



SNAPSHOTS  
AND BYLINES

STEPHANI HECHT

Best friends in high school, Marc and Sammy each harbored a secret attraction for the each other, but neither dared act on their feelings for fear of ruining their friendship. Finally one night during the summer after their senior year, they gave into their desires and had a passionate encounter. Well...as passionate as one can get when one of them had a dog bite, the other an allergic reaction to strawberries and both had a bad case of poison ivy. But just as they get together, Marc and Sammy were torn apart when life and family obligations interfere.

It's been ten years and Sammy never got over losing Marc. Even though he has a successful career as a social worker at the local GLBT youth center, Sammy has always felt as if a piece of himself is missing. Then one day when he least expects it, Marc shows up at the center, wanting to film a documentary. Sammy is shocked and hurt that Marc has stayed away so long only to turn up when he needs something.

What Sammy doesn't know is Marc had a good reason for staying away. One that could not only destroy their lives, but the love they once had for each other and any chance of a future together.

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Snapshots and Bylines  
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Snapshots and Bylines  
Friends to Lovers

By

Stephani Hecht

Dedication

*To best friends everywhere.*

## Chapter One

Marc should have known the first time he looked into the dog's bloodthirsty eyes that the bitch had it in for him.

He'd been walking to Sammy's house when the wicked monster darted onto the sidewalk and blocked the path. Marc found himself locked into the mutt's soulless, wickedness infused gaze. After a few minutes of mental *you can do this and don't show any fear*, Marc took a deep breath, then willed himself to take a timid step forward.

The dog let it be known that was a huge mistake on Marc's part. The canine growled and lifted one side of her mouth to reveal wicked, long, sharp, saliva-covered canines. *Great, all the better to eat me with.* Marc let out a yelp and retreated a step back. Damn, if the mutt didn't look smug for winning the first round, too.

"Look, Fido, I know you and all your fellow dogs have never liked me. I don't even know why. Maybe I was an evil dogcatcher in a past life or something. It really doesn't matter because I

couldn't really care less. All I want is for you to let me walk by. Sammy's waiting for me and if you keep up with the whole *Cujo* routine, you're going to make me late."

The dog refused to be reasoned with. Ears lay flat against the mutt's skull as she let out a low rumbling growl. The beast's muscles tensed as if she were just waiting to pounce at any moment. Marc knew that it would only take one more false move on his part and she'd be on him like ink to a newspaper.

Marc found himself locked into another stare down with the dog and he wasn't ashamed to admit he was scared of the damn thing. Who could blame him, especially as he let his gaze sweep over the monster in another assessment. One that left him feeling a bit like Clarice must have felt when Hannibal had spouted his twisted wisdom to her.

He couldn't think of a better comparison either, because like the movie character, the dog was evil, dangerous and more than a little psychotic. The bright red collar looked stark against her long, dark fur—the color seeming to be a conscious choice on the dog's part. After all, what better way to hide blood stains than to wear red? Wouldn't want her owners having to mar the leather up with stain stick or anything.

The worst thing, more so than the growls and

teeth, had to be her name. It sounded so awful that Marc even squinted his eyes to make sure he'd read it correctly. No such luck, even from a distance, he could read the name engraved on the collar in all its horribleness. The owner must be as sick and twisted as his pet. What other reason could there be to name a dog, *Tum-Tum*?

Okay, so perhaps Tum-Tum wasn't the baddest name out there and maybe—just maybe—Tum-Tum was a Pomeranian. But the dog was big for its breed. It had to weigh at least seven pounds, maybe even eight. Add in the teeth and kick-ass attitude and that made one serious dog.

As for Marc, he really wasn't much bigger. Even though he'd just graduated from high school and had a license that marked him as eighteen, he didn't have much bulk. Sure, he stood tall enough at five-nine, but since he weighed a whole whopping one hundred and thirty-five pounds, he wouldn't be winning any muscle men competitions any time soon.

"Hey, doggy. You're a nice puppy, aren't you?" he cooed in those baby-talky, dorky tones everybody seemed to use when they talked to mutts.

Tum-Tum wasn't so easily won over, unfortunately. He...or was it she, growled even louder, this time with a bit more teeth. Not surprising, since as he'd stated already stated, all



dogs hated Marc. Not just a little bit either, but with a deep passion. They had more animosity in them than his older sister after one of her breaking-up-with-boyfriends-is-hard-to-do moods.

Maybe it was all the dark clothing he wore. Since his freshman year, he'd never owned anything that wasn't black or grey. Or perhaps it was the way he kept his dark hair slightly long so it hung over his eyes. Going by what his grandfather said, it made Marc look *shifty*—whatever the hell that meant. Or perhaps it was because of all of the various body piercings Marc wore. Maybe dogs had a thing against nipple and eyebrow rings.

Whatever the reason, pooches hated him and this particular one looked as if it were out for his blood.

"Come on, Tum-Tum. Cut me a break here," Marc cajoled, this time his tone going whiny.

If it had been any other time, Marc would have just given up and left. He couldn't do that this time because on the other side of those eight pounds of fury, lay Sammy's house. With such a great prize in reach, retreat just wasn't an option.

To be more correct, it wasn't the house that was the prize, although the environment there was a whole hell of a lot better than Marc's place. No, it was Sammy that Marc desired. Best friends for

nearly a year, Marc had been harboring a secret crush on the other guy the entire time.

Too bad Sammy was way out of Marc's league.

All thoughts of Sammy fled from Marc's mind when Tum-Tum finally decided the time was right to attack. With a high-pitched bark, the dog launched itself forward. Marc zigged, only to realize too late, that he should have zagged.

As if that weren't the story of his fucking life.

Tum-Tum's teeth sank into Marc's ankle. Sharp waves of pain shot up Marc's leg as he let out a yelp that sounded embarrassingly similar to Tum-Tum's bark. Desperate to get away from the hurt, Marc shook his leg only to find that the dog's canines were firmly in place.

"Not cool, Tum-Tum," Marc said as he continued to do his one-footed hopping, shake dance.

Although he'd heard that dogs were incapable of conveying emotions through facial expressions, he could have sworn Tum-Tum shot him a fuck-off glare. How the dog managed to do that while still biting the snot out of Marc was such a mystery that it belonged in the *Ripley's Believe It Or Not* museum.

Sammy burst through the front door of his house and quickly trotted down the steps. "Tum-Tum, what in the hell are you doing?"

Under any other circumstance, Marc would

have laughed. Only Sammy would ask a dog an open-ended question. At the same time, that familiar tingle came to Marc's stomach, the one he always got when he saw Sammy. Which showed how bad Marc had it for his friend. With the amount of pain Marc was in, it should have been impossible to think of anything other than *Ouch!*

Yet, there Marc was thinking about how good Sammy looked in his baggy jeans and oversized Detroit Lions sweatshirt. He even noticed that Sammy had just taken a shower because his normally blond, slightly curly hair was slicked back. Heck, sap that Marc was, he even took the time to admire how sexy Sammy's blue eyes were when they grew dark with anger.

Sammy came up and reached down. With the upmost care, he pulled Tum-Tum away and tucked the would-be killer to his chest. The dog let out one last snarl before snuggling into Sammy. Marc couldn't blame the dog. There were many times that he'd been highly tempted to do the same thing.

If only Marc weren't such a chicken.

"Are you okay?" Sammy asked, his gaze dropping to Marc's ankle.

"Sure," Marc lied, even as fresh waves of pain spiraled up his leg.

His sock felt suspiciously wet and sticky, leading him to wonder if he was bleeding. He

gingerly set his foot all the way back on the ground and put his weight on it, barely holding in the hiss of pain.

As soon as Sammy's eyes narrowed in that knowing way of his, Marc realized he was busted. He should have known better. Even though he and Sammy had only been friends for a year, Sammy could read him like no one else ever could. Which was kind of funny, considering how different they were.

Where Marc had the dark-clothed-punk part down to perfection, Sammy was more the preppy-awe-shucks kind of guy. Or maybe a better way to put it would be where Sammy helped granny cross the street, the old gal ran in other direction when she spotted Marc coming her way.

They did have one thing in common. It happened to be a biggie, too. They were both gay. In fact, all of the guys in their small clique of friends were. It was the only reason why someone like Sammy would even talk to Marc. Otherwise, they would have probably gone all through high school without ever speaking to each other one time.

"Come inside and let me check it. My mom isn't home, but I think I can navigate the first aid kit without her," Sammy said.

When Marc hesitated, Sammy sighed and jerked his head in the direction of the house. Marc

realized he had no choice. When Sammy got something in his head, he could be damn stubborn about it.

"We're going to be late and I don't want to set up camp in the dark," Marc protested even as his sock grew wetter by the second.

Crap, how much blood could four tiny teeth draw?

"The campground is only a five minute drive from here and we're only putting up a tent, so we have plenty of time," Sammy reasoned.

Marc wanted to curse in frustration. After weeks of trying, he'd finally got Sammy to agree on a camping trip. One that, due to Marc's careful planning, would just be the two of them instead of their usual clique of buddies. To have some actual one-on-one time with Sammy without having to worry about parents interrupting or anything had been a dream come true to Marc. Now thanks to Tum-Tum, the chance could be lost.

"Okay, but just so you can slap a bandage on it. Only because I know you'll never let up until I do," Marc reluctantly conceded.

Sammy carefully deposited the killer dog inside the fenced yard of his neighbor. Tum-Tum gave Marc one last snarl before she trotted away, her tag jingling with each step. Marc flashed the dog the finger only to blush when Sammy gave him a crooked grin.

"Come on. Let's get you cleaned up," Sammy said with a slight shake of his head.

They walked inside the old-style farmhouse. As Marc entered the warm, homey kitchen, he couldn't help but compare it to his own family home. While Sammy's family wasn't rich by any stretch, his house still seemed almost like a mansion to Marc.

Marc's house was actually a tiny one-bedroom dwelling that was probably all together as big as Sammy's kitchen. Plus, Marc would be willing to bet his one remaining blood free shoe that Sammy's toilet never backed up. Just like his heat and water probably worked, too. Although to be fair, the latter often had to do with the fact that Marc's mother hadn't bothered to pay the bills. It'd got to the point where Marc was on a first name basis with the guy in charge of turning off deadbeats' gas and electric.

It wasn't just the space and setup that made Sammy's home so much better, it was the vibe of the place. Sammy's parents were always so nice. At Marc's, he constantly lived in fear, never knowing when the next cruel word or slap would be coming. Whereas at Sammy's, everyone seemed to like each other. Hell, Sammy's parents actually said, "I love you." Something that never happened in Marc's home.

"Come on over to the sink," Sammy ordered.

Marc obeyed, limping slightly. The sharp pain had switched to a burning sensation and his sock had gone from being damp to soggy. Sammy patted the countertop next to the sink and Marc complied with the silent command, sitting on the ledge. He scooted his butt back until his legs dangled.

Sammy bent over and began to examine the injury.

Marc took that time to study his friend. He swallowed hard as his gaze traveled a familiar path, taking in Sammy's thin frame and cute features. There was no other way to put it either, Sammy was cute. A fact that pissed Sammy off whenever somebody pointed it out to him. Marc wondered what Sammy would think if he knew that it was that feature that first drew Marc to him.

"I don't think you need stitches or anything," Sammy said after he'd carefully pulled off Marc's shoe and sock.

"Since when are you a doctor?" Marc grumbled.

As always, Marc's foul moods didn't upset Sammy, he just looked up with a grin. Damn if it didn't give Marc butterflies in the stomach, too. Not that it was an unusual experience. Sammy had always had the ability to reduce Marc to a mess of tingles and good feelings.

"Hey, my mom is a nurse, so I do know some

things.”

“So, you think it just works that way? That, since your mom went through nursing school, some of that knowledge magically passed down to you?”

Sammy turned slightly to wash his hands.

“Sure, isn’t that the way it always works?” Sammy quipped as he dried his hands.

“If that’s the case, then I should be ready to rob the corner gas station.”

Marc meant the comment to be a joke, but it fell flat. Sammy blinked up at him for a few moments. It finally became too much and Marc shifted his eyes to the side, not wanting to see the pity in his friend’s gaze.

“You’re nothing like your father,” Sammy finally said in a near whisper.

“How can you be so sure?”

“Well, for one thing, you’re the smartest person I know.”

Yeah, and a shit load of good it was going to do Marc since his parents couldn’t pay for college. Hell, even if they had the cash, there would be no way they’d waste it on their *fag son*.

“I’m just good at memorizing things,” Marc scoffed.

“Don’t underestimate yourself. If it hadn’t been for you, Drake would have never passed math class. He would have been kicked off the track



team and you know how much he loves doing that. What's more, you helped all of us in our classes at one time or another. If it hadn't been for you, half of the members of our clique would have never graduated."

"You guys would have been fine without me."

Sammy straightened, then reached out and wrapped one hand around the back of Marc's neck. "No, we wouldn't have. I know I, for one, would have been lost without you. When I first moved here last year, I was so scared. It's not easy being the new guy in a school, but when you add the whole being gay thing on top, it's even worse. Plus, I was still recovering from the murder of my grandfather, so that made me even moodier. But you became my friend and introduced me to others. For the first time in what seemed liked forever, I wasn't alone."

Marc became vividly aware of Sammy's touch. His thumb brushed slightly against the nape of Marc's neck. Marc shivered, the caress going straight to his cock. He sucked in a breath as he found himself locked in the smaller man's gaze.

"I have a confession to make," Sammy said, his thumb continuing to make lazy circles.

"What's that?"

Marc's heart pounded in his chest. He had a feeling something big was about to go down, something that would change them and their

friendship forever. While part of him feared it messing up their current relationship, a bigger part of himself was powerless to stop it.

"I lied when I said that Drake couldn't come camping with us today. I never even asked him."

"Really?" Marc asked, his breath hitching.

There'd always been an underlying attraction between Marc and Sammy, but before this moment, they'd never acknowledged it. Fear, with a heavy dose of excitement soared through Marc as he realized the moment had finally arrived. Now he'd know for sure what Sammy thought of him.

"Yeah, I wanted to have you all to myself."

Sammy stepped in tighter, his body sliding in between Marc's legs. They stood just inches apart. Their faces so close together that Marc could feel the fluttering of Sammy's exhalations brushing against his cheek.

"I have a confession to make, too," Marc said, his stomach balling up in anticipation.

"You do?" Sammy asked with a crooked grin.

"Yeah, I did the same thing with David. I never asked him either."

"Was it for the same reason as me?"

They each began to inch forward just a bit, but it was almost as if they were both afraid to make that final move, the one that would lead to them kissing. Marc did reach out and wrap his arms

around Sammy's neck. He even allowed one hand to drift up a bit so he could finger Sammy's hair. A jolt went through Marc when he found it to be as soft as he always imagined it would be.

"Yes, I've wanted to have you to myself for a while. I was just waiting until I turned eighteen," Marc said, talking so fast that some of the words jumbled together.

"Why would you think that would matter?"

Marc shrugged as much as their current body position would allow. "I didn't know for sure if you would want me until I was technically an adult like you."

"Sometimes you worry about the funniest things."

Sammy softened his comment by running the thumb of his free hand over Marc's bottom lip. The move came off as both sexy and exploratory at the same time. Almost as if Sammy had just been waiting for the chance to touch Marc.

"I have one last confession to make," Sammy said, his voice trembling a bit.

"What?"

Sammy leaned in so his lips were only inches from Marc's ear. "I want you to fuck me tonight."

## Chapter Two

Sammy tensed, his pulse racing as he waited for Marc's reply. He knew he'd taken a huge risk in voicing his request, but he didn't want to take the words back. Not when he'd finally gathered the courage to speak them.

From the moment his family moved to Michigan and he first met Marc, Sammy became hooked. His new addiction wasn't booze. It wasn't drugs or gambling either. It was one-hundred percent focused on Marc.

There wasn't anything that Sammy didn't like about Marc. He loved the way Marc styled his dark hair longer in the front so it hung over his chocolate brown eyes. He liked how Marc only wore black clothes, most of the time even painting his fingernails to match. What attracted him most about the other guy, had to be Marc's heart.

Even though Marc had a crappy home life, he never took it out on others. If one of them needed help with homework or a class, Marc would

always volunteer to help. He never took anything in return, ever, he just did it because he wanted to have his friends' backs.

As the silence stretched to the point of becoming awkward, Sammy felt his gut curdle in dread. He'd felt pretty certain that Marc returned the feelings of attraction. All the signs were there. So many times in the past, Sammy would dart covert glances in Marc's direction only to find his friend staring back in his direction. Plus, Marc always seemed to be going out of his way to make sure that they sat right next to each other in class, lunch or on car rides. Of course, that could simply mean that Marc just considered them best friends. If that were true, Sammy probably just blew that down in flames. A heat came over Sammy's face as he found himself desperately wanting to take back the last five minutes.

"I'm sorry...I just thought....shit," Sammy stammered, his voice warbling a bit.

Moving quick, Marc leaned forward and pressed their lips together. Now it was Sammy's turn to suffer from a moment of stunned shock as that hadn't been the reaction he'd expected, even in his wildest dreams. The surprise quickly gave way as a heady thrill came over him.

Marc Averson was actually kissing dorky him. It felt damn good, too. While Marc's lips were soft and warm, there lingered an underlining hardness

that Sammy had come to associate with his friend. As if Marc could take on anything that came his way and come out on top. While it shouldn't have, that strength turned Sammy on like nothing ever had before.

Then Sammy felt the sensual glide of Marc's tongue against the seam of his lips and Sammy forgot about everything else other than returning some of the same. Letting out a whimper that normally would have embarrassed him, Sammy moved in closer so their chests were flush together. When his cock brushed against Marc's erection, Sammy groaned.

Oh yeah, Marc wanted this just as badly.

Marc wrapped his legs around Sammy's waist, bringing their bodies in even tighter. Sammy responded by parting his mouth so Marc's tongue could slide inside. It still wasn't enough. Sammy wanted more—so much more that he felt a surge of panic as he found himself desperate to fulfill all of his daydreams at once.

"Please. Need. You. To," Sammy said between kisses.

"You need me to do what?" Marc asked as he thrust his hips up just a bit so they ground against each other again.

Sammy let out a long groan as pleasure coiled up his body. "God, this feels so much better when it's someone besides myself rubbing me off,"

Sammy blurted.

As soon as he realized what he'd just confessed, he grew cold as horror filled him. Shit, that hadn't exactly been the slickest move he'd ever made. He started to pull back.

Marc tightened his grip. "Don't be embarrassed. I was just thinking the same thing."

A small bit of the humiliation passed to be replaced by a heady thrill. Wow, Marc actually wanted to be with the school loser? Who would have *thunk* it? Especially since Marc probably had a ton of guys and girls fighting for his attention.

"Have you ever been with anyone?" Sammy asked, a spike of jealousy hitting him as he thought about somebody else touching Marc.

"No, you're going to be my first."

Sammy gave what he was sure looked like a dorky, timid smile. "Really? I would have thought someone as cute as you would have already had a boyfriend. Maybe one from before we knew each other."

"I wasn't out until I started to hang out with you guys and after that, I didn't want anyone but you."

Now Sammy was certain he had a dopey grin on his face, but he was too happy to care. "I feel the same way about you."

"I should hope so, considering what you asked me to do to you," Marc replied with a tender smile

of his own.

"So does that mean you'll do it?"

Marc gave him another long, heated heart-pounding kiss. "Of course I will. I'd have to be an idiot to turn down an offer as hot as you."

"You don't have to say that to make me feel better." Sammy nibbled his bottom lip as that stupid, childish flush came over his face again. God, he'd be lucky if Marc didn't change his mind before things went down. With as smooth and good looking as Marc was, Sammy knew the guy was way out of his league.

"Say what? That I'll fuck you?" Marc cocked his head to the side, the move causing a lock of dark hair to fall into his eyes.

"No, that I'm hot. I know I'm really just some dork."

"Don't talk about yourself that way," Marc replied with surprising force.

"Why not?"

"Because I don't know of anyone who is more giving, good looking or sweet. Not only that, but you have this innocence about you. Like the world can't touch you and ruin you in the same way it does everyone else."

"Wow, with the way you put it, I almost sound halfway decent."

"You're more than halfway there. If anything, I'd say you're perfect."



They kissed again before another moment of shyness hit Sammy.

"So, I got stuff for tonight if you really want to take me up on my offer."

"What kind of stuff?" Marc asked, a teasing glint coming over his usually somber eyes.

"You know, condoms and lube."

"If you're so innocent, how did you know what to get?"

"I asked Drake's older cousin."

Their mutual friend, Drake, had a cousin who was gay.

Marc laughed. "You actually quizzed him about what is needed for gay sex?"

Sammy shrugged. Since Marc's arms were still around him and his lips still tingling from their kisses, it was hard to feel upset by Marc's gentle teasing. "It's not like they taught the subject in our high school sex ed class. The only time my teacher even mentioned homosexuality was when she announced that she wasn't allowed to talk about it. But at least the condom-on-the-banana demonstration was strangely interesting."

That made Marc laugh harder. "God, that's what I love about you. No matter what, you always seem to find something good in every situation."

"Well, it's not every day that you see a sixty-year old lady go all phallic on a piece of fruit,"

Sammy shot back.

"That's another thing I love about you, the way you use big words for sexual references."

"You were the one who taught me most of the fifty-cent words in the first place." Sammy laid his head on Marc's shoulder. He hoped the other guy didn't mind cuddling because Sammy could have stayed that way forever. Having the freedom to touch Marc all he wanted, Sammy found he couldn't get enough.

Marc didn't seem to mind, he just threaded his fingers into Sammy's hair and began to idly play with the strands. They stayed that way for a few moments before Marc gave a sigh. "We should probably get going so we have time to set up camp."

If it hadn't been for the fact that he now knew what they'd be doing inside the tent they'd be setting up, Sammy would've been reluctant to move. But since he realized that all kinds of fun waited for them at the campgrounds, he agreed with Marc's suggestion.

"Okay, just let me run upstairs and grab my stuff."

He reluctantly pulled away from the embrace, then ran up the stairs to his room. As he reached the top of the steps, he couldn't resist darting one last glance back. Marc gave him a small wave that was so uncharacteristic of him, it made Sammy

chuckle a bit.

He rushed into his room and grabbed his backpack. He'd already loaded the tent and other supplies in the car earlier, so he didn't have much to carry. He went back down to Marc, who already had his shoe back on, and they went outside.

They'd just reached the car when Sammy's next-door neighbor called out his name. He let out a sigh, miffed that they'd be delayed, but he knew he couldn't brush off the hailing since she was an elderly lady who doted on him.

"Hey, Mrs. Siltwell," he said with a forced smile.

She shuffled over as fast as her dusty blue slippers would allow. They matched her faded robe and her hair. She currently reached Sammy's shoulder, but he was pretty sure she'd been a little taller before the osteoporosis had kicked. She clutched a shoebox in her liver-spotted hands.

"Your mother said you were going camping, so I made you some cookies for the trip," she said, offering the box up like it was a great prize.

Sammy shifted his backpack up higher on his shoulder before he reached out and took the treats. "Thanks, I'm sure I'll love them."

"Hello, Marc," she said before giving Sammy a painfully obvious conspiratorial wink.

Subtle and Mrs. Siltwell usually didn't exactly

go in the same sentence.

"So what campgrounds are you two going off to tonight?" she cooed, still doing the over exaggerated winking. If she kept it up, she was going to lose an eyelash or something.

"We're going to the private land Sammy's dad owns," Marc replied, the corners of his lips twitching.

"All by yourselves?" she asked, drawling the words out for emphasis.

Sammy wanted to crawl into a hole of something. Leave it to him to attract the oldest hag in gay history. He shared a look of amusement with Mark.

"Yes, our other friends couldn't make it," Sammy replied. He bit the inside of his cheek to hold in the laughter. That amusement turned to oh-no-she-didn't horror when she reached into the pocket of her robe and pressed something into the palm of his hand. Like an idiot, Sammy glanced down to see what it was only to gasp when he found himself looking at a condom.

She blinked at him, her face way too innocent for what she'd just done. "Do you need more? I have a whole box in the house?"

Marc choked with laughter while Sammy sputtered a few times. "No, one will be enough."

"Are you sure? I know how often you young bucks can go at it. When I first married my Earl,

may God rest his soul, he could go all night." She placed a hand on her chest before raising it to the sky.

Marc actually looked up as if wanting to see what she was waving at.

Sammy brought a hand to his mouth to hide his smile, only to realize he still held the condom. That set off his amusement more, so before he knew it, he was choking in an effort to hold in the laughter. He darted his gaze to the sidewalk because he knew that if he made eye contact with Marc, it would all be over.

"One will do us just fine, thanks," Marc said.

She stared at them both for a moment before sadly shaking her head, like she'd assessed them and found them lacking because of their single-condom need. Sammy decided he needed to change the subject fast.

"So what kind of cookies did you bake this time?" he asked, using his other hand to hold up the box questioningly.

Mrs. Siltwell blinked a few times before she caught up. "They're chocolate chip, your favorite."

Last time Sammy checked, his favorite cookie had been peanut butter, but who was he to judge? Not when she went to all the trouble to bake and safe-sex it up for them. Besides, she'd been getting more scattered minded lately.

"I can't wait to eat them," Marc said.

She smiled, then waved. "You boys better get going."

They waved back and she slowly shuffled away. They watched in silence until she'd gone inside her home and shut the door behind her. As soon as Sammy knew she was out of earshot, he gave up the fight and burst out laughing. Marc joined him and they were soon cracking up so hard they had tears in their eyes.

"Can you believe she used to be the town librarian?" Marc asked.

Sammy made a half-hysterical sputtering sound. "No way! You're kidding me?"

Marc held up a hand. "Honest to God's truth. She was the one who led the story hour when I was in elementary school."

The thought of the condom-wielding lady reading *Goodnight Moon* to a group of kids had Sammy laughing harder. It got so bad that it took several minutes for him to calm down and even then, he was still a bit out of breath.

"We better get out of here before she comes running out with an instructional book or video," Marc said.

The horror of that possibility made Sammy shudder because he wouldn't put it past his well-meaning neighbor to do just that. He pulled the car keys out of the front pocket of his jeans and climbed in behind the wheel of his red Jeep.

After Marc got in on the passenger side, he leaned over and cupped the back of Sammy's head, bringing him in for a hot, open-mouthed kiss. As he pulled back, Sammy found himself breathless for a second time.

"What was that for?" he asked, bringing a hand up to touch his tingling lips.

"For one, I just can't seem to keep from touching you."

"Okay, I understand that since I feel the same way about you, but what's the second reason?"

"I wanted to make sure that we gave Mrs. Siltwell the show she'd been hoping for." Marc nodded toward her house.

Sammy gasped when he saw her peeking out from between a crack in her front room curtains. "I guess her mother never taught her it wasn't nice to snoop."

"Cut her some slack. We're probably way more interesting than her soap operas."

"You may have a point there. Last time I checked, she was addicted to those and court shows."

"*Judge Judy* is pretty addicting," Marc said, before leaning in for another kiss.

This time Sammy met him halfway, his hands going to Marc's shoulders. One kiss led to another and pretty soon they were making out. Sammy knew he should pull back. They were sitting in his

driveway where anyone could see them, not just a certain nosey neighbor. But as he lost himself in the sweet taste of Marc, Sammy found himself unable to end things.

He let out a needy sound as he twisted his body to the side as much as the steering wheel would allow. While awkward, it still seemed to please Marc because he growled low as he fisted one hand in the back of Sammy's hair. He tugged slightly, the pain adding a surprising edge to the arousal already humming through Sammy.

Marc's free hand somehow ended up on Sammy's thigh. His cock jerked in response as hope bloomed through him. All Marc had to do was move his hand up a few inches and then he'd be touching Sammy's erection.

Almost of their own accord, Sammy's hips thrust forward up in a silent plea. Marc answered it, his hand drifting up to find Sammy's erection. At first, Marc's touch was so light that Sammy barely felt it. He let out an impatient whimper that sounded slightly muffled against Marc's lips.

Marc chuckled before his caresses became harder and more demanding. A low groan ripped from Sammy's throat as pleasure shot up his spine. Damn, this was way better than he'd ever dreamed it would be. Not just the handjob, but the kisses, too. Marc proved to be pretty talented with his lips and tongue. Not that Sammy had anyone



to compare him with or anything. He still felt pretty sure that even if he kissed a hundred guys, Marc would still come out on top.

The kisses became more intense, Marc adding in some love bites between the swipes of his tongue. At the same time, he continued to rub Sammy's cock. Even with the layers of clothing, it soon brought Sammy to the edge. Even though he tried to fight it, an orgasm slammed into him.

He tore his lips away, a loud cry filling the car as he creamed his jeans and underwear. All the while, Marc continued to caress him, as if he wanted to get every last drop from Sammy.

"Oh, shit. Oh, shit," Sammy stammered as his body trembled with aftershocks.

Then he became painfully aware of the uncomfortable mess in his pants. Had he really just come that quickly? It must have taken all of three minutes. Not exactly the way he wanted to show off his lack of experience.

Marc must have noticed his embarrassment. He gave Sammy a soft kiss before saying, "Don't feel so bad. I almost did the same thing and you weren't even touching me."

Sammy looked up from under his lashes. "I could if you want me to. You know, touch you back."

"I can wait until we get to the campground."

"Are you sure? It doesn't seem too fair to you."

"I'm in no rush. We have all night."

This time, Sammy initiated the kiss, although he made it a brief one. "Just give me a second to run inside and change real quick."

"I'll be waiting for you," Marc replied.

Sammy had never heard sweeter words.

## Chapter Three

Once they reached the campground, they unloaded the car, then began setting up. Things moved a bit slower than normal because Marc found it hard to concentrate as his gaze kept drifting to Sammy. Since that first kiss, he'd been vividly aware of every movement Sammy made. Hell, Marc even found himself tracking the guy's breaths, desire shooting through him as he remembered how Sammy panted during their little encounter in the car.

"You keep looking at me like this and we're never going to get done," Sammy chastised with a smile.

"Then you need to stop bending over so much. Your ass is so hot that it renders me stupid."

Sammy blinked a few times before he laughed.

Marc's cheeks flamed until he realized that Sammy wasn't laughing at him but what he'd said. Sammy cocked his head to the side, an impish grin coming over his face. "You're the

farthest thing from stupid. Even on your worst day, you're smarter than the rest of us put together. I only wish you could go away to college, too."

A brief flicker of longing filled Marc. He wished he could go away, too, but that would mean he'd be leaving his younger sister, Kelly, behind. Since she was only eight, that just wasn't an option. Without Marc there to shield her from their mother, Kelly wouldn't last a week before the beatings began.

Marc glanced up, his heart shattering at the thought of being apart from Sammy. The thought of not seeing Sammy every day made Marc want to kick something in anger. Damn it, why couldn't he have a normal family? One where the mother wasn't a mean drunk and the father wasn't a prison inmate.

"I'm going to miss you so much," Marc rasped, his throat tight from the influx of emotions.

Sammy crossed the campground and reached up to cup Marc's face. "Hey, it won't be so bad. We can write each other and I promise to call every day."

How Marc wanted to believe that, but the reasonable side of himself just knew it wasn't true. Sure, Sammy would be diligent at first, but it would be only a matter of time before he met somebody else. Someone who could live a normal

life and not drag him down, someone who wasn't a loser like Marc. So Marc vowed that he'd make the most of the campout because deep down he knew his time with Sammy would be very limited.

"Why don't we get some food? I'm starved," Marc said in an attempt to change the subject.

Sammy opened his mouth as if to argue, but in the end, he closed it with a tight nod. "Okay, but I think we should start with the cookies first."

Marc cocked a brow. "Dessert before dinner? You rebel."

"What can I say? I feel like living dangerously."

"Whatever, we can just blame Mrs. Siltwell for our descent into the dark side." Sammy opened the shoebox, grabbed a cookie, then took a bite.

Marc followed suit. His first thought as the sweet flavor exploded in his mouth was that it didn't taste anything like peanut butter or chocolate. His second was the slow realization that the foreign flavor tasted an awful lot like strawberries.

*Strawberries! Oh shit!*

"Don't eat that," Marc shouted as he reached over and batted the cookie from Sammy's hand.

Sammy let out a yelp of surprise, giving a forlorn gaze to the broken and now dirty treat. "Why not?"

"It has strawberries in it."

"Oh, crap! I'm allergic to strawberries," Sammy

exclaimed, his eyes growing so large they nearly took up his face.

"I know, which is why I stopped you before you ate too much. Didn't you taste it when you took that bite?"

"I thought something was up, but I couldn't figure out what it was. I've been allergic to them since I was a baby, so it's not like I eat enough of it to be able to recognize the taste from one bite."

"Did you swallow?"

All the horror left Sammy's face as he flashed a wicked grin. "I don't know, but if you're lucky, we may just find out in a little bit here."

Marc paused to gawk at him. Seriously, who makes jokes during a medical emergency? "I don't think now is the time to be making *Penthouse Forum* worthy statements."

"How would you know? Do you read that magazine or something?"

"Yeah, because naked women are my thing," Marc snapped. "You need to take this seriously. Should I drive you to the hospital or something?"

"No, at the worst I'll get a rash. At least that's what my mom told me." Sammy waved a dismissive hand before giving his broken cookie another sad glance. "Damn, they were good, too."

Marc rubbed his palms over Sammy's upper arms. "Are you sure? I would hate it if anything happened to you."

"I'm positive. I may get a little itchy, but that's it."

That wicked grin came over Sammy's face as he darted a glance to the side. "You know what I love most about this site?"

"No, but I have a sneaky suspicion you're about to tell me."

Marc looked around, noting there was a lot to love. Tall trees surrounded them on three sides, providing a perfect canopy of cover so no matter how hot it got, they would always have shade for protection. A lake took up the fourth side, the water so pure it almost looked like blue glass. The best part had to be the absence of human-made noise. The only sounds were that of nature, from the soft shifting of branches swaying in the wind to the chirping of birds and the lapping of water against the dock connected to the campground.

"Since this is private land my dad owns, there isn't anyone around for miles," Sammy said before he stretched up to press a soft kiss to Marc's lips.

"You don't say? So there isn't any chance of a voyeur stumbling over us?"

"I love it when you use big words like that." Sammy dropped to his knees and looked up from under his lashes. "Maybe I should give you an award for being so smart."

Marc almost cringed at their cheesy dialog, but got sidetracked when he felt his zipper being

undone. "What are you doing?"

Sammy paused to give him a *really?* stare. "If you're asking that, then I know for a fact that you've never read *Penthouse Forum*."

"I know what you're doing. I'm just shocked you're actually going to do it."

"Are you kidding? I've wanted to suck you off from the first day I met you."

Marc remembered that day so well. How Sammy had looked so scared and vulnerable as he all but huddled against his locker. There was something else Marc saw in Sammy. Something Marc saw in himself every morning when he looked in the mirror. A vibe that said, *Please, don't let them hate me for who I am. I can't help it, it's just the way I was made.*

He'd gone up to Sammy, introduced himself. Then he'd brought Sammy into the protective circle of his small group of friends. Since they were all gay, they also understood what Sammy was going through. Ever since then, Sammy and Marc had become nearly inseparable.

Despite that, Marc never imagined that Sammy would someday be on knees wanting to service him. Sure, Marc may have had a few dreams, both the day and night variety, but he never really believed they'd come true.

"You sure you don't want me to do you first?" Marc offered, his mouth watering at the prospect



of tasting Sammy's cock.

Sammy shook his head as he finished undoing Marc's jeans. "No, I want you to stay exactly like you are."

Spreading the fly apart, Sammy pulled Marc's pants down far enough for his cock to spring free. Sammy jumped in shock, a soft laugh bubbling past his lips. "Wow, so you don't wear underwear. Didn't see that coming. I just assumed you had dozens of black pairs."

Marc started to laugh in response, only to let out a long groan instead as Sammy gave his cock a tentative stroke. Even that small touch sent jolts of pleasure up Marc's spine. He tilted his head back with a hiss, one hand going out to thread through Sammy's hair.

"You like that?" Sammy asked, his voice laced with wonder.

Since he didn't think he'd be able to speak, Marc just gave a vigorous nod. Sammy's eyes sparkled like he'd been a good boy all year and Santa had just given him the best Christmas gift ever. Still keeping a soft grip on Marc's dick, Sammy leaned forward and ran a hesitant tongue over the tip, making Marc jerk in response.

"You taste so good," Sammy said before he ran his tongue over Marc again.

"Damn, this feels hot," Marc blurted.

He clenched his teeth together in an attempt to

hold back his orgasm. Now that one of his fantasies had come to life, the last thing he wanted was to blow it just as things were starting to get hot.

Sammy parted his mouth and sucked Marc in. At first, Sammy only took an inch or so, his brows furrowing with concentration. Much like he looked when a particularly hard math question confused him. Then he took in a breath and sucked Marc in a little deeper. After a few seconds, Sammy did it again, this time gagging a bit. A flush came over his face as he darted a shy glance up at Marc.

"That's okay, take your time. We're both on a learning curve here," Marc soothed as he ran his fingers through Sammy's hair.

The relief in Sammy's eyes let Marc know he'd said the right thing. Sammy paused a bit to scratch his own arm, before he leaned forward and took Marc back in. This time, Marc worked through the haze of bliss flowing through him and reached down to wrap his hand around the base of his cock. Making sure that Sammy didn't take in too much again. Sammy hummed his appreciation before he splayed his fingers over Marc's hips and began sucking harder.

"Shit, for your first time you're doing a great job," Marc praised.

Not that he had anything to compare Sammy

with. Marc hadn't been lying when he said he'd never been with anyone else. Until Sammy, Marc hadn't so much as kissed another person. To say they were going from zero to one-twenty would have been an understatement.

Sammy paused again to scratch his arm before he took Marc in again, this time using one hand to cup Marc's balls. Marc yelped as the pleasure went up a notch. Marc started to move forward in shallow thrusts, still taking care not to go too deep. Sammy looked up once more, his eyes dark with passion, and that shattered the bit of control Marc held.

"I'm going to come," he warned, giving Sammy time to pull back.

When Sammy continued to suck, Marc added, "Sam, if you don't let up, I'm going to shoot off in your mouth."

That wicked glint came back into Sammy's gaze as he sucked in so hard his cheeks hallowed out. Marc let out a whimper as he gave one last thrust, his dick jerking as it filled Sammy's mouth.

Sammy gagged again, but recovered quickly, his throat working as he swallowed. The only time he showed any more discomfort was when he reached up to scratch his cheek. Sammy even went so far as to lick Marc clean, his perfect pink tongue lapping at the overly sensitive tip.

"Now it's my turn," Marc growled.

He grabbed Sammy from under the arms and hauled the smaller man to his feet. Sammy swayed a bit before he gave a shy smile. A bit of spunk clung to the corner of his mouth and Marc leaned in to slowly lick it clean before plunging his tongue inside Sammy's mouth.

The salty taste of cum mixed with the warm, sensual flavor of Sammy had Marc's cock making an attempt to stir again. Maybe Mrs. Siltwell had a point about younger guys being able to go all night long because despite having come, Marc knew he'd be ready, willing and able for more action before long.

He pulled back long enough to strip off first his own shirt, then Sammy's. Tossing the garments to the side, Marc gently nudged Sammy until he got the hint and lay down on an overgrown patch of grass. Marc stretched out over Sammy and peered down at him.

Damn, if Sammy wasn't the most beautiful thing Marc had ever seen. Sammy's lips were swollen and glistening from all the kissing and his cheeks were flush. This time, the rose color came from passion rather than embarrassment. Marc felt his breath catch as he realized, not for the first time, just how much Sammy meant to him.

Sammy was so sweet, so good, so special. In other words, he was everything that Marc wasn't. Despite his high grades and even higher IQ, Marc

knew he'd never amount to anything. If he was lucky, he'd find a decent paying job in a factory. He'd work there for thirty years. Most of all, he'd be alone. In the end, Marc would still be grateful because he wouldn't be as much of a loser as his father.

All that wasn't true for Sammy. No, Sammy would be a success. He wanted to go into social work and Marc knew without a doubt that his friend would do just that. Sammy was made to help others. Most of all he would be somebody, whereas Marc would just be another small town shop rat.

"Are you okay?" Sammy asked, his brow furrowing in concern.

"Of course, I am," Marc lied. "I just got the best blow job of my life."

"I thought it was the *only* blow job of your life," Sammy countered, that wonderful smile coming over his face.

"Leave it to you to get all technical on me."

They started kissing again, rolling over several times as they playfully fought for dominance. Finally, Marc won. He straddled Sammy's thighs and used one hand to pin the smaller man's wrists above his head.

"I guess this means I get to top later," Marc teased.

He didn't expect Sammy to let out a low groan.

At first Marc thought it came from pain and he loosened his grip, afraid he'd been too rough. Then Sammy thrust up and Marc felt the hard press of the man's cock.

"You like the sound of that?" he asked, hissing in pleasure as their cocks ground together.

"Yes, I want you to pound me so hard I can't walk for a week."

Marc leaned down to whisper in Sammy's ear. "We really don't need dinner, do we?"

Sammy shook his head so vigorously Marc started to laugh, until he noticed the plants they'd rolled into. Squinting, he studied them as he tried to remember the old saying, *leaves of three, let it be*. He then counted off the leaves of their current bed, *one...two...three...oh, boy!*

"Shit, poison ivy," Marc yelled, jumping to his feet.

Sammy let out a yelp of alarm as he scrambled up, his gaze now fixated on the ground. "Quick, jump in the lake. If we're lucky, we may be able to wash some of the oil off."

They quickly shucked the rest of their clothes before running to the dock. First Sammy, then Marc jumped into the water—which happened to be damn cold. Marc let out a gasp of shock, not his wisest move since he was still under water. He choked and struggled to get to the surface. After what seemed like forever, he broke through the

surface.

Sammy popped up next to him. "Shit, it's freezing."

Sammy's teeth chattered loudly as he treaded water. Marc ran his hands over his body in an attempt to wash away the toxin. Even as he worked, he realized it probably wouldn't do much good.

"This trip has been one disaster after another. Now I'm going to have a rash on my rash," Sammy moaned as he paused long enough to scratch at his neck.

"Now that you mention it, you do have some hives forming." Marc frowned.

"Great, because we both know how sexy that is."

Marc swam closer to Sammy so they could share a kiss. Due to all the chattering, it didn't exactly go off smooth, but Marc didn't mind. "Don't worry. You're still as cute as ever."

For the first time since he'd known him, Sammy didn't take offense to being called cute. He gave a soft, hesitant grin. "Really? You're not just saying that to make me feel better?"

"No, you've always been perfect to me. Now let's get out and warm up."

## Chapter Four

After they'd climbed out of the water, Marc grabbed Sammy's hand and led him to the tent. Sammy followed along docilely, his body shivering so hard it hurt. He even let out a moan as he got to his knees and climbed through the small opening.

"See, aren't you glad I didn't let you get distracted while we were setting up camp? Now we can take shelter in the tent," Marc said as he climbed into his sleeping bag.

"You didn't let *me* get distracted?" Sammy echoed with outrage. "I seem to recall it the other way around."

"Stop arguing and come here."

Sammy started to tell him off, but stopped when Marc lifted the edge of the sleeping bag up in a silent invitation. Sammy crawled over and got in, snuggling up to Marc.

"I give it one day before we're both miserable as hell. That's usually how long it takes for a poison ivy rash to appear," Marc said.



Sammy tilted his head up so their lips were inches apart. "Well, then we better make the most of tonight."

"Sounds like a good idea to me."

Marc closed the space between their lips, meshing their mouths together in a kiss. It came off as a bit sloppy and their teeth got in the way a few times, but Sammy thought they were quickly improving on their technique. They weren't ready to star in their own porn yet, but as far as beginners went, Sammy felt sure they rated at least an eight.

A grunt escaped Sammy's chest when Marc rolled him onto his back and pinned him down. All thoughts of being cold faded as Sammy stared up into Marc's gaze. At the same time, Sammy's heart hammered like mad.

They were actually going to go through with it. Before the night was over, he'd be losing his virginity to Marc. Something that Sammy had dreamed of, but never thought would actually come true.

Another thought occurred to Sammy. He noticed how happy Marc looked. Sure there were brief flashes of nervousness, but otherwise, Marc's face was clear of the usual guarded, kicked-too-many-times expression.

Sammy reached up and cupped Marc's face. "The stuff is in my backpack."

Marc grabbed his hand and placed a soft kiss in the center of his palm. "Okay, I want you to get on your stomach while I grab it."

After Marc got up, Sammy rolled over and propped himself up on his elbows. All the while, the nerves continued to run overtime through his body. While he knew for certain he wanted this more than anything, the fear still lingered. When he'd sucked Marc off, Sammy noted how big the guy's cock was. There was no way in hell that wouldn't hurt when he shoved up Sammy's ass.

Marc must have sensed his nervousness because after he retrieved the supplies, he ran a soothing hand down Sammy's spine. "Don't worry. I'll make sure it's good for you, too."

"How?" Sammy asked, his voice slightly raspy.

"You're not the only one who can do research," Marc replied with a crooked grin.

Sammy's stomach jumped, both in lust and stress. If it had been anyone other than Marc in the tent with him, Sammy felt certain he'd have already bolted. Even so, the only thing that kept him in place was the reminders that he trusted and cared deeply for Marc. Plus, Sammy knew that deep down, hidden under all the fear, he still wanted this very much.

"Oh, I guess that makes sense," Sammy said, the last word coming out as a moan because Marc started raining kisses down his spine.

Marc reached over and grabbed the lube.

Much to his shame, Sammy jumped at the sound of the cap being cracked open.

Marc froze, his face filling with concern. "We don't have to do this if you don't want to. I promise not to get mad or anything. I'll be happy with just being able to hold you tonight while we sleep."

And yet, everyone thought Marc was the punk from their group. A warm sensation filled Sammy at Marc's thoughtfulness. There was no doubt in Sammy's mind that Marc meant every word of it, too.

"No, I want this, too. I'm just a little nervous because it's my first time and I don't know what to expect. Something tells me things aren't going to be the same as all the porn I've watched."

"Little innocent Sammy watching skin flicks. Who would have thought it?"

Sammy laughed, the last whispers of fear leaving him. "They never had the same effect on me as you did. If I really wanted to come hard, all I had to do was close my eyes and imagine you were in the room while I jacked off."

Marc's mouth dropped open as lust filled his eyes. "Shit, if I'd have known that, we'd have done this a lot sooner."

"Well, you know now, so let's get to it."

Marc squeezed a big glob of lube over his

fingers, then tossed the bottle to the side. He returned his attention to Sammy, his lips once more making a lazy path down his spine.

Now that all the nerves were gone, Sammy got lost in the sensation of the velvet glide of Marc's tongue and lips. Sammy wiggled a bit, desperate to give his cock a bit of relief. He didn't think he'd ever been so hard and having his erection pinned between him and the ground added a not completely unwelcome bite of pain to the sensations already soaring through him.

When he felt a slicked finger running down the crack of his ass, Sammy only tensed a moment. He took a deep breath as he reminded himself that this was Marc he was with and how much he really wanted this. The inner pep talk did the trick because when Marc delved deeper, his finger circling Sammy's hole, there was only pleasure.

"Just let me know if anything hurts and I'll stop right away," Marc promised.

He slowly eased the finger past the tight ring of muscles. Sammy hissed, a slow burn coming from the area. It only lasted a second and he soon found himself even rocking back a bit.

The entire time, Marc spoke soothing words as he began to slowly saw his finger in and out. After a while, he added a second one. Sammy moaned, once again working past the burn to find pleasure waiting for him in the end.

"You doing okay, sweetie?" Marc asked, his free hand smoothing down Sammy's back.

Sammy nodded as a sheen of sweat broke out over his body. It was hard to believe that he'd been freezing mere minutes ago. Marc gave the nape of his neck a kiss before easing in a third finger.

"Oh, God," Sammy panted. When Marc hesitated, Sammy added, "I'm fine, I just didn't think it'd feel this way."

"What way is that?" Marc asked as he began to thrust the fingers in and out.

"So full. It burns a little, too, but not in a bad way. I think I'm ready for your cock."

Marc slid his fingers out and grabbed the condom. One that Sammy brought, not the one that Mrs. Siltwell gave him, thank God. Once Marc had it on, he grabbed the lube and added some extra slick to his cock. Putting one hand on the small of Sammy's back, Marc said, "Don't worry, I promise to go slow."

"Okay," Sammy nodded as he got up on all fours and braced himself.

After one last caress to Sammy's back, Marc lined the tip of his cock up to Sammy's hole and began to press in. Sammy tried to hold back the hiss of pain, but it hurt...bad. He bit his bottom lip as he tensed.

"You need to relax, sweetie," Marc soothed.

Easy for him, he wasn't the one with the *Gigantor* dick up his ass, Sammy thought as he tried to follow Marc's instructions. Marc didn't move, showing a patience that amazed Sammy. He knew Marc had to be to the point of pain from being so hard, yet he made sure to take care of Sammy first.

*Damn, I could so easily fall in love with him.*

The pain eased a bit, so Sammy relaxed. Marc still didn't take that as permission to thrust in, instead, he slowly eased in, inch by inch. All the while, he crooned soft, praise to Sammy. The words were spoken with such a caring tone that Sammy found himself glowing from them. Soon Marc bottomed out, his cock fully inside Sammy.

"Fuck, you're so tight," Marc groaned as he pulled out some.

Sammy began to mourn the loss until Marc surged back inside, setting up an easy, yet eye-rolling pleasing pace. After a few thrusts, Marc reached around and grabbed Sammy's cock.

Sammy yelled as pleasure ripped through him. The pain completely forgotten, he began to thrust back against Marc. Then Marc shifted position, so his cock brushed against something inside Sammy's ass. Sammy cried out in pleasure.

"What in the hell did you just do?" he asked, his body still humming.

"I don't know," Marc replied.

"It doesn't matter, just do it again."

So Marc did. At that same time, he still stroked Sammy's cock. Sammy tried to hold it back, but the most powerful orgasm of his life slammed into him. He let out a breathless scream as he shot his load, ribbons of cum splattered the sleeping bag.

"Damn, that's the hottest thing I've ever seen," Marc panted, still thrusting into Sammy.

Sammy gave a weak smile. He couldn't think of a time when Marc had sworn so much. Usually he didn't have to resort to gutter language to get his point across. Sammy would have made a teasing comment about it had he any breath left in his body. All he was capable of, at the moment, was shifting most of his body weight to his arms, so he didn't collapse before Marc finished.

Luckily, he didn't have to hold that position for long. Marc gave one last, jerky thrust before he stiffened as he moaned Sammy's name. Sammy felt Marc's cock pulsate as it filled the condom.

Marc collapsed onto Sammy, pushing him flat onto his stomach.

"Gross! Wet spot," Sammy yelped as he struggled to get up.

"Sorry," Marc murmured.

He gave Sammy's ear a kiss before rolling to the side. They retreated to the bedding Sammy brought. Blissful and satisfied, Sammy snuggled into Marc's chest. Marc wrapped his arms around

Sammy and held him tight. They stayed like that for the rest of the night.

\* \* \* \*

While Marc could have stayed at the campground for the whole weekend, he had to go home early the next morning. His sister had a field trip for Girl Scouts and unless Marc was there to drive her, she'd miss it.

Even if Mom did remember about the trip, she'd be too lit to drive Kelly there. The last time Mom had taken the car out for a spin, it had ended with a busted fire hydrant and a decimated garden gnome. Which would have been funny had it not resulted in her getting another DUI on her record.

Not that she ever went to jail. She had a way of batting her lashes and playing the poor-me story so well that she almost always got off with probation or a fine. Marc secretly felt thankful for at least that since her being sent to jail would have landed him and Kelly in a foster home. That'd happened for a brief time a couple of years ago and it was an experience Marc never wanted to repeat. Better to put up with Ma and her abuse than some of the homes he'd lived in while under the tender care of the state.

After Sammy dropped him off, Marc ran up the



rickety steps leading to his low-rent apartment. As he reached for the door, his heart seized in fear when the sounds of Kelly's muffled cries reached his ears.

"Kelly, baby, what's wrong?" he asked as he burst inside.

His blood froze as he spotted all the half-full suitcases and boxes. *Oh, hell no! This could not be happening again.*

Mom rushed from the bedroom, her spindly arms clutching a pile of blankets. At one time, his mother had been so beautiful. She'd even had a brief career as a model. It'd only been for the JC Penney catalog, but hey, it'd been a paying gig. Those good looks were a thing of the past.

Years of hard living, hard men and hard booze had left her old before her time. Her once silky, black hair had thick streaks of grey running through it. Her cheeks were sunken in and marred with wrinkles and her eyes were tinged yellow from Hepatitis. That disease had been a little pressie from boyfriend number twenty.

Kelly cowered on the threadbare couch, her tiny body tucked into a tight ball. Even so, Marc still spotted the bright, red handprint marring one of her chubby cheeks. Anger surged through Marc and he wanted to lash out.

The only reason he held back was because for some strange reason, he still feared his mother.

Even though he stood six inches taller and outweighed her by nearly forty pounds, she continued to hold a sickening power over him, which just showed what a pathetic loser he really was.

“What’s going on?” he asked, even though the suitcases and boxes already screamed the answer.

“Get yours and Kelly’s shit packed up. We’re leaving this shithole of a town,” Mom ordered.

In other words, dear old mother must have pissed somebody off...again. The last town they had to leave was because she owed a bunch of money to a drug dealer.

This time was different because Marc had someone he actually liked here. He didn’t want to have to leave Sammy just when they’d finally gotten together. It wasn’t fair.

A deep seething hatred filled him. While he may not be proud of the fact, deep down he knew he held no love for his mother. He’d have run away a long time ago had it not been for Kelly. While there was his older sister, Mary, she’d taken off a couple of months ago and never looked back.

So that left it up to Marc to make sure that Kelly was protected from the worst of their mother’s fury. Just like it was up to Marc to make sure Kelly had the proper food and clothing. The only thing Mom ever cooked was meth and even then she always messed the recipe up.

Many times Marc had been tempted to just take Kelly and leave, but with no college degree and few prospects, he couldn't afford to support himself, let alone a little girl. At least Mom let him use her disability checks to pay for rent and food.

"I don't want to leave," Marc still tried.

Inside, he felt his heart shattering. Just the thought of not ever seeing Sammy again made him want to break down and cry, something he hadn't done in years.

Mom spun on him, her face ugly with anger. "You have no choice. Now get your shit, then load up the car."

She dropped the armload of clothes and went over to light a cigarette. She had a two pack a day habit that resulted in the entire apartment being saturated with the stench of smoke. All despite the fact that Kelly suffered from asthma.

"But I have friends here," he continued to protest.

The instant her mouth turned down into a sneer, Marc knew that had been the wrong thing to say. She stormed over to him and used her free hand to slap him across the face.

"You mean that Sammy," she spat. "Don't think I haven't noticed the way you two look at each other. It disgusts me."

For the first time ever, Marc found his backbone. While she could go on all day,

degrading him, he'd be damned if he'd allow her to do the same thing to Sammy. He rubbed away the hurt and said, "We care for each other. So what?"

She snorted, the noise making her all the more unattractive. "Do you think your pretty boy would want you if he really knew who you were? No, he wouldn't. In fact, he'd hate you even more than I do."

Marc paused, hand still in the air as he gapped at her. "What are you talking about?"

With a sadistic gleam in her eyes, she told him everything. By the time she'd finished, Marc felt numb and empty inside—she'd been right. Now that he knew the truth, he'd never be able to look Sammy in the face again.

He bent down and began to gather up the boxes. Mom had been right, it would be better if they left town as soon as possible. While he knew that would hurt Sammy, the man finding out the truth about Marc would hurt way more. Sure, Sammy would probably end up hating Marc for taking off just after they'd admitted their true feelings for each other, but maybe that would be for the best. At least then, Sammy would move on and find someone more suited for him.

Whomever Sammy ended up with had to be better than the son of a monster, which Marc now knew he truly was.

## Chapter Five

*Ten years later*

Sammy frowned as he reread the email sent by his buddy, Hayden. He'd gone over the message at least twenty times in hopes that he'd misread it, but the damn words remained the same, *Can't wait to see you. Oh, and by the way, I'll be bringing Marc with me.*

A fresh wave of anger rushed through Sammy as he focused on one word in particular, the letters seeming to burn into his brain—*Marc*. As in the Marc who'd literally fucked him over, then turned his back and left without so much as a goodbye.

Now Marc was back, but it wasn't so he could beg for forgiveness or grovel. No, that would be beneath the guy. Why worry about something as trivial as hurting somebody who'd at one time been his best friend? That kind of thing didn't even register with someone as coldhearted as Marc. Otherwise, Marc would have contacted

Sammy over a year ago when he first moved back to Michigan. Instead, Marc had reconnected with all their old friends, but had never so much as sent Sammy an email.

That was until the jerk needed something. Now he was finally showing his face after a decade of the cold shoulder because his company decided to put together a documentary about the center for GLBT youth that Sammy worked for.

A soft knock interrupted his troubled thoughts. He looked up from the computer and said, "Come in."

Paxton poked his head in. "I hope I'm not interrupting. I was in the neighborhood and thought you'd like to grab some lunch."

Back in high school, Paxton had been the stereotypical hockey jock, with long blond hair and a cocky attitude to match. Since that time, Paxton had grown up—mostly. He currently worked as a lawyer in the same firm as David, another friend from school. Paxton now wore his hair in a short, conservative cut to go along with his high paying job and fancy suits. He still hadn't lost that fuck-them-all edge. That would never change.

"Sure, I need to get away from here," Sammy replied as he got up and grabbed his coat.

Paxton studied him carefully. "Are you okay?"

Sammy thought about lying, but knew Paxton

would see right through it. "Not really. I just got an email from Hayden. His company is doing the documentary for sure now."

"So, why are you so upset? It'll bring a ton of exposure to the center."

"Hayden won't be coming alone. Marc will be with him."

Paxton paused, his eyes flashing with surprise. "Are you sure?"

"Yeah." Sammy shrugged on his coat, then shut down his computer.

"Wow, I didn't think he'd have the guts to ever face you again."

Sammy glanced down at the desk, hurt slicing through him. "I'm finally going to see him again, but it's only because he needs something from me."

Paxton carefully closed the door behind him, then came over from behind and wrapped his arms around Sammy. "Would it make you feel better to know that he asks about you all the time?"

"Not really."

"Maybe if you just called him first?"

Sammy stiffened. "So he can reject me all over again. Thanks, but I've already gone down that road and I don't want to revisit it."

"Have you ever wondered if he might have had a good reason for doing what he did? We both

know it wasn't his decision to leave town so quickly. That was all his mother's choice."

"I get that part. I know he wouldn't have left Kelly alone to deal with her either. What I don't get is why he's never contacted me since. If he ever really cared for me like he claimed, then he wouldn't have done that."

"I wouldn't judge him too harshly. We both know how he loves to play the martyr. He probably thought staying away from you was the best thing for you."

"That's impossible. He knew how I felt about him, so how could he hurt me so much?"

As soon as he asked that question, Sammy wanted to kick himself. He'd never played the poor-me card before. He'd be damned if he'd let the situation with Marc make him start now. He shrugged off Paxton's embrace. "Let's go get lunch."

They walked across the street to the old diner. While the place appeared to be just another greasy spoon, it actually served some of the best food in the city of Ferndale. Sammy waited until they'd both ordered before he asked, "So what really brought you here this morning? I'm not buying the whole in-the-neighborhood excuse."

Paxton's mouth parted in shock before he clamped his lips together with a rueful shake of his head. "I should have known better than to try



to get one over on you.”

“It’s just because we’ve known each other so long that I can tell something big is on your mind.”

Paxton took a sip from his coffee before he set the mug down on the chipped table. “I heard from a friend who works for the DA’s office that Ray Glen has appealed his sentence.”

All the air seemed to leave the room as those words hit Sammy like a kick to the gut. “On what grounds?”

“That the defense lawyer from the original trial was incompetent.”

“You’ve got to be kidding me!” Sammy practically yelled.

“It’s a commonly cited reason.”

“I don’t care. Ray’s lawyer did a bang job of smearing my grandfather’s name. Ray carjacks my grandpa, takes him out to the woods, tortures and kills him, yet the way his lawyer described it, Gramps was some drug dealer who deserved it. If anyone should be declaring the lawyer incompetent, it’s my family.”

Paxton held up a hand. “I agree with you. It’s totally bullshit, but that’s our legal system for you.”

Sammy took a couple of breaths in an attempt to calm down, but it failed. His head spun a bit as he clutched the edge of the table. “What are his

chances?"

"The evidence against him is damn solid, so the original sentence should hold up."

*"Should?"*

Sammy shook his head, shocked at the turn of events. It was as if every bad thing that'd happened in his past had come back to bite him on his ass. His stomach rolled, then tilted, before it finished off its performance with a neat summersault. He jumped to his feet and dashed for the bathroom.

\* \* \* \*

Paxton shook his head as he watched Sammy's hundred-inch dash to the bathroom. It wouldn't be the first time the guy blew chunks in the men's room. The only difference being this time it wasn't because he had ten too many shots at the bar. No, this barf attack was completely due to nerves.

All because Marc refused to see Sammy because of the guilt he felt over leaving him and Sammy for being too stubborn to realize that it took two to ruin a relationship.

Damn it, now they were going to have to make it so he got involved. He hated it when that happened. It made him feel like his busybody aunt who always had her nose in everyone's business.

Hissing a top-end curse word, Paxton fished

out his cell and punched in Hayden's number. When his friend answered, Paxton didn't waste any time on pleasantries.

"It looks like the two asshats aren't going to get over this without our help. It's time to launch operation *Drama Brats*. Have Marc at the center in a half hour. I don't care if you have to drag his sorry I-only-wear-black-because-I-love-to-brood ass there. Just make it happen."

Not waiting for an answer, he ended the call. Marc and Sammy were so going to owe him for this.

\* \* \* \*

Marc slogged up the steps leading to the center, feeling like a condemned man facing the noose. At the same time, his heart thudded in excitement over the prospect of finally being able to talk to Sammy again.

Ten years. It still amazed Marc that it'd been that long. While those years had seemed to fly by, there had also been times when they'd painfully, slowly ticked away. Marc had worked his hardest to make the most of them, too.

Despite everything going against him, he'd managed to pay his way through a local community college and obtain a degree in journalism. Along the way, he'd left his mother's

house, taking Kelly with him. It hadn't been easy, raising a kid and going to school at the same time, but Marc had been determined not to fail.

In the end all, the hard work paid off. He now had a great job, an annoying mortgage and an equally annoying eighteen-year-old sister who would soon be leaving for college.

There was only one thing missing in his life—Sammy. Marc knew he'd never have that. He'd blown any chance with Sammy ten years ago. He paused at the top as he stared at the center door. Hayden, who'd been walking next to him, stopped to give him his trademark one-brow lifted quizzical looks.

"He hates me," Marc declared.

Hayden let out a frustrated sigh as he ran his hand through his short hair. Something he'd been doing a lot of during the car ride over. It didn't take a genius to figure out his patience was wearing thin.

"Or maybe he's just pissed that you've been in Michigan for over a year, yet haven't bothered to even toss a phone call his way," Hayden countered with his usual bluntness.

"This is a bad idea."

"No, this is you being a wimp. The bad idea was me agreeing to leave our good pay jobs with the newspaper so we could work on this documentary."

"Why would you say that? I thought you were all behind it," Marc demanded, more than a little hurt.

"Because if you can't even talk to the head social worker of the center, there isn't going to be a damn documentary?"

Marc shot Hayden a filthy look. "Fine, let's just get this over with."

He opened the door and entered the building. His first impression was how classy the place looked. With tall ceilings and glass-enclosed offices, it had a light airy feel. There were various sculptures and paintings dotted throughout the building, adding a whole upbeat deco vibe.

Then he spotted Sammy waiting by the front desk and Marc's breath hitched. The years had been good to Sammy, damn good. He still had the same blond hair, but he now cut it much shorter so the curls didn't show as much. His work attire was all casual, jeans with a red polo shirt. Marc couldn't help but notice how nicely Sammy filled out the clothes. It looked as if he'd gained some muscles over the years.

"Hi, Hayden. How's it going?" Sammy asked without so much as glancing in Marc's direction.

Okay, so that was the way things were going to be played. Not that Marc hadn't anticipated the cold reception, but it still hurt all the same. He was about to fire off a sarcastic, *Hey, how ya doing* when

Paxton rushed over.

"Sorry, I'm late," he announced.

Marc frowned. "I didn't know you were going to be here."

Paxton shrugged. "I was in the neighborhood."

"Yeah, you seem to be neighborhooding it a lot today," Sammy drawled, his eyes narrowing suspiciously.

"A guy's got to have a hobby. I was going to pick up scrapbooking, but the firm won't let me play with scissors."

They all shared an eye roll.

"Someone should call David and Drake, then we'd have all the old gang back together," Paxton suggested brightly.

"Or we could just get this tour over so I can get back to work," Sammy replied.

"Fine, if you want to be all boring about it," Paxton griped. "Why don't you show him the *Clothes Closet* first?"

"What's the *Clothes Closet*?" Marc asked.

For the first time, Sammy glanced his way. "The center takes in donations of gently used clothing which we, in turn, hand out to homeless teens. So many kids get kicked out because they're gay that we try to help out as much as we can. We also help direct them to gay-friendly homeless shelters and work programs."

"That's great," Marc replied.

A thrill of pride went through him. He'd always known Sammy would make a difference in the world. Sammy shrugged off the compliment before he led them down the stairs. They took a long hallway until they came to a room tucked away from the rest of the building.

"I can understand now why you call it a closet. It's not that big," Marc replied as he leaned in to peer inside.

Sammy came up and joined him. "Yeah, I keep hoping that we'll get so many donations that we'll have to upgrade to something bigger."

Marc smiled at him. "I'm sure you will."

After he nervously cleared his throat, Sammy said, "Why don't I show —"

Sammy never got out the rest of his sentence because Paxton came up from behind and shoved him into the room. At the same time, Hayden blitz-attacked Marc, pushing him in after Sammy.

Marc twisted his body so he didn't fall on top of Sammy. He let out an umph of pain as he fell heavily on his ass. He tried to recover and lunge for the no-good-shoving-jackasses, but was too slow. Payton and Hayden quickly shut the door, the sound of the lock clicking into place filling the stunned silence.

"What in the hell are you guys doing?" Sammy demanded.

"It's for your own good," came Hayden's

muffled reply.

Sammy ran up and tried to turn the handle, Marc wasn't surprised when it didn't open.

"You two need to work this thing out between you," Paxton added.

"When I get out of here, I'm going to rip both your heads off," Marc snarled.

"You know how much I like it when you threaten me, so it won't work," Hayden said.

"Look, it's not like we didn't give you guys a chance to handle this on your own. You had ten frigging years," Paxton chimed in.

"Now, we'll be back in a half hour. By then, I expect you crazy kids to be, at the very least, friends again," Hayden sang out way too cheerfully.

\* \* \* \*

Sammy listened with a sinking sensation to the sounds of Paxton and Hayden's retreating footsteps. "I can't believe they locked us up."

He tried the door again in a desperate attempt to prove himself wrong. No such luck, they'd definitely locked the door.

Marc struggled to his feet. "Really? Don't you remember the time when they inflated a hundred condoms and floated them in the high school pool?"



"They were kids then. What's their excuse now?"

"Some people never grow up."

Sammy flicked a deliberate knowing glance over at Marc. While he'd given up the nail polish and styled his hair a tiny bit more conservatively, the all-black clothes were still there. "Yeah, I can see that."

Marc glanced down at his jeans and shirt. "What's wrong with what I'm wearing?"

"Nothing, for a guy still trying to cling to his inner Goth."

"As I seem to recall, you like that look."

"*Liked* as in past tense. Unlike you I've matured past that stage of my life."

Marc's eyes flashed angrily before he took several deep breaths. Sammy held in a triumphant smile, thrilled he'd managed to get under the jerk's skin. It served him right for daring to show his face at Sammy's work. Maybe if Sammy kept it up, by the time they were free, Marc would be suffering from a really serious complex.

Unfortunately, Sammy's plan backfired when Marc gave a snarky grin before saying, "I get it, you're still pissed at me for taking off on you."

Sammy wanted to kick the wall in frustration. Didn't the asshole get it, even after all these years? Sammy let out a bitter laugh. Some things never changed. "Don't flatter yourself, I never gave you

a second thought.”

“That’s too bad. I thought of you every day,” Marc replied, his expression softening.

Had they still been eighteen, Sammy may have been swayed by those puppy dog eyes, but he had a decade of life experiences to make him immune to such tactics. While Sammy may be a social worker, that didn’t make him an easy mark. Being dumped by Marc had taught him to never be so trusting again.

“I’m sure you had a daily laugh at my expense. Tell me, Marc, when you shared how you played a cruel, practical joke on the school nerd, did you refer to me by name or just call me the *easy lay*?”

Marc moved forward and put his hands on Sammy’s shoulders. “Don’t talk like that. What we had together wasn’t cheap so don’t make it sound like it was just another random hookup.”

Sammy jerked free of Marc’s hold and took a few steps back. “Yeah, it was so special that you couldn’t wait to get away from me.”

“What was I supposed to do? Let Mom take Kelly and disappear to God knows where? We both know Kelly wouldn’t have survived a year without me being there to protect her,” Marc said, his voice edged with frustration.

“No, I realize you didn’t have a choice. That leaving Kelly alone with your mother wasn’t an option.”

"Then why are you so mad at me?"

"Because you never once sent me a letter or called me to let me know that you still cared. You just took off and never looked back," Sammy confessed in a broken voice.

Damn it, leave it to him to get emotional. Marc didn't deserve to know how much his presence threw Sammy into an emotional whirl.

"You could have contacted me just as easily. Hayden always knew where I was," Marc countered.

"Don't push the blame on me just to make yourself feel better," Sammy spat.

"Why not? Isn't that how relationships are supposed to work? Each partner has an equal part? Because for all you knew, I was waiting for you to contact me just as much as you were waiting for me."

Sammy sucked in a breath. It killed him to admit it, but Marc did have a point. He'd be damned if he let Marc know that. "Yeah, you would have loved if I'd gone all stalker and chased after you. Call me crazy, but the way you took off without even saying goodbye led me to believe you couldn't give a damn about me."

Marc hung his head. "Okay, maybe you have a point. Not about the stalking because you can't stalk somebody who's already crazy about you. But for a while, I really didn't want you to find

me. It's not because I didn't care for you, though."

Sammy finally gave in and kicked something, only he aimed for a pile of clothes instead of the wall because he didn't want to hurt himself. Throwing his hands into the air, he turned on Marc, "Then what is it? Please tell me what was so scary that it had big, bad Marc running for cover. It's the very least you can do considering all the hurt you put me through.

"I thought you'd be better off without me."

Sammy snorted in disbelief. "So in other words, you're going with the classic, it's-not-you-it's-me. Leave it to you to use the oldest excuse in history."

Marc continued, "I mean it. You were getting ready to go off to college and become somebody. The last thing you needed was some white trash, loser dragging you down."

That took some of the fire from Sammy's anger, but he didn't allow it to show. "Yeah, because you look so poor now. I may not be a fashion whore like Paxton, but even I can tell you're wearing top end jeans and shoes."

Now it was Marc who kicked the pile of clothes. "Damn it, Sammy. How can you not know how much you mean to me?"

"You mean *meant*," Sammy corrected petulantly.

"No, I used the word the way I used. I still care for you. Sometimes so much so that I actually ache

to hold you. That night we shared together was the best moment of my life. Ever since then nothing has lived up to it. I've cursed myself way more than you'd ever be capable of because I realized that I stupidly lost the most important person in my life. I was some scared wimp who wasn't man enough to stand up and fight for the guy I cared about and now I know I'll never get you back."

Shocked by the sheer intensity of Marc's words, Sammy paused, his gaze locked on the other man. Marc looked so sad, so vulnerable that Sammy had no choice but to believe him. Sammy had been so mad and hurt it never occurred to him that Marc might have actually had been suffering just as much.

"How can you even say that about yourself? Don't you realize how important you were to me?" Sammy rasped, tears building up in his eyes.

"Don't be so sure, there's something you need to know about me. Something that I've never told anyone else about, not even Hayden. I should have told you sooner, but I didn't want you to hate me more than you already did."

Marc looked up, his face so full of pain, shame and grief, that Sammy wanted to put his arms around him and tell him that it would be all right. "What is it? What could possibly have been so bad that you didn't think I could forgive you?"

"The day we left, my mom told me that Alan wasn't my real father."

"So, I would think that would be a good thing. Anybody would be better than him."

"Unless that somebody was Ray Glen," Marc said, his eyes growing wet with unshed tears.

Sammy froze, his stomach clenching as if he'd taken an actual blow to it. "As in, the man who killed my grandfather?"

Marc nodded. "I knew that once you found out, you'd never be able to look at me again."

Sammy stormed over and flicked Marc on the forehead.

"Ouch, what was that for?" Marc asked, rubbing away the hurt.

"For wasting ten years of our lives. If you would have just had more faith in me, we could have been together all this time, instead of being apart and miserable," Sammy yelled.

"Are you trying to tell me that it doesn't matter that Ray is my father?"

"Of course it doesn't matter. It's you I care about. Not your father or your mother or where you came from. When I look at you, all I see is Marc, the guy who befriended me when I was just some lost dork who wanted to hide away from the world."

Marc reached out and cupped Sammy's cheek. The simple touch felt so good and right that

Sammy's knees went weak.

"Do you really mean that?" Marc asked.

"Yes, I do."

"Just so you know, I tried to come back to you once. It was five years ago. I got your address from Hayden, but when I got there, some strange guy answered."

Sammy closed his eyes, agonized to learn of yet another missed chance for happiness. "That must have been Troy. He and I were a couple for a year, but it didn't work out."

"Why not?"

Sammy opened his eyes and gazed up at Marc. "Because he wasn't you. You were always the only one I could ever love."

A crooked smile came over Marc's face. "I feel the same way about you. I fell in love with you that very first day I found you cowering by your locker."

Joy soared through Sammy, making him feel lighter than ever. He wrapped his arms around Marc's neck. "It looks like we both have a lot of groveling for forgiveness to do."

"Yeah, I think so, too. It's a good thing we have the rest of our lives to do it. Because now that I have you back in my arms, I'm never letting you go again," Marc declared as he pulled Sammy into a tight embrace.

"You do and I'll sic Tum-Tum on you," Sammy

threatened.

Marc laughed. "Is that dog even still alive?"

"No, but his grandson, Tum-Tum the third is and he's one mean Pomeranian."

Sammy stood on tiptoe and pressed their lips together in a kiss that Marc eagerly returned. A warm feeling came over Sammy as he became blissful in the knowledge that he finally had the man of his dreams and this time it would last forever.

Now, their only worries would be over how to avoid vicious attack dogs, strawberries and poison ivy.



## *About the Author*

Stephani Hecht is a happily married mother of two. Born and raised in Michigan, she loves all things about the state, from the frigid winters to the Detroit Red Wings hockey team. You can usually find her snuggled up to her laptop, creating her next book.

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