clutched the sheets and held on for the ride.

"You're mine now, and I'm gonna keep you."

Will swore as liquid shot between them, his entire body convulsing with his release. Cash soon followed shouting out Will's name. With a sloppy smile, Cash slid out of Will's body before collapsing on the bed beside him.

Turning his head, Will admired his lover. Cash's hair lay sweaty against his head, his black eyes sleepy with

satiated lust. He was the most beautiful thing Will had ever seen.

"You're mine," Cash said in a deep, gravelly voice.

"O-okay. I'm all yours." He would've agreed to anything; he was enthralled.

Cash kissed him on the cheek. "I'll be right back." He got up and walked out the door. He returned moments later cleaned up with a wet washcloth in his hand. "I can't let my man get all crusty overnight."

Heat filled Will at the thought of belonging to this gorgeous god. He let his lover take care of him and didn't even complain when Cash took the washcloth back to the bathroom so the cloth didn't make a wet spot on his bedroom floor.

Cash came back into the bedroom. Lying on the bed, he waved Will closer with a wicked smile. "Come be my little spoon, honey," he crooned as he rolled to his side, pulling William back into his embrace. "Don't be surprised if I'm not here when you wake. I know you're going to sleep in."

Will grunted his affirmative. He was too tired to do more. He briefly thought about arguing and getting up. He had deadlines to meet, but the warmth of his lover snuggled behind him lulled him into sleep.

CHAPTER FIVE

One of these days, Will was going to learn not to answer the door to anyone banging on the wood like there's a Memorial Day shoe sale and they're the first one at the opening.

"William, I know you're home," a frighteningly familiar voice shouted.

Looking over at his lover, Will was surprised to see the mad woman at his door not only didn't wake Cash, but the other man hadn't even stirred in his sleep. Pleased at his luck, he moved to slide out of bed. A large arm wrapped around his stomach, pulling him back against a hot naked body. He melted inside at the affectionate gesture. Rarely spending all night with a lover, he wasn't sure what the morning-after protocol was for waking up with someone in his bed.

"Where you going, baby?" Cash asked in a sleep-roughened voice, tucking him closer to his hard body.

"I think my mother is at the door."

"What?"

The cuddling man snapped away from him so fast Will was certain he felt the ripples of a sonic boom.

"My mother," he repeated. He was pleased his voice

sounded much calmer than his jangled nerves should allow. "She's outside." Without looking at Cash, Will pulled on a pair of jeans and headed downstairs. If he left his mother out there much longer, she was bound to attract the neighbors. Will hadn't met his neighbors yet, and he didn't want their first impression of him to be of a crazy woman standing on his front porch or growing roses out of thin air or any of the things she might do when she was bored.

Running down the stairs, he pulled open the door.

His mother stood there in her best pearls, a gray designer suit, and a pair of shoes that probably cost the same as the mortgage payment on most people's houses.

"Good morning, Mother."

"Don't you good morning me." With her patented "mother death glare," the impeccably coifed Mrs Stamson marched past him. "How could you move and not tell your family?"

Will held back the words that would rat out his brothers. He obviously had a misplaced sense of loyalty Gil had already tattled.

"Come on in," he said, holding back the sigh trying to escape. He loved his mother, he really did, but she kept insisting everyone would be much happier if they let her run their lives.

"Do you have any coffee?" Her look told him once

again he was lagging in his skills as a host.

"No I haven't made coffee yet. It's only nine in the morning, and my mother taught me it isn't polite to call on people this early."

She gave him a scornful glance. "That doesn't apply to family. Now go and make your mother some coffee."

"Yes, Mother," Will said. He prayed Cash would have the good sense to stay in bed, but of course, he barely had water in the coffee pot before he heard his lover's heavy tread on the stairs.

A low rumble sounded in the other room, followed by the softer noise of his mother responding. Starting the pot, Will rushed into the living room to find Cash lounging comfortably in a large wingback chair with his mother perched primly on the sofa.

"William, Cassius tells me the two of you have only been dating a little while, and he already lives here."

Will heard the censure in her tone, but he'd long ago given up trying to please his parents.

"Yes, mother. Cash lives with me. He's helping me fix up my house." Among other things.

She looked the handyman up and down. The smile she flashed him was her society smile, the one she saved for fundraising and trying to make drunken billionaires donate money to her favorite charity.

"Cash, would you mind if I kidnapped my son for a bit? I'd like to take him out to breakfast to discuss some family matters."

His lover's black eyes sparkled with amusement. He could tell Cash was dying to give him a hard time even as his answer was polite. "Of course not, Mrs Stamson, I wouldn't want to interrupt family matters. There's a good diner in town if you've a mind for some pancakes."

Will didn't think he'd ever seen his mother eat a pancake in her life. Carbs might as well be rat poison in her mind.

"That's a wonderful idea, thank you," she said.

"But I'm making coffee," Will sputtered.

Cash stood up and came over to him. Placing one big hand around the back of Will's neck, he leaned close enough to speak directly into his ear. "Stop being an ass and take your mother to breakfast."

"I'm not being an ass," Will said indignantly, realizing too late his mother heard him.

Cash's big body shook with laughter.

With a growl Will shoved him away. "Funny." He turned back to his mother, ignoring the man beside him. "Cash is right. There is a good diner a few miles away. Let me get dressed. I'll be right back down."

He gave his lover a pointed look Cash studiously

ignored.

Bastard.

He stomped up the stairs, not caring if they thought he was having a royal snit.

Not long after, Cash entered the room.

"Why are you mad at me?"

"Because you took her side," Will snapped.

Cash laughed. "I didn't take her side. I only said you should take your mother to breakfast. It's obvious she wants to talk to you."

"She probably has an accountant she wants me to meet. You'll feel bad later when I'm married to some stockbroker."

"I thought he was an accountant," Cash said mildly.

Will threw a shoe at him, and Cash, the evil bastard, ducked. The look he gave Will when he straightened should've had him running for his life. Instead his traitorous dick hardened with interest. "I've had enough of your tantrum. If you don't get dressed and take your mother to breakfast right now, I'll put you over my knee and let her know how I handle her boy when he misbehaves."

There was no sign of his laughing lover. This man meant business.

Damn, he was sexy.

Petulantly, Will put on a nice button-up shirt and

switched his comfy pants to an expensive pair of slacks his mother sent him last Christmas. He slipped on his loafers and turned to leave.

"What? No goodbye kiss?"

He slammed the bedroom door on his way out.

Will's mother was waiting at the bottom of the stairs, a thoughtful look in her eyes.

"Ready to go?" he asked, grinding his teeth with annoyance.

He offered her his arm, and the pair of them walked out to her silver Mercedes where her driver was waiting by the back door.

"Good Morning, Phil."

"Morning, Mr Stamson." Phil replied, tipping his hat.

They exchanged sympathetic looks. Working for his mother wasn't any easier than being her son. Phil was a good man who must be pushing sixty. William shuddered to think what poor sap his mother was going to hire when Phil retired, or died of the heart attack his mother was bound to cause him one day.

Will gave him directions to the diner.

* * * *

There was more than one reason Cash needed Will to go to breakfast with his mother. He picked up his phone and dialed the office.

"Did you get rid of Stamson?"

"No, I didn't get rid of Stamson. His mother came to visit. If I did anything to her boy, she'd kick my ass. When you said his family was strong, you didn't say they could dropkick me. Her magical field is almost as strong as the fucking house's."

"Mrs Stamson is there?" Cash couldn't miss the nervous edge to his boss's voice. The sound was the most unsettling thing he'd ever experienced. Drake Lender didn't get nervous. Ever.

"Yeah, she came to take her son out to breakfast."

"They didn't invite you? I thought I told you to get close to William."

Cash's body heated as he remembered how close he and William had become last night. He ached to relive the experience again. "She said she wanted to discuss family matters and probably the stranger she found living in his house."

"Shit. I hope she doesn't tell him to get rid of you. Getting another operative inside could prove impossible."

An unpleasant thought slipped into Cash's mind. "You knew William Stamson's my soul mate, didn't you?"

Drake gave a low laugh. "You wouldn't have gone if I'd told you." Drake's ability to match mates made him both a dangerous guy and the most sought out man in the magical community. He might be the magical society's version of Cupid, but he also was a mean-spirited bastard who was more than happy to use his matchmaking skills to his own advantage.

Ignoring his boss's question, Cash told him the truth. "There is no way William will leave this house. He loves it. Besides, as his mate, I can make sure no one else poaches the place. If you guys weren't so cheap, you could've bought the property years ago, and we wouldn't be in this situation."

"There are a lot of places where intersections meet. We can't buy them all up. Despite what you think, the Council doesn't swim in money. Not like your boyfriend," Drake added slyly.

Although Cash's heart skipped at the term, he continued on. "Uh huh. I'd find your disclaimer more believable if you didn't live in a mansion."

There was a heavy sigh across the line. "Believe me or not, it's more for security than because I like living in a fortress. But enough about me, just use your ability and change William's mind. He'll forgive you later."

"Shit, I wish I could." As the silence grew across

the line of the phone, Cash yearned to take the words back.

"William is a void?"

Fuck him six ways to Sunday. He was so used to the Council knowing everything, it never occurred to him William's condition might be hidden.

He tried to backtrack. "I mean it would be wrong to do that to my mate."

"Good try." Drake laughed. "I knew Senator Stamson was wily, but I didn't think the old dog had the nerve to fake his son's tests. He should've trained years ago."

"He's not the type," Cash insisted. "You know those tests are outdated. A reading done when you're a child shouldn't change who you become as an adult. I don't blame Stamson for fudging the results. Will would never make a good soldier. He doesn't have the temperament."

His heart leapt with terror as he thought of his gentle, dreamy lover sent into dangerous situations due to his immunity to magic.

"Voids are too fucking rare to ignore one right under our nose." Drake's voice had a terrifying finality.

"If you even think about sending one of your operatives to take my mate, I will snap the fucker's neck!" Cash didn't care if Will was the last void in the universe. He wouldn't let them take him.

"Relax, Cash. You know we'd have to get his permission. We don't just kidnap voids anymore. The program was outlawed twenty years ago."

Five years after Will's birth. Another reason Stamson had hidden his son's talents. Cash had never met the man, but he admired the senator's ability to protect his son. What really surprised Cash was no one had ever noticed before. Such an absence of magic should've sent alarm bells through someone, sometime.

"Will is the perfect keeper of this house. He can't use the magic, and his presence calms the flares. The neighborhood is already safer."

"But what about you?" Drake asked.

"What do you mean?"

"Can we trust you with all that magic? So much power at your fingertips is a lot of temptation."

Cash wanted to take offense, but his boss raised a valid point. Known for using magic however he wanted, sitting him on top of an enormous magical cloud might not be the best idea. However he wasn't leaving Will, and there was no way his lover was moving.

"Trust me when I tell you Stamson isn't leaving, and if he doesn't go, neither do I."

A long sigh was his only response for quite a while.
"Fine. I'll send out a few agents to check out the situation."

Don't take this wrong, but your impartiality is in question."

"Question my impartiality all you want, but if they touch my man, you'll need to increase your funeral fund."

"Understood." Before he disconnected Cash thought Drake sounded more amused than worried.

"Fucker better not touch Will," Cash muttered, tossing his phone onto the couch.

Sighing, he grabbed his tool belt. He might as well check things out while he was there. He'd email Drake later. He was taking some time off. This might have started as an assignment, but he really needed to check the soundness of the house. He didn't want Will to step through a broken floorboard while he was plotting his next story. He also needed to get a hold of some of Will's books. It would be nice to know exactly what the other man spent his time writing.

* * * *

Phil pulled up in front of the diner. A few minutes later William and his mother were sliding into a booth, accepting greetings and menus from Hazel.

"Morning, William," Hazel said with a smile. "How is Cash working out?"

He knew she didn't mean the question in a sexual

way, but he couldn't stop the blush on his cheeks or from saying, "Right now he's inspecting my plumbing."

"William!" His very proper mother smacked him in the head with the menu. Hazel threw her head back and laughed.

Will smoothed down his hair, opened his menu, and adopted a very proper mien. "I've only had lunch here, but the burgers are outstanding. What's the special today?"

Hazel rattled off the specials. "I'll leave you two to look over the menu," she said as she went to get them both some coffee.

By the time she returned, they were ready to order.

Will chose the pumpkin pancakes while his mother picked an uninteresting poached egg dish, but then she didn't still wear the same size she had in high school by eating butter.

There was only a few seconds between the ordering and the attack. His mother didn't like to waste time.

"William, why did you move away? I thought you were happy in Seattle."

Will fidgeted with his napkin, avoiding her eyes. "I was bored. I wanted to get away and try something new. When I saw Harriett, I knew this was the place to be."

"You met a girl."

Will looked up in astonishment. The confused

expression his mother gave him was almost worth the morning wake-up call.

"Harriett is the house." He didn't mention Harriet was also the name of the spirit wandering the halls. That would make her pack him up quicker than anything. He didn't want to go anywhere. He wanted to stick around with his hot handyman.

His mother nodded. "It'll be gorgeous when you get her fixed up and, really, who can resist living on Mulberry Street?"

Will stared at his mother, completely and utterly stunned. For the first time in his life, she actually understood him. Maybe the sky would fall down tomorrow or gravity would reverse itself. Neither event would be more shocking than this very moment.

Hazel returned with their dishes. She gave his mother an assessing look as she placed a small pot of melted butter and a carafe of syrup on the table. "I brought out the real maple stuff," she said, giving him a wink. "Is there anything else I can get you?" She poured them both some more coffee, a surprisingly good beverage for a diner.

"Not for me. Mother?"

She looked at her plate in surprise.

"No, everything looks good. Thank you."

They ate in companionable silence.

"Your man was right; this is a good diner," his mother said. "I wanted you to know your brother ratted you out to your father too. He called to yell at me for letting you move away." Her voice was so cold Will was surprised there weren't icicles forming in the air. It was amazing his parents ever had three children together. They couldn't stand each other. He could only assume at one time they were much fonder of each other than they were now. To give them credit, they both always made sure Will and his brothers knew they were wanted.

His parents were just more practical in their show of adoration, such as chauffeurs, French nannies and the helicopter Will got for his fifteen birthday and wrecked by his sixteenth. More traditional parents would've grounded him. Instead he got a chauffeured limo. His father thought Will was safer with someone else driving him. He was well into his twenties before he got his license.

"I'm sorry Father gave you a hard time."

His mother shrugged. "He says he's worried about you. I think he just doesn't like you to get too far away. He's always been possessive about you kids. Remember when Gil wanted to move to Maine with his first wife?"

"Yeah, I never did know why he changed his mind."

"Your father refused to finance his business if he moved."

"Huh. I always thought he wouldn't care where I went because I can't give him grandkids."

"Who says you can't?" Mrs Stamson asked, spreading marmalade on her toast. "You can artificially inseminate some girl or adopt a poor orphan, but if you plan on using a surrogate, let me know and I'll make sure it's someone from a suitable family."

"Of course, Mother," Will said, trying not to choke on his coffee. Some things just weren't breakfast fare. She gave him a smile that looked a lot like the one he saw in the mirror, but rarely saw on her. "I was young once too, William. I know I've never been a warm, huggy sort of mother, but I love you and I want you to be happy. If moving to a small town, fixing up a house and living with a hot stud with a tool belt is your way of being happy, then I'll try to be happy for you."

"He is a hot stud," Will agreed.

Mrs Stamson picked at her eggs for a moment. "You do know your house is built on a ley line intersection."

Will shrugged. "The power doesn't bother me."

She nodded. "I know. I just want you to be careful. A lot of people will want to access the property." She pinned him with a sharp gaze, similar to the one she gave him as a child when he was caught doing something wrong.

"Your handyman has a lot of power of his own. I'd be surprised if he really was a handyman."

A chill went through Will's body as his mother confirmed his own suspicions. "You think he's something else?"

"Possibly. Be careful. Enjoy him, but don't tell him anything you don't want passed on."

The pancakes churned in his stomach. He swallowed to keep his food down, the delicious pancakes suddenly unpalatable. He set down his fork as he focused on not throwing up. All he wanted was a nice guy to settle down with.

Finding his voice took a few tries. "Thanks, Mother. I'll keep that in mind. Hell, at least I can get my house fixed." If nothing else Cash would have to start working on the mansion to keep his cover. Now his stomach churned at the thought of sharing his bed with the other man.

"Should I say anything to him?"

His mother shook her perfectly coifed head. Not a hair stirred. "I'd wait and see what he wants."

Will gave a snort.

"I mean besides you. It's obvious the man wants in your bed, but you should wait and see what else he wants or who he works for."

She patted his hand, the greatest show of affection

she ever gave Will or any of her children, her equivalent of a hug.

By the end of the meal, for the first time in his life, he and his mother were on the same page. They both thought his boyfriend was hot, his house had potential, and the little diner had some damn good food. He said goodbye to his mother as she dropped him off at the bank.

He might as well transfer his brother's money while he was in town.

The local bank was a cute brick building with a sign stating they'd been serving the community for two hundred years. Will entered the bank and approached the perky blond at the teller window.

"Hello, sir, how may I help you?"

"I'd like to open an account."

"If you take a seat over there, I'll have someone help you right away," she said, indicating a row of leather chairs. The building was all exposed brick inside, giving off a feeling of permanence. He could almost feel the spirits of thousands of people who must have walked through those doors begging for or depositing money.

"Will. How nice to see you again."

Dr Mathews walked up to him with a wide smile. Overly friendly for the one time they'd met.

"Umm nice to see you again too." Will stood and

shook the man's hand. The doctor glanced around.

"Where's your boyfriend?"

"At home." Will didn't think of Cash as a boy anything, and he especially didn't like the other man's sneering attitude.

Mathews slid into the chair beside him and stripped him with his eyes as if he were a two-dollar hooker. "After you're done here, why don't you come and have lunch with me?"

Will sat back down. "No, thank you. Cash and I have an understanding."

Mathews sat up straighter. "What kind of understanding?"

"I don't sleep around, and he doesn't kill any of the men who try to seduce me."

The doctor paled. "You don't need to mention this to Cash."

"Nope."

"Good." With a last wistful gaze, the man rushed out of the bank.

One more problem solved.

A few minutes later, a good-looking man with dark layered hair and buffed nails approached.

"I'm Alan Archwood, how can I help you?" His words were polite, but his eyes examined Will like he was a

hot piece of ass trolling the bar scene.

If he hadn't promised his brother the money or wanted to create a local account, he would've walked right back out. "William Stamson. I'd like to open an account," Will reluctantly shook hands, pleased his magic protected him from the other man. He had a feeling Alan Archwood wasn't above using magical persuasion to get what he wanted.

"Right this way, sir." Alan led him to a highly polished desk with a state-of-the-art computer. All the papers on the desk were corralled neatly in a wire basket. Will sat down while Alan asked the usual bank questions.

Twenty minutes later he left the bank with his brother's money transferred, a shiny new bank account to go with his new life, and the banker's phone number, the latter he'd never use.

The gorgeous weather made him decide to walk instead of calling Cash, ignoring the little voice in his head whispering he was putting off seeing his lover. Eventually he'd have to face the truth. His handyman might not be only a handyman. He would have shrugged off anyone else making such an accusation, but not his mother. Mrs Stamson had better instincts than anyone he'd ever met. How she made a mistake with Will's father he'd never figure out, but whenever anyone didn't follow her advice,

things went horribly wrong.

Will had to find a way to nail his lover down on his real occupation. He pushed all the negativity away as he enjoyed the afternoon sun warming his back and the scent of roses in the air.

Turning the corner Will saw the tip of Harriett's steepled roof. So absorbed in watching his property come into sight, it took him a moment to recognize the sound of a car engine growling behind him. Will wasn't too concerned. Even though there weren't any sidewalks in this part of town, he was far off to the side and out of the direct path of cars.

As the sound got closer, he turned just in time to see a black car barreling towards him. Will didn't have a chance to get out of the way before the vehicle slammed into him and he was airborne.

He didn't remember falling to earth. There was only blackness.

* * * *

The steady beeping woke him.

Blinking, he tried to focus.

Hospital.

What the hell is going on?

A soft squeezing on his right hand caught his attention.

Cash sat on an uncomfortable looking chair beside him. He looked like hell.

"You look like hell," Will told him.

No one had ever accused him of being diplomatic.

He got a faint smile, nowhere close to Cash's usual brilliance. "You don't look so good yourself."

Struggling to figure out what was going on, he dropped his suspicions of his lover. "What happened?"

"Some asshole hit you with his car and drove away. Why were you on the road?"

"I was walking home. There's no sidewalk, and no one was around."

"Someone was. You should've called me to come get you. The police think the incident was intentional. Mr Barnett, four houses down, saw the car aim straight at you. I heard the ambulance and went to look because the sirens sounded close. You were lying in the street." Cash's voice broke at the description. As Will watched, two big tears drifted down his lover's face. "I thought you were dead."

A long shuddering sob went through Cash. "Never do that again," he demanded. The order lost some of its usual command through the tears. Whatever Cash's true purpose in Will's house, his affection wasn't manufactured.

If this was acting, Will was ready to nominate him for an Oscar.

Tentatively he reached out to stroke Cash's head. He let out a hiss as pain shot through his body.

Cash's head snapped up. "Careful, love. You were pretty banged up. The doctor said it's a miracle you weren't seriously injured. They were initially worried about a head injury. You hit the cement pretty hard, but they say there's no swelling. You must have a really strong skull," he said with a faint smile.

Will wiped away a tear Cash missed on his right cheek. This strong, tough man was truly devastated by his injury. The reasons behind him staying with Will faded into insignificance. When he was ready, Cash would reveal his motives. Until then Will really didn't care. Almost getting killed changed his priorities.

His eyes snapped back to his lover when the other man spoke. "By the way, your family is going to be here soon. I called your mom and told her you'd been injured."

"You called my mom?" He didn't even know Cash had her number.

Cash nodded. "She gave me her card in case I needed anything. She was back in Seattle. When I told her there were no major injuries, she promised to visit when you recovered. She had a lunch appointment with the

mayor or something."

In that moment Will realized his mother was actually trying to get along with whomever he chose as his partner. Even though she suspected Cash wasn't who he claimed, she gave him her card anyway in case of emergency. She might be a cold person, but he knew she genuinely cared about him. Of course, while handing over her card, she picked up Cash's magical signature. His mother had used the same technique more than once to hunt down someone who tried to cheat a Stamson. His mother's talent was like a psychic bloodhound. She could track people through their magical frequency, except Will. He didn't have one.

"Is my father coming?"

Cash shrugged. "I don't know. I wasn't given an update. She said she'd tell him, but I didn't hear back."

"Huh." With his father's presence, things could go either way. He knew his father would get away if he could, but Will hurt too much to care if his father planned to descend with wife number four. The only positive thing from this whole encounter was he discovered Cash really cared about him. Not his money, not his family, but him. He just wanted Will. It was a refreshing change or a suspicious one. He hadn't decided.

Before he could say anything irretrievably mushy,

Dr Mathews came into the room.

"Ah, you're awake, Mr Stamson." He pulled a penlight out of his pocket to flash in Will's eyes. "Pupils look normal."

After taking Will's blood pressure and temperature, he leaned against a cabinet and looked over Will's chart.

"Your vitals look good. I don't know if Cash here told you the whole story, but you're extremely lucky to have escaped this with nothing but a hairline fracture on your collarbone. The bone should heal on its own if you don't re-damage it." He made sure to meet Will's eyes as if trying to impress upon him the gravity of the situation. "Overall you're a very lucky man. There was no head trauma or internal bleeding. Not bad for a man who was hit by a car."

Will's nose twitched. The doctor's scent tingled his sinuses. Strange. Will didn't have any allergies except to zombies. The scent of the ash used in raising the undead always caused his sinuses to swell.

Will sneezed.

Dr Mathews gave him a tissue. "A lot of people are allergic to the cleaning fluid."

"Huh. I'm usually fine with cleaners."

Usually only zombies and flowers made him sneeze, but he couldn't come out and say such a thing to the

doctor. Even the most experienced magic user often denied the existence of zombies. Part of the magical community genuinely thought the undead would go away if they weren't acknowledged. Glancing around, he didn't see flowers or zombies in the room. He'd have to contact his Seattle doctor about getting some allergy medicine if this kept up.

"When can I go home?" The quicker he got out of there the sooner he could breathe again.

"I'd like to get the results back from your last MRI to make sure there isn't anything we missed, and if everything looks good, you can go home tomorrow morning." Dr Mathews looked between Cash and Will, a strange look crossing his face. "You still have my number. Let me know if you need anything."

"I'll make sure he gets everything he needs," Cash growled.

Mathews gave Cash an unfriendly look before turning back to Will. The doctor gently patted his arm in an overly familiar manner. Leaning over he said in a low voice, "Give me a call."

Not looking at Cash, the doctor left the room.

"I'm keeping you in bed forever, and I'm going to hire a bodyguard with all your fancy money," Cash growled at his bedside.

"I've already hired him a nurse with a military background," a deep voice said from the doorway.

Shit.

His father, Senator Edward Stamson, stood in the doorway, looking at Cash like he was a particularly stinky bug he'd found at the bottom of his shoe.

"You hired me a nurse?" Will said, more to distract the man than because he didn't understand what he said.

"Don't worry, kid, I made sure it was a guy."

"Neil!" He smiled as his middle brother walked into the room. Neil was the typical middle child, the peacemaker, and one of his favorite people in the world.

"Now we see some excitement," his father said with a smirk.

Will looked into his father's eyes, the color the same as his, and saw a flash of hurt.

"I'm happy to see you too, Dad," Will told him. "So is my nurse hot?"

His father laughed, a nervous sound, but at least he tried.

"I don't think it matters," Neil piped up. "Your new boyfriend will annihilate him."

"Dad and Neil, this is Cassius. Cash, this is my father, Senator Edward Stamson, and my brother Neil." He left out the boyfriend part. He didn't know what Cash was

to him.

Cash stood up to shake hands with them.

"When Will's mother called and said someone moved in with my son, I had you investigated."

Most people started with good to meet you. His father liked to go for the kill.

Cash gave him a wry smile. "I'm not after your son's money, sir."

"I didn't say you were, but if you do anything to hurt him, you'd best find a new country to live in."

"And a doctor." Neil's tone was colder than his father's. Strange, Neil was usually the friendly one.

Will looked between them, trying to figure out what was going on. He was distracted when an orderly rolled a cart with a food tray into the room.

His eyes lit up when he saw Will. "Hello there. I'm Sam. I've brought you something to eat. Is there anything else I can get you?"

"No." Cash gave the younger guy a look promising retribution if he continued trying to hit on the blond in the bed. "Why don't you go on your way? I'll take care of this." Cash pressed his will onto the other man.

Sam's eyes glazed over. "Sure. Page me if you need anything."

Still in his zombie-like state, he turned and left the room.

"Cash!" Will's expression was disapproving.

Cash shrugged. "You don't need people drooling over you while you're in a hospital bed." He scooted the tray closer to Will. "Mmm. Green Jell-O."

"I'll go get you something edible, bro," Neil said, pulling out his phone as he walked through the door.

"Thanks, Neil," Will called after him.

"There's nowhere close to here other than the diner."

Will shrugged. "Neil's skill is teleportation."

Cash's eyes followed the other man out the door. "Really." It wouldn't take much to hit Will with the car and then vanish. He wondered who got all his lover's money if he died. He'd have to give Drake a call.

"Could I speak with you a moment, Mr Grant?"

"Sure."

He followed the senator out of the room, despite Will's sputtered protests behind him.

It took no time for Will's father to get to the point. "I talked to Drake earlier today. He tells me he assigned you to get Will to move. I can tell you from experience, nothing will change the boy's mind once it's made up. So you can go back to the home office and tell your boss Will

can be the caretaker for the property. I won't tolerate anyone interfering with my son's life."

"Did he mention he knew Will's a void?"

The senator blushed. "Yes, but Will has the right to live where he wants. He also isn't responsible for his magical chart. His mother and I filed the paperwork to keep people like Drake away from our child." There was a fierce light in the older man's eyes. "Trust me, son, you don't want to get into a pissing contest with me. I've got more experience and a lot of powerful friends."

Cash held up his hands defensively. "I have no plans of fighting you on this, sir. I told Drake Will wasn't moving. Will is also my mate. I have no intention of letting them bully him out of his own house."

Stamson gave a loud laugh. "Mate. Shit. What kind of crap are they feeding you at school these days? Finding your perfect mate is a myth. Trust me, I've married four times, and each one has been a disaster. Both of Will's brothers are on their second marriage, and Will's never met a man he could stand for more than a week."

"Everyone in my family has found their mate." Cash wasn't going to back down on this. Stamson might be his lover's father, but he wouldn't stand in Cash's way. He didn't care how powerful the other man was. "I'm not giving Will up. Besides, now that he's in danger, I'm

certainly not going to leave him alone."

"He's not going to be alone. We'll have security on him twenty-four seven."

"And me in his bed."

"Does he know you're an enforcer? That you're going to be gone all the time?"

Cash shook his head as a knot formed in his chest. "No. He still thinks I'm a handyman. Besides, I'm going to cut back and do support so I won't have to leave him alone. He gets into trouble when he's alone."

"I thought Will's mother met you."

Cash nodded.

"Then Will knows you're more than you appear. My ex-wife can smell a phony twenty miles away. There's no way she didn't sniff you out. Hell, I still use her for consulting, and we can't stand each other. She's that good."

Stamson might claim to not like his ex-wife, but there was a wealth of admiration in his voice.

"I'll deal with my relationship with Will. Like I said, he's my mate, and I don't want anything to happen to him."

Stamson shrugged. "Do what you want, but if you hurt my boy, there won't be anywhere you can hide." The light flashing in the other man's eyes told Cash consequences were deadly. Stamson and his ex-wife might

have their differences, but they were surprisingly in sync when decisions were made about their son.

They walked back into the room to find Will leaning against a pile of new pillows eating a steak, his brother sitting on the chair beside the bed.

Cash's concern increased. He hadn't experienced any magic displacement when Will's brother left and returned. There was no saying what kind of damage a guy like this could do and never get caught, especially as the aide to a senator.

Concentrating on the other man, Cash opened his third eye. Seeing the aura around a person was one of his minor magical skills. He didn't do the scan often because the procedure brought a killer of a headache. For a moment the world shifted from its usual bright colors to a muted world where the only true colors were centered around people. Through Cash's inner eye, Senator Stamson's aura was the dark purple of a long time magic user, but with no rings to indicate anything nefarious in his nature. Neil's aura was a muddy brown of an intermediate user with tinges of gray. At sometime in his life, he'd done something he wasn't proud of. Cash's heart sank as he realized he couldn't rule out Neil Stamson. His breath caught in his throat as he looked at Will's aura.

Pure white with sparkles of gold. If Will were the

useless, rich brat he liked to portray, there would be gray or black tinges to his aura. In Cash's extensive experience working for the Council, he had never encountered a more pure soul. He swallowed back the lump in his throat threatening to drive him to tears. Today he'd cried more than he had in years, and he wasn't ready to shed any more tears.

The senator slapped Cash on the back then looked at his son. "Your man checks out just fine, boy. I approve."

"Um thanks." Will's gaze went between them, but the look lacked its usual sparkle. Cash wanted to blame the behavior on Will's accident, but he had a sinking feeling Mrs Stamson had spoken to her son like the senator suggested.

Neil laughed. "We worry Will's spending too much time alone, and when he's lonely, he'll sleep with anything in pants."

"Hey, I have standards. I never sleep with women, even if they wear pants."

Cash walked up to the bed and covered Will's hand with his. "His wild ways are over. I'm not letting him out of my sight."

"I'll make you a deal, Will. You let me put a discreet security detail around your house, and I'll cancel the nurse and let Cash be your bodyguard."

"See, honey, I get to guard your body."

Neil snorted out his laughter. "I like this guy."

The senator shook his head at his son's antics. "By the way, thanks for sending your brother money. He didn't want to hit me up for cash again."

"No problem. Hey, do you need me to donate some money?"

"A few million wouldn't go amiss."

"You are shitting him." Cash couldn't keep the fury out of his voice.

"What's wrong?" Will asked.

"You're lying in a hospital bed and your father is hitting you up for campaign contributions. That's fucked up!"

"Cash, my father is a politician. They always need money. Besides it looks better if all the money doesn't come out of his personal funds."

Will looked at Cash like he was the one with the problem.

"Yeah, but..." Cash's voice died out as he looked at the three of them. "You don't ask someone for money when they're all banged up."

"Sure you do," Will argued. "How else are you going to make sure you get it? Besides Father and I have an agreement. Any money I contribute gets to be listed under

whatever name I decide."

At Neil's snort of amusement, Cash couldn't resist asking. "What did he use last time?"

Neil's face split into a wide smile. "I believe last time the organization was the AGBTS or *Association of Gay Boys in Tight Shorts*. He established a non-profit charity just to use the name."

Will's amused expression confirmed his brother's statement.

"What does this non-profit company do?"

"It's a general fundraiser for programs supporting gay rights."

The senator cleared his throat. "Last year they raised twenty-five million dollars."

Will looked at his father in surprise. "I didn't think you followed it."

"I wondered how they were doing." He gave Will a proud smile. "I hear they've done a lot of good work towards lobbying for marriage equality." His eyes shifted between the pair of them.

"Real subtle, dad."

Senator Stamson pinned Cash with his sternest look. "Gays can get married in Canada and a few of the states. I'll send you a list."

"We've been dating for about twenty-four hours. I

think we can hold off on the big wedding," Will insisted.

Cash felt a warm spot in his chest. The image of Will wearing his ring flashed in his mind. He looked at his nails intently, avoiding Will's gaze as he said, "That was in my three month plan." He was still wrapping his head around having a male mate. However, he wasn't going to let the beautiful man run free for much longer. There were too many people willing to snatch him up.

"See? Not for a few more months." Will's breath came in quick gasps, and the machine hooked up to track his heart rate increased rapidly.

Cash took the chair Neil quickly vacated.

"Deep breaths, honey," Cash said, rubbing a soothing path across Will's chest.

Neil laughed. "You might've broken the news to him more gently."

"I expect a big wedding with full media coverage," the senator said. "It will look good for me to have a close connection to the gay community. I can announce your engagement discreetly through the media when the time is right."

Cash let out a low growl. "Is there anything you don't make about you?"

Stamson bristled. "Listen, kid, you don't know what we Stamsons are all about. We help out family. Don't we,

Will?"

Will laid his hand on Cash's arm. "Cash, let it go. My dad and I understand each other well."

Cash hoped Will came up with a good name for this year's donations. The senator gave him a smug smile Cash yearned to remove. Punching the man would be a career-ending move, but still tempting.

"Since I see you're in good hands, I'm going to catch a flight back to DC. Cash, good to meet you. Expect to hear about a security detail coming soon."

"Yes, sir," Cash said. His words were polite, but his tone said "fuck you." The senator's expression said he understood the message. It was nice to have open communication with his future in-laws.

Neil walked around the other side of the bed and gave Will a quick, gentle hug. "You take care of my brother," he told Cash.

"Don't be a stranger," Will told him.

Neil nodded and turned to follow his father out.

He stopped by the door. "Father left you a present, but Cash will have to drive it for a while."

He tossed a set of keys in Cash's direction and hurried out the door.

Cash looked at the Mercedes logo on the key ring.

"I thought you had a car."

"He gives me a new one every year."

"Your family is really weird."

Will nodded, carefully. "Yes they are."

CHAPTER SIX

They were in the kitchen eating cereal when a knock came at the door.

"Stay here," Cash ordered, like Will was a disobedient puppy he could bring to heel.

The guy at the door was big, buff, and obviously of the bodyguard persuasion.

"I'm here for Mr Stamson," the mini mountain said.

Cash puffed up like he was willing to fight the stranger.

He put a hand on Cash's arm. "He's probably the guy father hired."

The man gave Will an assessing gaze, almost as thorough as the one Cash gave him so often. "Are you William Stamson?"

"Yes." Will scooted around Cash before he could grab him. "Nice to meet you." He held out his hand to shake.

"I'm Guy Franks." His shake was gentle, but his brown eyes shot a challenging look at Cash.

"Listen, Franks, I don't know what my father told you, but it's not an emergency situation. Cash here will be with me during the day. I think this entire thing is being

blown out of proportion."

Guy's eyes shifted to him. Will saw them flash with surprise. "You don't want a bodyguard?"

Cash laughed behind him. "We told his father he could have a security detail if they stayed at a distance, but the only one guarding this body is me."

His lover wrapped an arm around him to make sure the other man got the idea. Will wasn't sure how he felt about that. He was still on the fence about dealing with Cash, but looking up at his lover, a portion of his heart melted.

Cash was a Neanderthal, but he was his Neanderthal.

Guy frowned. "Your father is paying my company a lot of money to keep you safe, Mr Stamson. I can't just walk away from this contract."

"He didn't tell you to walk away. He just doesn't need to see you," Cash said. "Now go hide behind a fire hydrant or something." He made a shooing gesture at the buff guard.

Will decided to intervene before Guy gave into the impulse clearly in his eyes and shot his lover. Their relationship might be built on lies, but he didn't want his man injured.

Guy looked between them and shook his head. "All

right, we'll be around. If you leave the house, don't be alarmed if you see a car following you."

"How is he going to know it's one of your people and not a psycho stalking him?"

"I'll make sure they flash their lights." Still shaking his head, Guy left.

"He seemed nice," Will offered, leaning against his lover.

"He's an idiot, but he probably knows his stuff if your father hired him."

"Probably."

He wasn't going to get into the same argument again. He wasn't. "Maybe you could convince father I don't need anyone to guard me but you." Okay, maybe he couldn't resist.

Cash glared at him. "Someone tried to kill you."

"It's only a theory. It could've been a freak accident."

"Then why didn't they stop?"

"Maybe the driver panicked. Some people don't do well under pressure."

"And some people try to kill others for all their money. Who gets your fortune when you die?"

Will rolled his eyes. "Everyone in my family gets a million, but most of the money goes to charity."

"The guys in shorts?"

Will shrugged. "Among others."

"Some people will do a lot for a million dollars."

"Not anyone I know."

He wasn't going to defend his family or his will.

* * * *

For the first time Cash realized he had no coping mechanism for dealing with his lover. Will wasn't magical so he wasn't under Cash's control and didn't have to do a damn thing he said. He also wasn't financially relying on him so he couldn't withhold money as an incentive. All he had was... "No sex."

Will's head snapped towards him.

"If you don't take basic precautions, I won't have sex with you. No skipping past the security detail and no hiring anyone to distract them because you find them a nuisance. I mean it. If you can't follow my basic security procedures, we'll sleep in separate beds." He almost crossed his fingers, hoping his lover fell for his threat.

Will turned pale. "Really?"

"Yes." He was proud his voice didn't crack when he issued the threat.

"So you wouldn't be the least interested in this?" Will ran a hand up and down his bare chest. They'd been eating cereal in the kitchen, and neither of them was

wearing a shirt.

Cash clenched his teeth so hard he was surprised he didn't hear them crack. Will stepped closer. Even banged up the man was more beautiful than anyone had the right to be. The bond between them hummed with awareness as sweat beaded his brow.

"Please don't go anywhere without me or a bodyguard."

Will's fine-boned hand cupped Cash's cheek. "All you had to do was ask, sweetheart. I don't like to be bossed around."

Cash let out the breath he was holding. This man was going to keep him on his toes. How could he face down an entire Magician's Council without flinching but one thought of his man injured brought him to his knees? "Thank you."

Will snickered. "Like you could withhold sex from me."

He wished he could deny the other man's confident smirk, but he was right. The concept was a doomed strategy to begin with. He'd forgotten the first rule in negotiation. Never offer anything you aren't willing to give up.

Cash stepped forward, wrapping his mate in his arms. "You're right. I'm an idiot, but I'm a desperate idiot. I need you safe."

"Fine, but if nothing happens in two weeks, I'm calling off the detail and letting those men go back to their lives."

"Baby, this *is* their life. They watch people for a living. If they aren't watching you, it'll be someone else."

"Then let it be someone else."

"Stubborn man."

Will didn't deny it, but he did let Cash cuddle him for a moment.

"I'm going to go upstairs and try to get some work done."

"Good. I'm going to work on plans to renovate your house. If anyone really wants to get to you, they'll come here. When they do, we'll be ready. Why don't you go upstairs and get some work done?"

Will gave Cash a toe-curling kiss, before turning and heading up the stairs. "Let me know when it's time for a break."

Cash waited until he was certain Will was upstairs before he went outside to stand on the porch. Seconds later, Guy stepped out of the shadows. "If I didn't detect your bond, I would grab the man for myself. He's gorgeous and rich. How did you get so lucky?"

He let a satisfied smile cross his face. "I had a shitty life for the first thirty-eight years."

"I'd have a shitty life for the next thousand if it got me a man like that. Is he worth it?"

Cash knew what his friend was really asking. He would have to give up active service, something he'd spent the past twenty years of his life doing, in order to keep his lover safe. He couldn't risk fighting and having something happen to Will. In the future he would have to settle for background espionage and soldier support. "Yeah. He's worth everything."

Guy shook his head, but Cash saw the flash of envy in his friend's eyes and knew, at three hundred years of age, Guy longed for a mate of his own. It was way past time for the man to retire. He was currently the oldest wizard on active duty, not a distinction anyone wanted. As soon as he found his mate, there was a Council position waiting for him.

"We need to figure out who's after your man. According to the senator, he's one of the richest men in the country."

Cash's stomach churned. He knew William downplayed his wealth, but he hadn't realized by how much.

"Someone is trying to kill him. I think it's because of his money. Have you investigated his brothers?"

Guy nodded. "The older one, Gil, is in deep

financial trouble. He depends on Will to keep him afloat. I would've pegged him as the one to watch, but when we talked to him, he was really worried about his brother. Our empath said he honestly didn't know about his brother's accident. Gil doesn't strike me as cold-blooded enough to murder his brother for money. Neil is a different kettle of fish. He lives in his father's shadow, and my intel says he's tired of it. His second marriage is failing because he's gone a lot for a job where his father uses him as a lap dog."

Cash thought over his encounter with Neil and the senator. "At the hospital Senator Stamson barely gave Neil a glance. His entire focus was on Will. What if this wasn't because Will was in the hospital? What if it's how things always are in the family? But why wait until now to do anything?"

"Think about it, Cash. For the first time, Will is vulnerable. He's not in the city, protected by his mother and older brother. The family is already nervous with having their void outside the nest; how big a reach is it to confirm their fears and have an accident befall him?"

"Do you think it's the money?"

Guy nodded. "Partly. Our research shows Neil Stamson has a gambling problem. His trust fund has steadily lost money for the past few years, and he's gambled away all his investment profits. What's to stop a

little fratricide?"

"I'll kill him." Cash didn't need further proof. He was going to kill the asshole. Will loved his brother. This was going to break his heart.

"No. We need to trap him into a confession. The Stamsons will hang us out to dry if we hurt one of their own without proof. This isn't a family you mess with unless you've dotted your I's, crossed your T's, and triple locked your door at night."

"I don't care who he is. If he hurts Will, he's dead."

Guy sighed. "Be careful."

Cash nodded. "Keep an eye out. If it's Neil, he can teleport."

"I'll tell the others."

Cash spent the next few minutes discussing strategy and catching up with news from the office.

* * * *

Above in his office, standing next to the open window, fury burned in Will's chest. His lover was going to hurt his brother. He couldn't let anything happen to Neil. Snatching his phone off his desk, he frantically dialed his brother's number. The call went directly to voice mail. He tried his father and got the same results.

Closing his eyes, Will clutched the phone close to his chest.

What am I going to do?"

He didn't care what intel turned up. He knew his brother was innocent.

If he could get to his car, he could drive to Seattle. While Cash and his father were in the hall, Neil had told him he was going to visit their mother.

Mother.

Will dialed his mother and left a message with her to call him back. Throwing some stuff into a bag, he snuck down the stairs. Thankfully Cash's back was to him as he lifted the keys off the kitchen counter. Without another glance towards his lover, Will left through the kitchen door. Creeping around the back of the house, he made his way to the detached garage. He pulled out his new car keys, threw his bag onto the passenger seat, started the car, and drove off.

CHAPTER SEVEN

"Your boy flew the coop."

Cash spun around to face the intruder. "What?"

A tall man stepped out of the shadows. Cash recognized him as Niles, a powerful wizard with an attitude to match.

"Your man, Will. He left."

"Why the hell didn't you stop him?" Cash demanded. He wanted to smash the other man's face in.

Niles lifted his hands. "I was too far away to stop him physically, and my magic didn't work. Why didn't anyone tell me we were watching a void?"

"Because it's classified," Guy hissed.

"Why would he leave?" Cash asked. His eyes went to the window above. "Shit, he overheard us." He glared at the other agent. "I bet he went to save his brother. Damn it. If he gets hurt, I'll kill you all."

"How are you going to find him?" Niles asked, a curious glint in his eyes.

Cash's phone rang. Mrs Stamson's name appeared on the screen.

"Why did Will call and tell me he's on the way? I thought you were supposed to be watching him."

A chill went through Cash's body.

"We think Neil is trying to kill his brother."

Mrs Stamson laughed over the line. "You've been reading too many murder mysteries. My sons are not looking to kill each other off for money."

Cash was impatient with the blindness of the entire Stamson clan. "Neil is a danger to Will. If you're too blind to see that, I will take care of the problem."

"Proceed with caution, Cassius. If I find you've harmed Neil, you'd best find a nice hole to go live in. Now find Will. Someone is out to kill him, and you incompetents can't keep track of him."

She disconnected, leaving Cash holding his phone in disbelief. "I'm not so sure I want to marry into this crazy family."

"If we don't find your lover, you won't get the chance," Guy reminded him.

Cash closed his eyes and focused. "Look for the void."

"Holy crap, there's a lot of magic here," Niles muttered.

Cash focused on his surroundings. Niles was right. Without Will's presence, the magic lost its calming influence. With his inner sight, he watched plumes of magic spurting like sunspot flares around the house, as if

the house knew it lost its keeper and wanted him back.

"We've got to find him before the magic gets out of control."

"It's been fine all this time," Guy argued.

"It's unstable," Niles confirmed, looking at the house with wide eyes. "Shit."

Guy yanked out his phone and started ordering his agents. "I don't care what it takes to find Will Stamson, but find him."

* * * *

Will woke to sounds of people arguing.

"You said you weren't going to hurt him." Gil's voice pierced his drowsy mind. His brother was here? What was Gil doing in Seattle? Wait, he never reached Seattle. He remembered being run off the road, but nothing after. Why was Gil here?

His foggy mind couldn't focus. He tried to move, only to find his hands and ankles were strapped down. His back was freezing from the cold metal table.

What the fuck is going on?

"What do you care? You got your money," a flat, expressionless voice responded. There was something wrong with the voice, something unnatural but familiar.

Will pretended to still be unconscious. He needed information more than confrontation.

"He's my brother. I need money, but I need him safe more. My family will skewer me if something happens to Will."

"Then you should have thought about that before you sold him to us."

"I didn't sell him to you. You said you'd take some blood and then let him go. I sold you his blood."

"He's more powerful than I hoped. With your brother's blood, I can make weapons to destroy the undead or keep them alive at my whim. Combining this unbinding spell with a drop of your brother's blood will give me total control over the magically risen."

The more Will heard, the more he didn't like where this was going. Gil sold him to somebody! The brother he'd looked up to his entire life had sold him like cattle? Pain stabbed through his chest at the betrayal. If he weren't working so hard to pretend he was still unconscious, he'd be yelling at his asshole brother. Surprise was the only weapon he had. So far he'd found absolutely no use for his anti-magical ability. Sure, the power was great in preventing his brothers from playing pranks on him when he was younger, but as an adult, he hadn't found much use for his odd ability.

"Our deal was for his release," Gil insisted to the psychotic stranger. Will knew this wasn't going to end well. Unfortunately, he was trussed tighter than a turkey, and had no way of releasing himself.

"Our deal is over!" the kidnapper shouted.

"I'm not leaving my brother here!" For the first time in Will's memory, his soft-spoken brother snapped. The smell of sulfur filled the air, and he knew his brother used the one ability he rarely accessed.

Fire.

There was a shout, and the sound of flames crackling.

"We've got to get out of here, Will."

Will's eyes snapped open. He blinked to clear his vision. His brother stood over him, soot smeared on one cheek, his eyes glowing with firelight. Before he could ask him what the hell was going on, his brother ripped away the straps holding his arms and legs.

Wrapping an arm around Will, Gil pulled him up and held him tight as flames engulfed the building. "We need to get out of here."

Unfortunately, teleportation wasn't a skill his older brother had.

"What happened to the other guy?"

"You don't want to know," Gil answered grimly

"Gotcha." He wasn't sure he wanted to leave with Gil, but his legs were rubbery, and he knew he couldn't get out of there on his own. He really wanted to get back home. Will imagined his Harriett—her faded and chipping paint, the squeaky third stair, the closet door that never closed quite right. He remembered everything he loved about the place, until longing turned into a concrete memory of him and Cash in bed.

With a bang, the brothers landed on the floor in Will's bedroom.

"What the hell was that?" Gil disengaged himself from Will and looked around with wide eyes.

"About time you showed up." Harriett materialized in front of them.

"Holy shit." Gil stumbled back against the wall, staring at the spirit.

Harriett narrowed her eyes. "You're lucky I don't banish you into the otherworld. The only reason I don't is because killing you would upset William."

"Who are you?"

"She's my house and probably the reason I'm here."

"Your house is a woman."

"Um, yeah." There really wasn't any other explanation. Some houses had an essence; Will's just took corporeal form.

Will shook his head as a soft buzzing sounded in his mind. His vision dimmed.

"Oh no you don't."

Harriett gripped his arms, snapping him back into awareness.

"What was that?"

"We're re-bonding. You have two links. One between you and me, for the magical source surrounding us, and one between you and your mate."

"I don't have a mate. I won't be with a man who lies and wants to kill my brother."

Harriett glared at him. "He had the right idea, just the wrong brother." Her head snapped to the side to glare at Gil.

Gil held up his hands defensively. "They weren't supposed to kill him."

"And you weren't supposed to be an idiot either." His father marched into the room, balefully glaring at his eldest son. "I can't believe I spent all this time telling Cash no son of mine could possibly do something like this. Unfortunately, I was wrong."

Will felt the air displace beside him heralding Harriett's departure.

"How did you get here?" Will asked.

"I teleported everyone," Neil said, crossing his arms

as he glared at Gil. "I should teleport you to a volcano and drop you in."

"I can't believe you'd hit your own brother with a car," his mother said.

Gil's mouth gaped open. "I didn't hit Will."

"Because selling me to a zombie master is so much kinder." Will glared at his idiot brother.

Neil marched over to Gil and punched him in the face.

"Ow." Gil leaned against the wall as far from his brother's fist as he could get.

"Do you have something you'd like to explain to us, big brother? Maybe start with how you were going to sell Will to the zombie master."

"I needed the money," Gil admitted. "Even with Will's loan, I didn't have enough. Karen's divorcing me, and she's demanding half of everything. All I have left is debt. When Dr Mathews approached me, I thought the procedure would be safe. He had a theory the blood of voids could be used to create an anti-magic solution. He was going to use your blood to unbind his enemies' zombies. I-I didn't think he would harm Will." He gave his brother an apologetic look. "I thought he'd take a few vials and replicate whatever made Will's blood special. I really thought he'd let you go."

The mental image of zombies falling apart with an

unbinding gave Will the creeps. He didn't know what was worse, zombies walking the streets or zombies breaking into pieces in the streets. Either idea was rather disgusting.

Before he could say anything about his brother's choice of associates, Cash came forward and wrapped him in his arms. For a moment Will absorbed his lover's warmth, soaking in the affection. Memories of Cash's conversation with Guy filtered into his mind. He shoved at the larger man. "Let me go, Cash."

"I can't; I love you," Cash whispered. The larger man's arms wrapped around him like a vise, as if he were afraid Will would make a break for it. Damn, he was smart!

"You love me? You lied to me. You aren't even a handyman."

Cash leaned back so Will could see his face, but still didn't release Will. "It's true. I did come here to get close and discover what's going on, but I wouldn't have been in your bed if I weren't attracted to you. I fell for you the first time you smiled at me. You are the first man, the only man, I've ever been attracted to."

Will tried not to let the man's words persuade him. He wanted to hold onto his anger. The thought of being the love of someone's life scared the spit out of him. He couldn't handle that kind of pressure. He liked things easy and light, and as much as he wanted to spend the rest of his

life with one special person, finding the person terrified him. He could too easily picture a life by Cash's side.

"I don't know if I can be what you need," Will confessed.

"You can," Cash said with complete confidence.

"You already are."

Will closed his eyes and leaned against Cash's muscular chest. For once he didn't want to be the one in charge. He wanted his lover to be right and know they were meant to be together.

"You'll have to face the Council for your crimes," his father told Gil.

Will wiggled around so he could see his parents and brothers. The thought of what kind of punishment the Council would find appropriate for his brother froze the blood in his veins.

"I could come along and put in a good word for you," Will offered.

"No, you can't," Cash countermanded. "He deserves whatever they want to do to him." Will gave Cash a disapproving frown. "What? You could've been killed."

"He saved me."

"He also put you in that position."

Will sighed, soaking in his lover's strength, even as he wasn't quite ready to forgive Cash yet. The entire day

was disheartening.

Neil grabbed his brother by the arm. "Let's go. Will, stay here until you hear from me. I'll let you know if you're needed by the Council."

Will nodded. Silently watching as his family teleported out of the room, he waited until they were gone before he wiggled out of Cash's arms and turned to confront the man.

"Why are you here?"

Cash crossed his arms. "Because I live here, and I'm not about to let you get kidnapped by your lunatic brother."

"He's not a lunatic. He's misguided, and I was already kidnapped. You can't stay here."

"Why not?"

Cash stepped closer. Will took a step back.

"Because I still haven't forgiven you for being a council puppet."

Cash took another step forward.

Will took another one back. His spine hit the wall.

Cash placed one large hand on either side of his head. "We are all council puppets to some degree. Your father is even a board member."

"My father told you to seduce me?" Will's mouth dropped open in shock.

Cash smiled, and leaning down, he kissed him. A

soft brush of lips against his had Will instinctively opening his mouth. Cash's mouth sent sizzling sparkles of electricity down Will's spine. Moaning, he struggled to get closer to the man, but Cash trapped his wrists to the wall.

"Your father just met me. I'm only saying we are all puppets of the Council. They might have sent me, but no one told me to fall in love. Say you forgive me," Cash whispered in his dark-as-midnight voice.

"I forgive you." Will knew he could never deny Cash anything. His heart, his very essence, called out to give himself to this one man.

"Good, because I love you, and I'm never letting you go."

The sound of a gun cocking froze both men.

Will slowly turned his head to see a man standing in the doorway, a pistol in his hand. The person looked like Dr Mathews, except the entire right side of his face was covered in vivid burns and bits of his scorched hair stuck up around his scalp like bamboo shoots.

"Doc, what are you doing?"

"Shooting the man who took you from me. It should be me in your bed, in your life, sharing your breakfast in the morning, talking over books while having afternoon tea, and using your blood to build my empire."

"I'm an idiot. You're the zombie master." Now the

allergies made sense. The doctor's clothing probably had zombie dander from creating the creatures. Little bits of flesh always clung to those who created the beasts.

The doctor gave a hysterical laugh. "Your brother is foolishly sentimental. He worried I would hurt you. He didn't think about how your death would affect me. There is no sense in killing the golden goose, especially when his blood can be used to help me counteract all the other magic." The leer coming from the half-burned man churned Will's stomach.

"He doesn't like tea," Cash said in a steady tone.

"Actually I do like a good oolong," Will argued.

"Now isn't the time, Will." His lover's voice was so deep the sound formed a low growl vibrating between them.

"Cash, I'd appreciate it if you could step away from William so he doesn't get hurt when I shoot you." The doctor's voice was so calm and collected the sound was eerie.

"If you let me go, I'll never forgive you," Will whispered. His heart thumped double speed in his chest as he tried to think of a way out of the situation.

"You were supposed to turn to me," Mathews said. "When I bumped you with the car, you were supposed to come to me for comfort, to heal you, not this idiot."

"Hey, no name calling," Cash said. This close to Will, Cash's magic was nullified.

"Shut up," Will whispered to his lover. He was going to get them both shot. "I'm sorry. I didn't know how you felt," he said to the doctor.

Out of the corner of his eye, Will saw a shadow in the hall, his only warning as a rush of wind slammed the doctor to the ground. Mathews' head cracked against the wooden floor, his body going limp. Cash pressed Will closer to the wall, protecting him from the mini hurricane. The wind stopped as soon as it began. A red-haired woman in a Victorian costume appeared beside the fallen zombie master and winked at Will. Her body was no longer translucent but had the solidity of a real person.

"Evening, Harriett. You're looking well."

"Thank you, Will," the woman responded in a soft voice.

"I thought you said Harriett was the house."

"She is. This is the spirit of my house. The building has lived on the intersection so long it created its own essence."

"Holy crap. I didn't know they could do that."

The spirit gave Will a wide smile. "You need the right combination of magic and non-magic. Without Will, I wouldn't be able to exist. Now that I have a more corporeal

body I can help you with your problems."

"What problems?"

"I heard you say you needed some help." She gave Will a hopeful smile. "I've watched people cook and clean me for years. I'm sure I can help you out. I need to do something now that I'm real."

Will couldn't think of a better solution to his problems. "Welcome to your house, Harriett," he said with a smile.

Harriett gave a little hop, revealing the young woman beneath the strict garb. Will made a mental note to get her some more modern clothing.

The doctor groaned, pulling their attention back to the fact they hadn't done anything to the man. "I'll tie him up and take him to the sheriff. He needs something to do."

Will watched with interest as Cash uttered a spell. Shining gold threads appeared, winding and twining the doctor's wrists together. It occurred to Will this was the first time he'd seen his lover do any magic.

"I'll be right back." Cash pinned him with a look threatening retribution if he dared to move from his spot.

"He's really sexy when he goes all commanding," Harriett said with a smirk.

"Yeah, he is."

"Come downstairs and I'll make you something to

eat."

* * * *

Cash returned to a house filled with laughter. He stood by the doorway for a moment absorbing the sensation of coming home.

Walking around the corner, he smiled at the sight of Will sitting at the counter with a big plate of fried chicken and mashed potatoes.

And were those biscuits?

"That looks good."

Harriett gave him a wide smile. "I saved some for you." She pulled a plate out of the oven and set the dish on the counter beside Will's.

"I thought the stove didn't work?" Cash looked at the food in bewilderment.

Harriet gave him a wicked smile. "I fixed it."

"Huh." Having a self-repairing house was handy.

"Everything go okay?" Will asked between bites.

"Yeah." For the first time, Cash could understand why his lover liked to be waited on. The pampering did make you feel good.

They polished off the food quickly, while listening to Harriett's patter about how the house needed to be

redone. Will nodded and agreed to everything. Cash sighed. He'd have to arrange everything so his lover wasn't taken advantage of. It sounded like she could repair things but not replace them. The redecoration project they were discussing would keep her busy for quite some time.

They could discuss things later. Right now he needed to reconnect with his man.

"Night, Harriett." Before Will could say anything else, Cash lifted the other man over his shoulder in a fireman's carry.

"I'm not sure that's such a good idea after chicken and potatoes," Will said, but there was laughter in his voice.

"If you puke on me, I'm going to paddle your ass."

"Hmm, does that encourage or discourage me?" Will mused.

Cash laughed. He couldn't remember the last time joy was his only emotion. He would do anything, and kill anyone, to keep the sensation alive.

Carrying his lover into their room, he laid him carefully on the bed.

"I love you, William Stamson, despite your spoiled ways and interfering family."

Will gave him a brilliant smile, warming him to his toes. "I love you too, Cash. Even if you're a bisexual

bastard."

Cash laughed. "I appreciate that."

He followed the lean, runner's body onto the bed, pressing his hard cock against the man on the bed. His heart was so full of love for the man beneath him his chest ached with need. Slow, sensual kisses reconnected them as if they'd been separated for an eternity instead of a few hours.

"I want you," he muttered against his lover's lips.

"I'm yours." Will's slender fingers pulled at Cash's shirt, urging him to lift up so he could pull the fabric over his head.

Cash slid off the bed to a soft sound of protest from his lover. "Shhh, I'm taking off our clothes." He made quick work of their clothing and returned to his man. Will wiggled beneath his touch as if impatient to feel more.

Their lovemaking before was about heat and passion. This time it was about reconnecting, establishing a bond, Cash claiming Will as his own.

"You know, I don't care if you raze this house to the ground and rebuild or decide to move back to Seattle. I will follow you anywhere."

Will's smile was brilliant. It ended with a gasp when Cash took Will's cock in his mouth. He'd never held another man in his mouth or enjoyed the power as his lover gasped and wriggled against his tongue. Now he wondered

what he'd missed all this time. He had no urge to experiment past this one man, but he longed to explore all the ways he could get more of those soft broken sounds of need, to get Will addicted to his touch, as Cash was dependent on his presence. How long would it take to get this beautiful man to need him more than air?

As he sucked more flavor out of his lover's cock, Cash's own body grew tighter with need. Letting go of Will with a pop, he slid back up to share the taste with his man.

Will's long elegant fingers slid through his hair. Hell, if he were a cat shifter, he would've purred. Nothing was better than his man's touch.

Cash licked inside Will's mouth and bit his lower lip, wanting to devour the younger man, slide inside his skin, and become one.

The heat between them went from hot to nuclear between one kiss and the next.

Growling, Cash reached into the side drawer and grabbed the lube.

"Condom." Will tried to reach into the drawer, but his range was too short.

"Nothing between us," Cash snarled.

Will shook his head. "I've been with a lot of men. I haven't been tested recently."

Cash doubted his careful lover was infected with

anything, but he knew Will wouldn't relax unless he was certain. "We'll get you tested tomorrow. I'm fine. The Council has us tested regularly. I'll show you my results when you get yours."

Will nodded his agreement. Cash pulled a condom out of the drawer, tore the wrapper open, and slid it on. The entire time he resented the barrier between them, but he didn't want to do anything to make his lover uncomfortable. He wanted only good things between them. They would have enough day-to-day battles without arguing over things when he knew William was right.

Slicking up his fingers, he slid them inside, one by one, until three comfortably fit into his lover's tight hole and Will was squirming on his fingers.

"More. I want you."

Cash smiled. This was what he was waiting for. Making sure there was extra lubrication on the condom, he removed his fingers and slid inside. Once he was fully seated, he froze until the expression on his beautiful man shifted from discomfort to want.

"Fuck me!" Will demanded, his brilliant green eyes sparkling in the light.

"Bossy man." Cash pulled out and slammed back in, pleased with himself when his lover's eyes went wide with lust. Wrapping a hand around Will's cock, he jerked him to

completion while pounding into his sweet ass. The lovemaking ended with them collapsing in a sweaty heap, and Cash pulled off the used condom.

"We are definitely getting you tested," Cash panted, tossing the used rubber into the trashcan by the bed.

"Okay." Will snuggled up to his lover. "Let's take a shower in a bit."

Cash wasn't usually the type to snuggle, but he would never be able to deny this beautiful man anything.

"You know my father hand-picked you," Will mumbled.

"What?"

Will laughed. "Why do you think you were chosen? They could've sent anyone."

"I suspected my boss, but I didn't know your father was involved."

Will shrugged.

"Huh. Does this mean we have to get married?"

"I'd be prepared for the worst," Will cautioned.

Cash rolled the idea around in his mind. Married to this gorgeous man, living in a magical house, and connected to one of the most powerful families in the magical world... Life didn't really get any better.

"I'm not wearing a dress."

"Deal."

Will snuggled closer.

Feeling sticky, Cash waved a hand over them both. Nothing happened.

"You can't perform magic if we're touching," Will said.

"That's not true," Cash said with a smile. "There's always magic when we're touching."

Laughing, Will got out of bed, dragging his lover with him. "Come on, big guy, let's go take our shower then you can help me find real people to repair my house."

"On the plus side, you now have a live-in maid and cook."

Will shoved aside the shower curtain. "True. At least some problems are solved. Now I only have to find a good handyman."

"An ugly handyman who only dates women."

Will smirked. "I'll put the description in my employment ad."

"Good."

Cash scrubbed down his lover. For the first time, he was glad he'd followed the orders of the Council.

He would protect this man with every fiber of his being. His William, his life, his reason for being.

"I love you," he whispered against Will's back.

"I love you too," Will said, handing him the soap.

"Now wash my back."

Cash laughed and went to work.

The End

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Amber Kell is a dreamer who has been writing stories in her head for as long as she could remember.

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REVIEWS:

Literary Nymphs Reviews gives *Jaynell's Wolf 5 Nymphs!*

Jaynell Marley arrives at Mayell Wizard Academy to complete his training. Jay had already had years of advanced private tutoring, therefore his school enrollment is more to honor his father's wishes. Joining his new dorm roommates for pizza, Jay literally bumps into werekin Thomas Sparks. A sniff at Jay's neck has Thomas proclaiming that Jay is his mate.

Jaynell's Wolf is the first book in the *Wizard's Touch* series. The plot is well written plus vastly entertaining. The main characters are impressive, along with amusing secondary characters. Jaynell is a powerful wizard who wonders why his father insisted that Jay attend a school when it is clear Jay surpasses everyone in magical skills. However, Jay has an unpretentious personality. Thomas is a considerate protector, as long as others keep a respectful distance from Jay. The secondary characters include Gnomes, dragons, half elf, wolf pack in addition to a variety of wizards in training. I thoroughly enjoyed *Jaynell's Wolf*. Amber Kell has created a fantastic flight of the imagination that is laugh-out-loud hilarious, interwoven with heartwarming moments as well as rousing scenes of intimate passion. I look forward to the next addition to the *Wizard's Touch* series.

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Lisa at Joyfully Reviewed — "*Blood Signs* is captivating"

"Deliciously dark at times and delightfully wicked as well, *Blood Signs* is pure entertainment... [T]he plot will hold you, the characters are engaging, and *Blood Signs* is hard to put down once you start. *Blood Signs* is captivating.