



REPORT FOR REPAIR

An erotic novella

Sommer Marsden

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Chapter One

CHANCE BLEW OUT A SIGH as the mechanical voice cooed to him, *‘Please continue to hold ...’*

‘Where else am I gonna go?’ Chance growled.

‘Here at Sunshine Gas and Electric your business is important to us. We have a staff of highly attentive operators at your disposal. Most waits are under two minutes ...’

Chance glanced at his watch. Six minutes had passed. As he waited, his bedroom was already starting to grow warm. He paced to the huge picture window that overlooked his backyard. Below, his nemesis had dropped another limb, once again successfully knocking out the power to his home as well as the rest of the block.

‘I cannot fucking believe that assho—’

‘Good morning, Sunshine Gas and Electric. This is Maria, may I please have your phone number starting with the area code?’

Chance recited it by rote. At this point he should ask for a direct line to his own personal highly attentive operator.

‘And what’s the problem this morning, Mr York?’ Maria chirped. He could picture her all smiling and happy with pink lip-gloss and bright eyes. For some reason that image pissed him off.

‘The tree behind me has dropped another limb,’ he

said, trying to keep his voice calm.

‘I see. I’m sorry to hear that, Mr York.’

Chance ground his teeth together and pulled his T-shirt away from his chest. Already he was starting to sweat. ‘Me, too, Maria.’

‘I see by our records that this has happened before.’

‘Three times.’

‘And the house is still unoccupied?’

‘Yes, that jackass has it up for sale. But he won’t take down the tree.’

‘I’m putting in a report, Mr York. One of our employees should be there within the next three hours to reconnect your service.’

Chance blew out a sigh. Three hours. Three. Hours. It was August. It was ninety degrees at nine in the morning and the humidity was about a billion per cent. But three hours was better than four or five or more. ‘Look, Maria, is there any chance they can send a cherry picker and a guy with a chainsaw to just lop the top of this damn thing off and call it a day? It would save us all a hell of a lot of time.’

‘I do understand your frustration, Mr York, but that is not our responsibility. It’s the homeowner’s responsibility to have the tree removed.’

‘I know. But that dip shi ... sorry. That *person* is not in the house and really doesn’t care if his decrepit dead tree keeps knocking out my air conditioning.’

Silence.

‘I’ve put you at the top of the list, Mr York. You should have air conditioning within the hour. I hope that helps some.’

‘I will take it, Maria. Thank you.’

‘I wish I could do more, Mr York.’

‘I’m sure we’ll talk again,’ he sighed.

‘Unfortunately.’

Chance disconnected and went to make a pot of coffee. He could still boil water and he had his grandmother’s old drip percolator in the china cabinet. It was something. He could pass the time until the tech arrived by watching his coffee drip slowly through the filter. The old fashioned way. ‘Then I can eat beef jerky and hard tack for breakfast and pretend I’m a fucking cowboy.’

‘Oh well *thank you*, Maria.’ The man was tall and broad. He reminded Chance of a brick wall in Dickies. A bald, goatee-sporting brick wall. The tech’s eyes were hidden behind black wraparound sunglasses. He shimmied up the utility pole like an ape man and Chance took a deep breath to stave off his lust.

It didn’t take him long to reconnect the downed wires. MacGruder’s dead-ass tree was basically hollow with dry-rot. But the limbs were heavy enough to knock down the small lines that fed power to the homes.

Chance held his breath, watching the man hover so high above earth to hook the wires up. Then the man held the pole with one hand, turned slightly and eyed the tree. He shook his head, lips pressed in a tight seam of disapproval.

‘Yes, sexy, that tree is totally fucking dead,’ Chance whispered.

The guy reached out with his free hand and swatted a small branch that promptly dropped to the backyard below. Like rotten fruit dropping to the ground, wood rained down and Chance shook his head. The pieces the tree dropped weren’t necessarily heavy but they sure as shit wouldn’t tickle if one fell on you.

He sipped his bitter almost cold coffee and when the

man on the pole turned to eye him, Chance choked. It looked as if the guy was looking right at him. When the man tipped a finger salute and nodded to him, he knew he had.

‘Damn damn damn.’

The guy pointed and held up his finger as if to say, ‘Stay there. I’m coming.’

‘Fuck,’ Chance breathed.

Elvis sauntered in to see who his master was talking to. All 17 lbs of stout miniature dachshund waddled as he walked. ‘That hunk of burning love is coming over here, Elvis,’ Chance said.

Elvis snorted. He had sinus issues.

Chance’s cell phone rang. ‘Chance York.’ He hadn’t even read the display.

‘I need you to...’

‘I’ll have to call you back, Rebecca. I can’t right now.’

‘But you are ...’

‘I know. I know. I’m your personal assistant. That’s what you pay me for. And you let me work from home. Blah, blah, blah ...’ Lucky, he thought, that they were also friends.

Dead silence.

‘Chance ...’

He could tell she was trying to keep her cool. Chance played the pity card. ‘Look. That monstrous tree dropped another limb. I have no power and I have to go deal with the electric guy.’

‘Oh. But Chance later can you just ...’

‘Text me!’ he yelled and hung up on her. The doorbell had just bing-bonged and his heart was going erratic in sympathy.

‘Now we *deal* with the electric guy,’ Chance said to

Elvis. Elvis just snorted again. 'And I'll have to buy Becca a whole damn basket of Ruby's gluten free pecan muffins. To make it up to her.' His phone buzzed in his pocket and he knew it was the text he had requested, OK, *demand*ed. He promised her, mentally, that he'd do her bidding cheerily for the rest of the week. Surely she'd forgive him.

The doorbell dinged again and Chance put a hand to his heart to still it. 'Mister Impatient,' he muttered, taking a deep breath. Then he tugged the door open to find tall, bald and surly standing there. And his heart promptly resumed its erratic state. 'Hi there.'

'Hello, sir. I've gotten your line reattached.' The guy stepped up onto the door sill and Chance took a step back instinctively.

'Thanks. It's really become a pain in the ass,' he blurted.

'May I?'

May he what? Chance thought for a moment and then he nodded. 'Oh, of course. Come in Mr ...'

'Todd.'

'Mr Todd. It's really hot out there.'

'No, it's just Todd.'

'Oh. Right. Todd. Can I get you a soda or some water?'

The guy looked torn which was comical, it was only a drink. Then again, Chance didn't know Sunshine Gas and Electric's policy on fraternizing with the clients. And what if he lost his mind and his manners and just kissed this guy? Begged him to do things he knew, just by looking at him, that he could do. What was the policy on that?

'I'd love a soda if you have one.'

'I have a ton. Come on in. This is Elvis.'

The fat wiener dog yawned and lay his head down on the hardwood floor. He looked very unimpressed. Elvis was the Zen-like calm to Chance's fidgety nerves.

'Elvis,' Todd said and followed Chance into the kitchen, his work boots leaving fine bits of grit on the floor. Somehow that grit was sexy, at least Chance thought so. Chance poured him a soda with extra ice and handed it over. He watched transfixed as Todd's throat bobbed once, twice, three times and the soda was gone. It begged the question what else could that mouth and throat do?

Chance cleared his throat, blushing like a whore in church. 'That tree is a nightmare. And I know you can't do anything about it legally, but my God, I'm ready to go over there with an axe and just start doing my Paul Bunyan routine.'

Todd's stern face broke into a crooked grin and Chance felt his heart turn over in his chest. He also felt his cock spring to life in his pants. He started running through his list of errands and chores for Becca. No use embarrassing himself in front of the help by getting a raging hard-on over a smile. Big bald Daddy was probably straight or taken or just not interested in the likes of skinny, pale, blond Chance.

'I'd like to see that. If you crack and go all caveman on it, let me know.'

Chance saw his opportunity and said, 'And how would I do that? Call SGE and report myself as a crazed neighbour with an axe.'

Todd fished in his coveralls and pulled out a business card. 'You could. Or you could just call me and save yourself some time.'

Chance's cock became more demanding. Jesus. This man up close was a dream. Big, imposing and bald as Mr

Clean. He smelled like summer air and hot tar and man. He smelled like fantasy sex and salty kisses and carnival rides. Chance had to force himself to stop sniffing. Even Elvis was staring at him. Their fingers brushed for an instant and his skin tingled with mild electric zings and pops.

‘I could do that.’

‘Good. Now about that tree.’

‘What about it?’

‘Well, it’s dangerous, but not so dangerous.’

‘What the hell does that mean?’ Chance stared out at the towering oak. Once majestic and gorgeous now it was dry and gnarled and ugly. A tree from a Halloween movie or a horror flick.

‘It means it’s dead. So it is definitely a bad thing. But the limbs it’s dropping *currently* are pretty dry rotted and eaten out by bugs. They weigh nothing. I was tossing them like kindling. Now I did break a rule ...’ Todd broke off and stared at the toe of his work boot.

Somehow the small boy gesture made Chance that much more smitten. ‘How so?’

‘I tied the one really treacherous branch to the asshole’s chimney.’

Chance blinked and snorted out laughter. ‘You did what? Why?’

‘Because he has to know how dangerous that thing is and I guess since he isn’t living there to deal with it, it’s no big deal. It could really do some damage, that big one. So if it does some serious damage, it’ll do some serious damage for him.’

‘Gosh,’ Chance said, cringing at his goofy school boy choice of words. ‘I hope you don’t get in trouble.’

Todd took a sudden step in, crowding Chance. Chance liked it. His heart raced and his hands shook just

enough to give him a jolt of want and arousal. ‘*Gosh*, we’re told to secure locations like that to the best of our ability. If the homeowner isn’t living up to his responsibility, we aren’t required to remove the tree but we can secure it, cut it, top it even.’

Chance swallowed hard. At the word *top* he had a vivid pornographic mental flash of this big, bald man tying him to a bed and spanking him until he babbled. Then fucking him slow and sweet until he wept with his release. He shook his head. ‘Top?’

‘Chop the top right off. But that’s extremely rare that they let us do that and even if I could, I don’t have a crew today. Plus, I’m hoping jack wipe, over there, will man up and take responsibility.’

Chance snorted again. ‘You clearly have never met Mr MacGruder. He’d eat his own toenails before he’d pay for something he could get someone else to pay for on his behalf.’

‘We’ll see. But I wanted you to know because the main branch. The big one that has heft is angled so that it’s most likely, barring a huge windy storm, going to come down on your fence out there.’

Chance watched Todd’s lips move. Heard how he said *bigun* instead of big one. Watched how his sunburned skin crinkled in certain spots when he smiled. And he almost leaned in and kissed him. But Todd leaned in fast and surprised him so much he gasped like a girl on a soap opera. His cheeks flooded with colour again and he bit his lip.

‘OK,’ was the only thing he could think to say.

‘I’m telling you so that you can get help if you need it. And so you don’t go too near that thing or, perish the thought, stand under it. This is thunderstorm season. It could drop chunks at any time.’

He'd moved his weathered face in closer until Chance felt sure he might have a heart attack. 'OK,' he said again.

Todd flipped his sunglasses up on his head and his eyes were startling blue. Cool and nearly translucent like water. 'Good. I'd hate to see you get hurt, pretty boy.'

'Pretty boy?' he stammered. Chance considered himself a lot of things, pretty wasn't one.

'Yeah, to me you are. You look like getting clocked with a branch might dent you. Break you even.'

There it was – another pornographic flash of being whipped. His body bowing under his new lover. His face a contortion of pain and pleasure. And then the mounting from behind. Fucking like animals. Kissing and sucking and biting and ... 'I doubt it,' he said, trying to sound brave and strong.

'I don't doubt it,' Todd said and pushed a finger to his bottom lip. Chance stilled, tried to breathe. 'I'd kiss you but you could sue me,' Todd said and turned on his work boots and crossed the room in three big strides.

He turned, Chance still staring, moving slow, dumbfounded. 'Remember, Pretty Boy. Just call to report for repair.'

He shut the door when he left, his boots banging across the cracked concrete front porch.

'Aren't you going to ask me out? Kiss me? Do fucking something about this?' Chance touched a finger to his hard cock. But no one was there to hear him.

Chapter Two

‘SO NOW THE ONLY way I’m gong to see him again is if another chunk falls off that fucking tree!’ Chance barked at Becca.

‘You’ll see him,’ she sighed. ‘Now, personal assistant, are you going to fucking assist me or what?’

‘What do you need?’ Chance tried to sound interested but all he could see in his mind’s eye was Todd’s gruff face pushing so, so close to his but not delivering the desired kiss. He could still feel his warm fingertip on his lip. Chance could still smell the other man in his house. He was a big, bald sexy phantom haunting his humble cottage.

Elvis snored loudly as he dozed and Chance touched him with the tip of his tennis shoe. ‘Hey, you lazy bum. You didn’t do much to help me flirt, you know.’

Elvis opened his eyes, appeared to roll them, and then yawned widely.

‘I need you to call and schedule my hair, my eye appointment and my gynaecologist appointment.’

‘Eew.’

‘Are you going to work for me or not, damn it!’

‘Fine, you do not need to yell.’ Chance took the details of what she needed. ‘Got it.’

‘And I need you to pick up that paint I ordered for the kitchen and ...’

‘I so do not paint,’ he said.

‘I have seen your attempt at painting, Chance. Don’t worry. I’d never ask.’

‘Good.’

‘Then wine for the dinner party, dry cleaning, grab what’s in my post office box and you are done for the day. Free to daydream over the burly, bald SGE man. And take matters into your own hands ... heh.’

‘I would never stoop to that,’ he said. He was lying. Chance knew it, Becca knew it. He was, as she put it PH – perpetually horny –masturbation for Chance was about as earth-shattering as putting salt on his fries.

‘Riiiiiight. You would never ever feature Todd the Gas and Electric guy in your dirty fantasies.’

‘Never.’

‘Ever,’ she laughed.

‘True story. Now let me go and do all your bidding, you wicked witch so I can come home and jack off and figure out how to ask him out. Or better yet, how to get him to ask me out. And speaking of ... why *didn’t* he ask me out?’

‘He’s playing with you,’ Becca said, and laughed. ‘I like him already.’

‘Damn.’

Chance hung up and made his friend’s appointments, making sure to stop daydreaming long enough to mark the dates of her appointments in her online calendar and send her an update. Then he grabbed Elvis under one arm and kissed his greying dark head. ‘I’ve got errands. I’ll be back. You hold down the fort, you’re in charge.’

Elvis looked thrilled.

When he got home after dropping off paint, wine, mail and dry cleaning to Becca’s apartment he found Elvis, lying on the cool tile foyer floor. Because the

power was out. Again.

‘Motherfucker!’

Elvis looked up and grunted. Chance immediately said, ‘Not you, buddy.’ Anger flared making his upper lip break out with a fine sheen of sweat. But then he remembered Todd’s card and his belly buzzed with excitement and his cheeks flushed with anticipation. He felt them, hot circles of blood standing out for all the world to see. His facial equivalent of a raging hard-on. There was no hiding it.

He dialled the number on Todd’s card and waited, feeling nervous and light-headed as it rang. ‘This is Todd.’

‘Todd? Yeah, um, this is Chance? Chance York. You were just here a bit ago because of my neighbour’s...’

‘Did you go all Paul Bunyan on its ass?’

Chance grinned like an idiot. Todd remembered! He remembered it all. ‘No. God damn, I wish. This, sadly, is just another drop of another branch. So I assume. All I know is I got back and my dog is lying here in the foyer where he never ever hangs out. But it’s cool. And there’s no AC running, no lights, no computer. No friggin’ nothing,’ he finished.

‘I’ll type it in as an emergency repair and be there as soon as I wrap up this new transformer.’

‘Thank you.’

‘You sure you didn’t tamper with that tree, boy?’

Chance shivered when he said “boy”. ‘Nope. Not me.’

‘Is the chimney still intact?’

‘Hold up, I’ll check.’ Chance ran into the kitchen where he had the best view of the chimney. ‘Still fine.’

‘Damn it.’ Todd hung up.

Now all he had to do was wait for him. No problem.

Wait patiently. Not be horny. Not even give it a second thought. That he'd be here, again. Alone with him. Hanging on a giant pole, risking life and limb, playing with electric wires. Dangerous, dangerous, tedious work ...

Chance nearly broke his neck racing to his room. 'OK, just this one time. So I'm not all skittish and nervous and manic.'

He took himself in hand, stroking his cock softly at first but going firmer almost instantly. He held the image of Todd, feet positioned on those pinions on the pole, in his mind. He saw him in his coveralls and his boots, his shorn head shiny in the midday sun. His water-blue eyes hidden by those wraparound, bad-ass shades. His cock ready for Chance, or so Chance imagined.

'Mercy,' he sighed, his fist slipping up and down, up and down so that he heard the rasp of skin on skin. He felt the crawling, heated weight of orgasm low in his belly. Gritted his teeth, shook his head, remembered the hot feel of Todd's lips so close to his and then the way he backed off and left him wanting more.

His brain, bored with just how good looking Todd was, switched it up to Todd hovering over him, pushing Chance's legs wide, leaning between his parted thighs their cocks brushing with maddening friction. Then Todd planted a kiss on Chance's waiting lips, stood – tall and burly, naked in this daydream – and plunged his cock deep. Chance rocked under him, begging him, his hand warring with Todd's hand to be on his eager cock. Then Todd stayed seated deep and bent, impossibly limber, and sucked the tip of Chance's cock until he cried out and came in a long gush of release.

'God, in my head he's Gumby. Biker Gumby,' Chance laughed, coming hard to keep time with his

fantasy. Then the doorbell bonged and he yelped sharply.

Downstairs Elvis gave one bored woof and then silence.

The SGE man was here. Todd was here.

‘Here I am,’ Todd said and grinned.

Chance had never been so grateful for having jacked off in his life. If he hadn’t, he would have been managing an erection he could have done sword battle with. ‘Here you are. Is it up?’

Todd’s eyes drifted low and he grinned wider, his smile very much a predatory leer. ‘Don’t know. Is it? We can work on that if you ...’

‘God, I meant the line.’ Chance blushed hotly and felt stupid for it. ‘The line, is the line up?’ But then he glanced around and saw that his computer light was still off, his AC wasn’t running and the digital clock on his cable box was dark.

‘Not yet. I wanted to let you know that I’ll be over there. And then I’ll be back to get your feedback on your service.’

‘Pardon?’

‘We have these things we need to ask people to fill out now. You rate your service. You tell them how you like me.’ The big man chuckled and leaned into the crack in the doorway. Instead of shutting the door, Chance pulled it wider, wanting to allow more of Todd into his home.

‘Oh,’ he said. His mouth was about two inches from the pink lips of a man he very much wanted to kiss. Not just kiss. Kiss hard and then maul like a grizzly in heat.

‘So ... how do you like me?’

It occurred to him to say *naked* but instead Chance said, ‘Just fine, thanks. I like you very much.’

‘Yeah?’

‘Yes.’

‘I’ll be back. You can prove it.’ Then he turned and all Chance could see was broad worker-man back. All Chance could hear was his own heartbeat.

He rushed into the kitchen and parted the white curtains to watch Todd mount the pole. Then he laughed to himself. ‘Mount the pole, Jesus, Chance. You are such a pervert.’

He was near the top with the electric line looped over his shoulder like a thin black snake. It was a damn good thing, Chance realised, that the stupid wire had a lot of give. From his kitchen perch he could just make out the gnarled tip of the tree branch that had fallen since Todd left this morning. No thicker than his arm, it looked like it was reaching for *his* repairman with haunted, gaunt fingers.

‘My repairman,’ he said on a sigh.

He watched Todd’s big arms flex as he looped the line around its securing hook. Then he watched, nearly salivating, as the big man reached out with one long arm and knocked down a few dead limbs that hung there like wooden icicles. They hit the ground with a soundless clatter since the windows were shut and at that moment the air conditioner jumped back to life.

‘Nice,’ he said. ‘I give you five stars.’

It was only a few moments later that the doorbell rang again. This time, Elvis didn’t even bother to bark.

Chance counted his steps to the front door so he wouldn’t appear too eager. One hot workman, two hot workmen, three hot workmen ... four. When he opened the door, fully prepared for the man on the other side, his blood leaped anyway. ‘Wow, that was fast. Thank you, thank you. It gets hot in here fast,’ he said and then felt

his cheeks grow red again. He had to get a handle on this blushing thing.

‘I bet. OK, I’m done. I just need you to ...’

‘Come on in. Out of the sun. You’re sweaty,’ Chance said, and heard the lust in his final word himself.

Todd smiled, but it was only half a smile. An ornery kind of smile that twisted Chance’s stomach into nervous knots and made his cock forget that he’d already gotten off today.

‘Very,’ Todd said. ‘But I have to bolt. I have an affair to get to.’

‘Lucky guy.’ Chance meant to say it in his head but somehow it popped out of his mouth, too.

‘More like “lucky nephew”. I am speaking to a very bored, very energetic group of second graders in about an hour. Career day.’ This time when he smiled it was lovely and heart warming and Chance felt his heart expand in his chest.

‘Wow. I doubt they will be bored.’

‘Hope not.’ Todd pushed his sunglasses back and there were those water-blue eyes again. ‘Now – about how you like me.’

Naked

‘Right. I’ll get you something cold and you pull it out.’

Todd chuckled.

‘The paperwork. I’ll be right back.’

Elvis pranced after him. Usually a trip to the kitchen meant food. He wasn’t very happy when he found his master pouring a cold glass of tea for the new person. ‘Soon, I promise, buddy.’

Elvis didn’t look convinced.

‘Here we go. Nice and cold since you’re so hot.’ He heard himself two beats later again and froze. ‘My God. I

can't seem to say anything clean around you at all,' he said and sighed.

Todd took the glass, running jut the tip of his finger along Chance's finger so his skin sang with the touch. 'I'll take it as a compliment,' he said and again downed his drink in three easy gulps. 'Here you are.'

Chance barely looked at the form. He ran down the list giving his new crush all five stars. Then he put 'Super fast and great service!' In the comments section and handed the yellow and white slip back.

'Wow, a clean sweep. Thanks. Glad you liked me so much.'

Todd leaned in close and Chance's lips shivered with excitement. 'You're welcome,' Chance managed.

'Again, I'd kiss you but you could ...'

Chance grabbed a hold of the big tan face and yanked Todd forward. He heard the other man's heavy boots clomp on the hardwood floor as he tugged him off balance. He pushed his lips to Todd's warm lips and kissed him hard. Their tongues darted out to dance against each other and Chance tasted the cold, sweet tang of tea on Todd's lips. 'I know. I could sue you. You could sue me. But I'll risk it,' he mumbled and kissed harder, forcing himself to forget that he'd been the aggressor. Not the norm for him.

Todd's hands found his waist and he hauled Chance forward so that they were hip to hip, pelvis to pelvis, cock to cock. And both were hard. Then he pushed Chance back again and said, 'I have to go. I can't disappoint Tyler, but call me. Since you like me so much.'

'But I ...' How do you say you are used to being pursued, not the pursuer? And was Becca right? Was Todd fucking with him?

'You have my card still – right?' Todd traced one

callused finger along Chance's jaw and Chance felt his body erupt in goose bumps.

‘I do.’

‘Then use it when you're ready.’

Chapter Three

‘JUST CALLED TO SAY THANKS, baby cakes! You did a great job. And to see if you’ve heard from your uber manly man yet.’

‘He came back. And climbed a pole,’ Chance sighed, sinking down on the front porch glider. Elvis was still giving him the stink eye for not forking over a treat.

‘Was it yours?’

‘Har har.’

‘You mean it wasn’t yours and you had to watch! Of all the ner ...’

‘Becca!’

‘What – more tree fell down?’

‘Yes.’

‘*And?*’

‘And then he came in and I gave him a drink like last time and he teased me about kissing me and me suing and ...’

‘And!’

‘And I kissed him.’

‘Ooooh, you went all alpha male, Chance. Good for you.’

‘It felt weird.’

‘I bet.’

‘What is that supposed to mean?’ he barked.

‘You are a bit of a princess,’ she said.

‘Jesus.’

‘It’ll be good for you. Get the old blood going. What did he say?’

‘To call if I wanted. I had the number.’

‘Are you going to call him?’

‘I don’t know.’ Chance blew out a breath. ‘You know me.’

‘Yep, princess.’

‘Shurt it,’ he growled.

‘Call him,’ she said.

‘But why? Why is he torturing me?’

‘He’s fucking with you. Pushing you. I like him, I told you.’

‘Because you are a sadist.’

‘Maybe he is, too,’ Becca laughed.

‘Oh. My. God.’ Chance hung up to the sound of her laughter.

Three times. He’d masturbated three times and still couldn’t shake the idea of Todd from his head. The sun was down and a thunderstorm had blown in, fast and hard. Chance watched his arch nemesis, the tree, sway and dance and dip in the wind. For the first time ever he stood there praying for it to drop a limb. Maybe the big one. Maybe the one that would tug down part of the chimney too. Then he could not only call Todd with a good excuse, but he could also be the bearer of good news that his plan had worked.

Instead the fucking tree decided that would be the perfect time to not drop a limb. Not even a twig.

‘I swear it knows I want it to drop something,’ he told Elvis. Elvis rolled his eyes.

‘I’ll never be able to sleep thinking about him. No one’s gotten in my head this way for a very long time.

Like *ever*,' he admitted.

Elvis snorted like a pig and wagged his tail once.

'I really need to get some friends since I seem to bore you,' Chance said.

Elvis yawned.

He tried watching a mindless movie on demand. Some shoot 'em up flick full of ripply beefy men who blew things up and tossed out catchy one-liners. After ten o'clock, he was tired but wired. A horrible, horrible combination.

You tell them how you like me. He heard it in his head and said to the dog, 'Naked. I like him naked. I mean, I assume I do ...'

He dozed off on the sofa and woke to pounding rain and lightning. The power flickered off and on and he rushed to the window to see if the tree had dropped any of its limbs. Nothing.

It was midnight before the thunderstorm passed. Chance cradled a micro brew and nursed it. When it became clear that a) the tree was stable for the time being and b) his reoccurring hard-on wasn't going anywhere any time soon, he made a decision. He set his alarm for five and rolled over to try and sleep.

Sleep he did. Of course his dreams were riddled with nasty naughty hot dreams of a certain SGE worker and he woke up with his hand shoved in his pants getting himself off, but that was a minor detail.

'Elvis, stay here. This is dangerous work.' He gathered his painting ladder, a construction helmet from a previous job and the limb cutters his uncle Jerry had given him as a housewarming gift (and he had scoffed at, for the record). Thank God the previous neighbour had put a connecting door in the fence that separated MacGruder's yard from his. Whoever owned the home before

MacGruder had been friends with the Tomlins who'd owned his home previously.

'Here we go. One gas and electric man coming right up.' Chance got to the third step on his painting ladder and it wobbled a bit in the wet yard. Two legs had started to sink and two hadn't. Mud squelched up around the rubber stick-grip feet. 'Just one good whack and ...'

He took a swipe at a medium-sized limb with his cutters and the whole ladder trembled a bit. At about five feet long, the cutter sported a sharp metal jaw on the business end for grabbing and lopping off small and medium branches from the ground. He didn't want to cut them, though. That would be obvious. He wanted to knock them down as if the storm had done it.

'Fuuuu-uuuck,' Chance said. 'Why can't you be normal, asshole, and just call and ask the man out.' He took another swing. 'Grow some balls!' Another swing.

Birds tweeted in the early morning air and the sky was just starting to turn that lavender colour he liked. 'Be a man!' Chance chided himself and finally connected with the tip of a smaller branch. A dry cracking sound hit his ears even as he tumbled off the ladder and he smiled. And yet the damn limb stayed on.

'Oh my God. Why?' He gasped. For weeks now the oak had dropped limbs if a butterfly flew by. Now he was playing the world's most demented game of whack the piñata and nothing.

He lay there watching the sun streak the lavender sky with blue and then shots of gold. Chance sighed, trying to regroup with a new game plan when the branch gave way with a snap, it snagged the trim black electric line on its way down and tossed it to the middle of the yard. Then it came down on his shin. It was heavier than it looked.

'Motherfucker,' he growled, but grinned anyway.

Then he limped home, dragging his ladder and his limb trimmer with him.

‘Don’t even,’ he said to the dog and plopped on the sofa, dropping an ice pack he kept in the freezer on the growing knot on his shin. ‘I have succeeded. No matter how many war wounds I might have.’

The dog grunted, wagged once, waited for food and went back to sleep when he got none.

On top of the growing knot on his leg, Chance had a huge scratch up his arm from the fingers of the branch and one on his cheek. He had a knot on the back of his head where he’d collapsed and the helmet had hit his head. ‘Who gets injured by a hard hat for fuck’s sake?’ But he grinned again like a madman and dialled the phone number on the card he clutched. Chance ran his fingertips over the raised words “Todd Lewis”.

A sleepy voice said, ‘This is Todd. What is it? It better be good.’

Chance’s voice deserted him but flashes of his dirty wet dreams came rushing down on him like a mental rain of smut. ‘Um ... hi, this is ...’

‘I know who this is. Did it drop another one?’ He sounded more awake now and Chance pictured him all yummy and hot and naked in a bed full of tousled sheets and overstuffed pillows. Morning sunshine shooting through the window and glistening on his muscles. Did he have a tattoo? Where was it? What did it say? What did it mean? Would he let Chance kiss it?

Chance jumped when Todd said, ‘Helloooooo? You there?’

‘Yes. Another limb is down and the power is out.’ There he hadn’t lied. He didn’t say another one fell. He said another one was down.

‘You weren’t out there going all Paul Bunyan were

you?’ Chance heard the sheets rustle on the other end as the object of his desire sat up in his warm, mussed bed.

‘Nope. No axe,’ Chance said. There. Again, he hadn’t lied. He was getting good at that.

‘I’ll be there in about twenty,’ Todd rasped, his voice still a bit sleepy. ‘Be ready for me.’ Then he chuckled once and hung up.

What did that mean?

Chance scurried up to take a shower. It would be cold without power, but so be it. A cold shower might be exactly what he needed.

He hadn’t even put on his uniform and Chance did a double take. In a short sleeved plain white T-shirt, faded jeans and work boots, the man looked sexier than he had in his work coveralls if that was possible.

‘It’s up.’

‘Is it now,’ Chance said, but again his cheeks flared hot. He had to get better at banter. ‘Come on in. Coffee?’

‘Magic word. Right up there with food and sex.’

‘Well, I can offer you food.’

‘And?’ Todd turned fast in the short, thin hallway, his water-blue gaze pinning Chance.

Chance swallowed hard. He had the urge to blurt the truth. Instead he said. ‘And I ... um ...’

Todd took a step in, crowding him to the wall, pinning him in. When he spoke his lips hovered over Chance’s. He could feel Todd’s warm breath and smell toothpaste on his mouth. ‘Don’t you want to offer me sex?’ He grinned.

‘I ...’

His big hands clamped down on Chance’s biceps and he held him there physically. Pinned him to the wall and pushed his back to the louvered door of the coat closet.

When Todd's lips touched his Chance felt his body go limp like he might faint. He'd never felt more boneless but for a particularly nasty bout with the flu. He stood there, perfectly powerless and opened his lips to let Todd's tongue bully his. The kiss deepened and the bigger man stepped in even further, his chest and belly pressed to Chance's as the slats of the closet door pressed his back.

'Don't you?' Todd asked again.

'I do, actually. But that is so slutty,' Chance said, accepting soft baby kisses that made his skin tingle and his nipples go hard. His skin buzzed and thrummed and all the small hairs under his hairline rose up in a wave.

'It's the damndest thing,' Todd said, his fingers caressing the hard ridge of Chance's cock. Chance didn't let himself think, he pushed his hips forward to place his hard-on more firmly in Todd's capable hands.

'What is? What is?' he chanted.

'That branch looked like it has been whacked down. The splintering was all wrong.'

Chance stilled and Todd laughed against his mouth, the rumble working through his lips and his throat and chest. 'Really? How odd.'

'Really odd.' Todd pulled the top button of Chance's jeans and yanked. The whole row proceeded to pop one after another in capitulation to the newcomer's strength. 'You know what was more odd?'

When Todd's hand slipped inside Chance's jeans and boxers his breath disappeared. Chance tried hard to draw a deep breath and failed. He felt like a fish out of water, gasping and begging for more air. 'What? Dear Christ, what?'

Todd's hand started a slow but persistent rhythm on Chance's cock and Chance groaned like he was dying. He thought maybe he was dying. But what a fucking way to

go.

‘What’s even more odd is the guy next door to that house who saw, and I quote, *“that loony who lives behind me out in the backyard in a hard hat hitting limbs with a stick”*.’

‘It was a tree pruner,’ Chance corrected as Todd relieved him of his pants. ‘And it’s your fault.’

‘How so?’ Todd now tugged. He tugged him from the hallway into the kitchen and leaned him back against the giant butcher’s block that was Chances’ pride and joy.

‘You could have just asked me out like a normal person.’

‘And miss all the fun?’

‘I...’ But Chance had nothing good to say so he tugged at Todd, yanking at his T-shirt where he normally would have tugged at hair. He kissed him, arching up to try and come in contact with the man in all his entirety.

‘Condoms? Grease?’

‘Grease?’

He laughed. ‘Lube. Something to make us all slippery and dirty and ...’

‘What makes you think I’m going to fuck you?’ Chance asked.

‘You have no pants on.’

‘And.’

Todd cocked his head and frowned. ‘Bend over.’

Chance caved then. He pointed to a drawer and said ‘There’s a travel kit in there. It’s all inside.’

‘Don’t move.’

Chance listened to Todd scrounging through the drawers. He felt the cool kiss of fingers to his opening and the warm kiss of lips to the back of his neck. ‘No preamble?’ He laughed, though, because truth be told he needed no preamble. He wanted Todd to take him as he

imagined Todd took men. Hard and fast and frightfully good.

‘Do you need some wine and maybe a cigarette?’

‘No,’ he breathed.

Todd’s zipper growled and Chance turned his head to watch. The big man shucked his jeans and tugged his boxer briefs down revealing a spectacular erection. ‘Do you need me to woo you?’ Todd asked, rolling on a condom. He slipped one callused hand along his length and winked at Chance.

‘No.’

Todd pinned him with a stark gaze. ‘Do you need me to fuck you so your knees give out?’

Chance’s mouth went dry, but he nodded. Here in the early light, in his pretty kitchen, with the pole-climbing behemoth, all he could do was nod dumbly.

‘Good boy,’ Todd said and dropped another wink before taking a big hand and pressing Chance’s back until he bent over the rough wood butcher’s block with his hands splayed like he was under arrest.

Todd squeezed his ass cheeks and Chance snickered, he couldn’t help it. But then a loud smack filled the small kitchen and a split second later a line of pain danced over his buttocks. ‘Don’t laugh. You’ve got a sweet ass. Perfect for spanking,’ Todd said.

Chance laughed again, sure he was joking, but instead he swallowed his chuckle because Todd smacked the other cheek harder than the first. Heat seared up his ass and down his flank. ‘You’re not kidding?’ he gasped.

Todd delivered four more blows and Chance found himself pressing his cock to the hard edge of the butcher’s block to gain friction. His pulse was trip hammering and his ears rang.

‘Fuck no, I’m not kidding.’ Three more slaps and the

pain sang, hot and white through Chance but when Todd reached around him and grasped his cock, working him with a firm slippery fist, he thought he'd come right there. Or die.

'I see that. I've never been spanked. Tied up, yes. Spanked, no.'

'Is that so?' Todd said against the back of his neck and his skin tingled so much he shivered.

'Yeah.'

'How about whipping?' Todd asked Chance, circling his hole with the tip of his cock.

Chance shook his head, holding his breath, waiting for the invasion of heat and flesh. Instead, Todd circled some more, the lube making his gentle ministrations slick and maddening.

Todd shook his head, gripping the wood, begging in his head for Todd to slide into him and fuck him senseless. He managed a soft, 'No'.

'Caning, flogging, paddling?' Todd teased. He entered Chance, just the tip, just enough to send Chance's poor body into a flurry and an uproar.

'No, no, no.'

'We can fix that. Soon, if you behave,' Todd said, and gave Chance a smack and on his gasp, he slid home, entering with a rough thrust that made Chance gasp a second time. Todd's hand worked his cock and Chance held on for dear life as the bigger man rocked against him.

'Yes, please fix that,' he babbled. He moved back to meet Todd's thrust, feeling the heated swirl of pleasure roll through his belly. His fingers shook with his nerves and arousal and he wished he could kiss Todd. Instead, he laid himself flat like a human banquet for Todd to enjoy. He sprawled his fingers on the oversized wooden block and heard Todd grunt.

‘Damn, you look so fucking perfect like that. So vulnerable and ripe for the picking,’ Todd said.

‘I am ripe for the picking.’

‘Let’s check your stem,’ came the gruff voice and then a laugh as he reached under and squeezed Chance’s dick so hard Chance saw spots, but when he released him, the pleasure rolled over him fast. He felt hot and flushed and so ready to come he could weep.

‘My stem is ready.’

‘Christ, you’re pretty. I’m glad you decided to assault that tree.’

‘I would nev ...’

‘Save it.’

‘Yes, sir,’ Chance managed as he lost his battle and started to jerk under Todd. The orgasm slammed him as surely as the tree limb had slammed his leg and he blew out a gust of air.

‘Fuck. You had to say sir?’ Todd growled and his fingers bit into Chance’s flanks, pressing white crescents in the flesh and anchoring him tight. He came with a final buck and a huge sigh and then his forehead was pressed to Chance’s slim back.

Chance felt a kiss dropped there, just a warm flicker of lips on his spine and then Todd was pulling free of him. He turned fast, feeling anxious and clingy but worried too that if he didn’t speak. ‘I ... wow.’

Todd dropped the tied-off condom in the trash. ‘Wow, indeed.’ Somewhere in his jeans a beeper sounded. ‘Gotta get that.’

Chance eyed his muscular legs, trim waist, the bruise on his right knee and the scar on Todd’s left thigh. His body was a roadmap of years and stories and time. Chance wanted to hear every story. Know about each battle wound and each blemish.

‘Gotta go. There’s a big ass maple down on Kittredge Road. They need a bunch of us.’ He hauled Chance forward brusquely and kissed him hard. ‘Thanks for the morning pick me up. Don’t go getting a concussion out there, OK? You get hit on the head, even by a little one and you’re toast.’

‘Remember my hard hat?’ Chance sighed. He sought another kiss and was rewarded with a hard press of soft lips to his, teeth clacking his, a tongue bullying his tongue until he felt his cock stir again.

‘How could I forget?’ Todd laughed. He offered one more kiss, put his jeans on and smacked Chance on the ass. Hard.

This is it, Chance thought. This is where he asks me out.

‘Call me if you need anything or to report for repair,’ Todd said and left Chance gaping like a fish once again.

The front door snicked shut, the dog looked up and Chance said, ‘Son of a bitch.’

Elvis went back to sleep.

Chapter Four

‘YOU JUST NEED to chill out. You’re all torqued up after Allen and you can’t be that way. This guy isn’t Allen. They all aren’t Allen. He convinced you that you couldn’t do anything, so now you believe it. I think it’s good that you have to be the pursuer guy. I think you need that.’

‘I hate it.’

‘You can do it,’ Becca sighed. ‘What are you doing for me today?’ she asked. She was pregnant, recently married and running her own skin care line. Busy didn’t begin to cover Becca.

‘I don’t think so.’

‘Honey, when we were in college you used to pick up men left and right. You barely had to speak to them. You were a pro. Now look at you, convinced you can’t pick up a guy who’s already been there, made himself clear that he wants you *and* banged you? What do you want, an engraved invitation?’

‘Maybe.’

‘Are you looking for a more permanent job?’

‘I like what I’m doing for you. I’m good at it, too. Aren’t I?’

‘Yep. Usually. Unless you’re thinking with little Chance and are all preoccupied.’

‘Har, har.’

‘But yes, love, you normally are the bomb. I think

you should have like three high end clients and be their bitch and run yourself ragged and charge mad fees.'

'Done and done. I am a good organiser type person,' he said.

'You are. Now go back to your mental space from college and get that man to kneel before you and beg you for your favours.'

'I think with this guy it works the other way around,' Chance said, brushing back the curtain and eyeing the tree. He switched the phone to the other ear and then poured the last of the coffee left in the pot.

'You mean he wants *you* to kneel?'

Chance heard the deep murmur of Becca's husband, Shawn, in the background. He worked with his new wife running the promotions end of her line. He still did some of his accountant work, but mostly freelance and only during tax season.

'Pretty much. I'm sure Shawn loves hearing this.'

'He asked that I let him leave the room before he was struck deaf,' Becca snorted.

'Gee, thanks.'

'It's not you. He doesn't like to hear dirty details about anyone. Now back to your whip cracker.'

'Seriously. He's a top, babe.'

'Does that bother you?' she asked.

'Nope. Sweetie, you know damn well when it comes to the bedroom I am a total bottom.'

'A bottom with a great bottom,' she giggled.

'Christ, now you sound like him.'

'Told you I liked him,' Becca said. 'Now will you call him?'

'Any bad weather due today?'

'Maybe late this afternoon,' she said.

'We'll see then,' Chance said and hung up. Then he

proceeded to do Becca's grocery shopping, stop by her apartment, put it all away, leave her a whole bundle of real estate and vacation brochures she'd asked for. He also walked Nips her cat because Becca was a lunatic who walked her fat, old cat on a leash around the block. Then he fed all the birds she insisted on feeding.

'Good thing her business is booming,' he told Nips. 'I'm so efficient, I'm going to cost her a fortune.'

Nips did a good Elvis impression by shutting his eyes and going to sleep.

His phone rang again as he was leaving. 'Chance,' he said, hopeful because he didn't recognise the number.

'This is Becca.'

'Oh.'

'Sorr-eeee.'

'I thought it might be him. Foreign number.'

'Ah, it's Shawn's phone. Sorry, babe. But I did call with good news.'

'Oh yeah? What's that?'

'Severe thunderstorms tonight,' she said.

Chance laughed but in the pit of his stomach something tingled. He heard Todd say to him, *Bend over*. Remembered that perfect sublime moment when he came and the burly repairman followed suit. God, he could feel the warmth of Todd's lips on the back of his neck if he focused hard enough.

'I'll cross my fingers for you,' she said. 'Oh, give Nips a piece of cheese!' Then she hung up.

'Nips, you fleabag, wake up and get your cheese.' At the word "cheese", the giant calico unfolded himself and bounded after Chance. 'Cheese whore.'

So he was sitting and praying to the rain gods that it would dump and the winds would blow and that

treacherous piece of shit tree he normally feared would drop branches like leaves.

Allen had been a good boyfriend in most respects, but not very supportive in others. He'd often treated Chance like he didn't know what he was doing. From cooking an egg to calling a repairman for a sump pump. After a bit, Chance had let him do it all and had worked in a retail flower store. Something he enjoyed.

'You have no creativity,' he'd said.

Chance had creativity, but it was more with stuff like flowers and time management, but Allen was a painter and viewed that as nothing more than frivolous time wasting.

It was Becca who had offered him the assistant job. It was Becca who had insisted he run so much of her life like it was his own and keep her in ship shape. It was Becca who had given him his self confidence back. And it was Becca who had said "dump him" when Chance had finally stressed how unhappy he was with Allen.

Now he was back in his house alone stalking the electric man and praying for rain damage. Chance grinned. 'But I feel all tingly and alive. Or maybe that's just approaching lightning.'

The phone rang and Chance jumped. 'Hello?'

'Big storm coming. Be careful.'

'Todd?' Chance's heart skittered in his chest.

'The one and only. I just wanted to make sure you weren't running around out there under the tree in a hard hat with a big metal rod.'

Chance felt laughter bubble up out of him and he tried to clamp his lips shut. He failed. 'No. I won't be doing my human lightning-rod routine. Don't worry.'

'Good. Gotta go.'

'But wait! That was...'

But Todd was gone.

Chance made himself a grilled cheese and tomato soup. He poured a huge glass of red wine and watched the winds rise and toss the trees in the neighbourhood like girls in hoop skirts. The leaves undulated in a wind he could not feel but could see.

Little spitting rain flecked the clean window glass and the old frames rattled with a burst of thunder.

‘Come on ...’

The tree rocked and swayed. Something that in the past would have had him a nervous wreck, instead he held his breath, praying for something, anything to drop. Nothing.

Chance went to bed with a big glass of wine, a mystery novel and a short simple prayer to whoever might be listening that the power would be knocked out. He fell asleep reading and when a huge crack of thunder at two a.m. was followed by Elvis barking his ass off, he crawled out of bed, stiff and groggy.

‘What is it?’ he yawned. The light in his room was still on; the digital readout on the cable box glowed red. ‘What is it, you fat wiener do ...’

A knock came and Chance jumped. It was the middle of the night. He had no idea who it could be. His insides warred, part excitement, part fear. He pushed his eye to the peephole only to see an eye peering back at him. He couldn’t tell what colour it was but he bet it was the same colour as clear clean water reflecting a pale summer sky.

‘Hello?’

‘Can you let me in before I get fried by a rogue lightning bolt?’ Todd demanded.

He undid the chains and opened the door. Todd stood on the threshold unmoving and dripping wet.

‘What are you doing here?’

The light in the foyer that he kept on all night flickered as the wind gusted and the rain increased in volume.

‘Hello to you, too,’ Todd said.

‘Come in, come in.’ Chance took a step back, but Todd didn’t move.

‘I don’t want to date anyone.’

Chance frowned. ‘OK. Well ... has anyone asked you to date them?’

‘You know what I mean.’

‘I guess. I think ... not really.’

‘I don’t want to date anyone, think about anyone while I’m eating, showering, working out or folding my clothes.’

‘I...’

Todd bullied on, ‘And I don’t want to worry about anyone without power or maybe being under a big ass tree in a huge storm. I don’t want to wonder what someone is doing or wearing or thinking. And I certainly don’t want to obsess over the feel of someone’s lips.’

A small puddle of water formed on the tile of the foyer. Wind tugged at Chance’s lounge pants and he considered pointing out that he was letting all his AC out, but instead kept his big mouth shut. He was so stunned that random rogue thoughts kept popping into his brain. But he pressed his lips together and nodded.

‘I don’t want to be here.’

‘I see.’

‘Can I come in?’

‘Of course.’ He took one more step back to prove his point.

Todd came into the house just enough that Chance could shut the door. ‘I’m wet,’ he said.

‘I noticed.’ Chance grinned but the smile went

unreturned and he glanced around for a towel or a blanket.

‘Were you sleeping?’

‘Yeah. I was waiting for ... the tree. Hoping ...’

Todd laughed. ‘You are weird, you know that?’

‘So I’ve been told.’

‘You know, I’m out of relationships six months now. I had to do everything. Always the aggressor. I didn’t want to come here.’ He said it again but instead of sounding angry, he sounded tired.

‘So that’s why you tortured me with the whole “call me” thing.’

Todd shook his head, said nothing, continued to drip.

‘Let me get you a towel,’ Chance said and hurried to the coat closet. He grabbed a beach towel from the tote he kept there year round. When he returned, Todd was watching droplets of water splash the red tile floor.

‘It gets exhausting, always being in control.’

‘But you like to be?’ Chance wiped off the other man’s shorn head gently. Like Todd was breakable. Because at that moment in time he damn near seemed to be.

‘But not always.’

‘I get it.’ He unbuttoned Todd’s blue work shirt, dropped it on the floor. He towelled the dampness from his skin and then kissed a line from nipple to nipple. Then a few more kisses from chest to belly button. When he spoke again, Todd’s voice was rough.

‘Oh, you get it?’

‘Yep. I like to relinquish control. But not always,’ Chance said, tugging the silver belt buckle and then popping buttons. ‘Once in a great while I like to take matters into my own hands.’

‘Yeah?’

‘Yeah.’ Chance slipped his hand down into Todd’s jeans, closing around his cock with a firm fist. It felt good to touch him. The warm heft of his sex in the palm of Chance’s hand. Chance’s own cock went hard in the span of a heartbeat.

Chance tugged the wet denim down until he couldn’t get it any further and Todd helped him. Then he wiped his magic towel along all the flesh revealed. His lips followed suit and wherever he wiped, he kissed. Small kisses, long kisses, gentle and hard. He kissed each inch of Todd who seemed to sway on his feet.

‘Is that what you’re doing now?’ Todd threaded his fingers through Chance’s hair and tugged just a bit. Not enough to hurt but enough to get his attention.

‘Trying.’ He pushed the other man a bit and Todd turned his back to him. Chance wiped each buttock slowly and followed with his lips and tongue. He parted Todd’s cheeks and kissed and licked the moist skin in smaller and smaller circles until he rimmed the tight bud of his anus with the tip of his tongue. When he pushed his hand between Todd’s legs and felt him hard and ready, his pulse jackrabbited.

‘You’re doing a good job.’

‘Thanks. Now turn around.’

Todd turned, his erection standing out like a handle. Chance laughed softly and grabbed it, pushing his lips to the tip before Todd could even get his balance. He slipped his mouth slowly up the shaft so that those big hands flew back to his shoulders, his hair, his face. Todd made a soft noise and then a deeper one. His hips rocked slowly as he thrust against his lover’s face.

‘Don’t move now, or I’ll stop.’

‘Now that’s not ...’

Chance tsked. ‘Now don’t argue or we’re done here.’

‘You’re getting the hang of it,’ Todd growled.

‘Still.’ Chance tilted his head so he could look Todd dead in the eye as he went down further, taking the full length of his cock into his mouth, his throat, until he couldn’t breathe and didn’t care. Tears sparked in his eyes and he sucked in a deep breath through his nose.

‘If you had any fucking idea how hot you looked doing that ...’

He sucked hard, and gave a brisk stroke with his hand and then pulled back. ‘I plan to see how fucking hot you look doing it for me,’ Chance said matter of factly.

‘Oh do you?’

‘I do.’

Todd frowned but then his face softened in a smile. ‘We’ll see.’

‘There’s no, “we’ll see”. Shut up and let me make you come.’

‘Yes, sir,’ Todd said but he snickered at the end. No one thought that he was really the one to follow orders or that Chance was the one to give them. But for this moment in time, with the flashing lightning and the rolling thunder, they would play it that way.

‘That’s more like it.’ Chance went down again, dragging his lips and his tongue, relishing each slippery moment of friction between cock and mouth. He sucked in the warm rich taste of Todd. Sweat and clean clothes and smoky flavours that made him think of cigars and autumn.

Sometimes a cigar is just a cigar. And sometimes a cigar is a cock ... That’s what Becca always said and it struck him as so funny he started to laugh even as he slid his mouth slowly along the hard length of Todd’s dick.

‘Don’t laugh for fuck’s sake. It’s vibrating and ...’

He cupped Todd’s balls, squeezing gently, letting

them slide around a bit in his palm before squeezing again. He played his fingers over his inner thigh and behind Todd's balls.

'Fuck me hard,' Todd gasped.

'Later,' Chance said and smiled.

'Hunh. I plan to bend you over and ...'

He pushed his finger into Todd's ass, one hard smooth push and he was in and cutting off the bigger man's words. He fucked him slowly with first one finger then two, the hot smooth flesh letting him enter, gripping up around him. Chance's mouth never rested, he was kinetic. Cheeks aching, eyes watering, nose full of the sexy scent of Todd. When Todd grabbed his hair and tugged and began fucking his mouth for real, he let him go. Chance gave up the illusion of power and sucked for all he was worth as Todd rammed all the way home and came with a roar that rivalled the thunder. Then he dropped to his knees in the foyer, still wet on his eyelashes and brows and kissed Chance.

'That was pretty good for a first time in charge.'

'I've been in charge before.' Chance kissed him back, touched his face, relished the salty taste of his kisses. 'But not with certain people. People who make me ...'

Todd's hands were on his cock, stroking him. Chance found himself moving forward in a rocking motion to get more contact. To get more touch.

'People who make you what?'

'Nervous. Jittery. Electrocuted.'

'I electrocute you?' Todd's eyebrow shot up and he froze.

'In a good way. You make me feel like I'm gripping a live wire.'

'Wanna feel like you're dying? But in a good way?' He pushed Chance back on the hardwood floor and

covered him with his body.

‘Fuck yes.’

‘Good. Here we go.’

Chapter Five

TODD'S HANDS WERE STILL COOL from the rain as he tugged down Chance's pyjama pants. He pushed Chance's legs high, so high they nearly kissed his shoulders. His mouth was as warm as his hands were cool and he kissed Chance's chest, darting out his tongue in silken strokes, leaving wet trails on his skin. His sharp teeth clamped on first one nipple then the other. Chance danced under him, wanting to move but trying so hard not to. 'Stay still now. I'm going to take my time.'

The storm howled outside, lightning flashing against the dark windowpanes, creating disco flashes of light. Todd dragged the flat of his tongue down the middle of Chance's chest – what felt to Chance like the middle of his very being – until he hit hipbones. Then he licked each sharp ridge, dragging out the moments where Chance held his breath and prayed for contact. The feel of that tongue on his cock, on the tip of him, down low, on his testicles ... just on him.

And hold his breath he did. He watched the meagre light glow on Todd's shaven head. Watched the cut of his jaw and the angle of his nose and the pink tip of his tongue dart out to draw invisible blazing lines on his skin. 'Say please,' Todd said.

Chance shook his head. Bit his tongue. Refused.

Todd shrugged, his hands lacing around Chance's

ankles. He held his legs high and wide, he kissed the back of each thigh and then lower still with his demanding kisses. He nipped Chance's right ass cheek and Chance jumped, blowing out the breath he'd been holding. 'Jesus.'

The sharp stab of pain bled into a warm yellow pleasure and Chance sighed. Todd moved his hand, darted his tongue to the tight ring of his anus and then promptly bit the other cheek. Chance jumped again, his cock so hard he thought he might pass out. That burst of pain that became malleable and turned to pleasure had him damn near vibrating.

Todd drew out the torture, kissing all around Chance's sweet spot. He kissed and licked every place but his cock and Chance shook his head in frustration. 'All you have to do is ask,' Todd chuckled. He touched a rough fingertip to the very tip of Chance's cock, gathering the small dot of pre-come. Then he gazed up at Chance with those liquid eyes and licked his finger.

'Fuck. Fine. I cave, please.'

'Please what?'

'Suck my dick!' Chance wheezed, feeling like he might laugh or cry or possibly a combination of both.

'Hmm. I'm not sure if ...'

'Todd!'

One more dark laugh and Todd dipped his head and took him in. The inside of his mouth the closest thing to heaven Chance could imagine. Or maybe it was partly the strong, powerful hands holding his ankles like they were little twigs, fragile and easy to break. Or maybe it was the shaved head and the ethereal eyes or the deep gruff voice. Or the speech that he gave showing how much he didn't want to be here and yet he was. Maybe it was ... but he broke off then because Todd pulled Chance's cock free of

his mouth and licked him from front to back and then did it again. He wormed a rough finger into Chance's ass and pressed and prodded and fucked until Chance cried out.

'Please!'

'Bossy.' Todd had mercy. He returned to his wet ministrations and when Chance came, he smoothed the come along his shaft working each final spasm like it was the first. Then he dropped a kiss on the top of each thigh and said, 'Well, I'd better ...'

Chance started to shake: hurt; rage; anger – whatever you wanted to call it or a combo deal. 'NO you won't. You'll go get in my bed and stay here.'

'What if I say no?' Todd asked, sitting up, rubbing his head, watching the small light flicker and frowning.

'What if you do? I guess I can't stop you then,' Chance said, sighing. He was very tired suddenly. 'I guess if you want to go you can go.'

'Do you want me to go?' Todd asked, looking almost angry.

'Fuck no.'

'And you don't mind me staying?' His face was unreadable, but Chance thought he saw anxiety there.

He remembered Todd's tale about his past lover. About always being in charge. About how tiring it was. So he said, 'Get your ass upstairs, I have extra clothes in the bureau and unopened toothbrushes in the linen closet.'

'I ...'

'Do it.'

Todd nodded once and rose, offered Chance a hand that he promptly took. Todd tugged him to standing and hugged him, his kiss was soft but still demanding. 'Thanks,' he said, so low and so fast that Chance wasn't sure he'd actually heard him right.

So he said nothing. He just tugged the bigger man's

hand and led him upstairs.

‘What do you mean he was gone?’

‘He was gone. How many ways are there to take that?’ Chance ran a hand through his hair and felt the wave of anger that threatened to wash over him. ‘He told me pretty much up front that he wasn’t in for a long haul.’

‘Yeah, but to leave *that* fast ...’ Becca trailed.

Chance drew ever darkening circles on the notepad where he’d made out his list for the day. After a moment he realised that at some point he had switched to drawing dark rain clouds. *Paging Doctor Freud, please come to the front desk and bring your cigar ...*

‘I don’t know what to do. Maybe there’s nothing I can do. Maybe I need to chalk it up to a ONS and call it a day.’

‘An ONS?’

‘One Night Stand,’ he said.

‘Is that what the kids are calling it these days?’

‘No. They’re calling it fucked up.’

‘Ahhh, well I feel horrible. I think that you should do whatever makes you feel best.’

‘Tie him up and drag him home and fuck him until he begs?’

Chance heard a groan and then Becca laughed. ‘Did I mention you were on speaker phone?’

‘Sorry, Shawn,’ Chance sighed. ‘Gotta go. My boss ... she is a slave driver.’

‘Yeah, I’m so cruel. Call me if you need me, hon.’

‘Will do.’ Chance hung up. No use fretting it. It was what it was.

‘It’s sad, though,’ he told Elvis. ‘We could have been good together. No note. No nothing.’

Elvis sighed and Chance put his sneakers on. He had

all kinds of running to do for Becca from picking up the crib that had just arrived at the baby store to returning library books. And lucky him, the sky had opened up and more fierce storms were rolling through. By the time he got to his car, he was soaked. Five steps from the door had turned him into a drowned rat.

He started the SUV and his phone ring. Without bothering to check the number he said ‘What did you forget now, you shrew?’

‘A note. An apology. Something.’ Todd’s voice was darker than usual and that was saying something. Chance broke out in goose bumps from the cold and the shock.

‘Hey, what happened?’

‘I left.’

‘I gathered.’

‘I’m all fucked up.’

‘I know. I can tell.’ Chance chewed his bottom lip and then added ‘But if it’s any consolation, so am I. I think everyone is in their own way.’

‘I can’t get past it right now. I’m really attracted to you. Really. And I like you. Which is odd.’

Chance barked out a laugh. ‘Really? How so?’

‘In case you haven’t caught on, most folks annoy me.’

‘Nooo. You?’ He smiled as rain pummelled the vehicle.

‘It’s been a while since I even thought to show up at someone’s house in the middle of the night, let alone to do it. It’s been a while since ...’ Here he broke off. All Chance could hear was him breathing.

‘Since you?’

‘Enjoyed it that much? Fucked? Gave in to someone. Wanted to be submissive to someone. Had that urge, need, desire. Jesus, pick one. Mix and match.’

‘OK. Well, come by. We’ll talk about it.’

‘No.’

‘Todd, we’ve had very little besides power outages and fucking and I still feel drawn to you.’

Todd made a gruff sound but said nothing.

‘Just come talk to me. Like ... what’s your favourite colour?’

‘Blue.’

‘Favourite food?’

‘Steak.’

‘Favourite movie?’

‘Patton.’

‘Favourite smell.’

‘You. After last night...’

He hung up.

Chance put his head to the steering wheel and fretted. ‘How do I always get the complicated ones?’ What had started as mere attraction seemed to have potential to be so very much more. And yet, he was dealing with a gun shy man who took stubborn to a whole new level.

‘I usually get to be the stubborn one,’ he said aloud and started his errands. It would take some time to figure this out, but Chance knew he would. Bottom line was he was a stubborn motherfucker and if there was a way to get Todd to hear him out, think this over, he’d think of it.

At Becca’s house, he struggled up the front walk with the crib and managed to wrestle it inside. Then he put the library books Becca had asked him to get when he dropped off the load that were due. A mountain of baby books went sliding down the hall as they cascaded from his arms. ‘Shit!’

His brain was in overdrive. Doing his list, pondering Todd, hearing the echo of his dark smoky voice in his mind. He felt haunted and wired and half crazed. But

under it all was a low level peace that made no sense. As if he intuitively knew it would all work out. ‘Cuckoo,’ Chance sighed and ran to get the few groceries he’d bought.

‘Nips, I have brought a crib. And some books and cheeeeeese!’

At the word “cheese” the giant calico uncurled himself from an oversized decorative bowl he was prone to sleeping in and pounced on Chance. ‘Finally! Some affection.’ He sat on the floor feeding bits of cheese to the cat and finally decided what he needed to do about Todd.

Lightning flared and thunder boomed and the lights flickered before cutting out. The sump pump beeped and so did the carbon monoxide detector plugged into the outlet. Becca’s house had become safe city since she’d found out she was pregnant. Then everything came back on before another big rumble of thunder that shook the window panes in their frames.

‘At least the weather is on my side,’ Chance said.

Chapter Six

‘AND THERE’LL BE more storms tonight for sure.’ The newscaster turned to the camera, his awful tie pattern dancing with glee as it wiggled out the TV cameras. ‘Look for rain, rain and more rain and some pretty heavy winds and maybe some severe lightning in certain areas. A good night to stay inside. This is Dan Bartenfelder reporting for *News 11*.’

‘Thank you, Dan!’ Chance said, realising he needed to get a boyfriend fast because the only people he talked to any more were Becca, the TV, Nips and Elvis and three of the four weren’t actual people.

The ten o’clock news was done, the wine had been drunk, the plot had been plotted and he was ready to roll. He patted his pocket and felt the heft of the cuffs there. Another ex had been a cop and had left a few treasures behind such as cuffs, a blue work shirt and what Chance thought was a can of pepper spray but wasn’t sure so he just left it sitting in the closet. He had nothing to do but act now.

One more shot of liquid courage ... He poured off a half glass of wine and downed it like a shot. Then he hit speed dial on his cell and waited while it rang.

‘Todd.’

‘Power’s out again.’

Silence. Then, ‘Maybe you should call the ...’

‘Come on, man. Don’t leave me hanging,’ he said.

‘I just think that ...’

‘Do you hate me?’

Todd sighed. ‘God, no. Not even close. Which is the issue.’

‘Look if you still like me even just as a person, don’t put me through all that shit. Come help me out. I won’t bother you again.’

‘You aren’t bothering me. In fact, I like you too much. I’m not ready to like anyone as much as ...’

‘Save it,’ he growled, trying to spur Todd into action by being short with him. ‘If you don’t want me, fine. I can’t change that. But at least help me out. I have no power and an old fat wiener dog who wants AC.’

‘I’ll be there in ten.’

‘Just meet me in MacGruder’s yard.’

‘Why?’

Why? Whywhywhywhy ...

‘Because I want to point out another limb that’s scaring the shit out of me since you’ll be here. And I won’t see you again after,’ he added, just for the guilt effect. Hey, he wasn’t above a good guilt play.

‘OK. I’ll be there soon.’

‘I’ll be out back.’

‘It’s pouring down with rain.’

‘I won’t melt.’

Chance cut through the back yard and stood near the gate. When they’d installed it they hadn’t gone for an old boring chain link gate, they’d done a scrolled iron gate with an archway for ivy. Years and years of ivy crawling up the gate had turned it into a magical organic structure. Chance clinked the handcuffs against it to hear the solid clunk. He noticed his hands were shaking. If Todd was backing off because he felt too much, it was a good sign

in a lot of ways. And he'd made it clear that he'd been in a one sided relationship. Something Chance totally got. So it was Chance's opportunity to show Todd just what he was made of. That he was multi-faceted.

And mildly cuckoo ...

He shook his head and waited, the rain pelting down but luckily no lightning for ages.

He heard the truck and then the main gate to MacGruder's back yard. 'Hello?

'I'm at the gate,' he called.

'The lines look like they're up!'

'Hurry!'

If he caught Todd off guard he'd be good. If he had any warning at all, the bigger man could surely overpower him.

'They're up,' Todd breathed trotting into view.

'I'm stuck on this gate,' Chance said, not making eye contact. He was sure that if he looked Todd in the eye, he'd know something was up.

'What the fuck is going on? The lines are fine, no branches are down and you're stuck to a gate?'

'In the wrought iron scrollwork. I have my sleeve caught and ...'

Todd got close, reached for him, small bits of light filtering from the nearest streetlamps. When his arms got close, Chance snapped on the cuffs. They connected and closed with a soft, sudden *snick*.

Todd looked up, confused, angry, shocked. 'What the fuck?'

'We need to talk' Chance said and looped the cuff through the wrought iron gate. It was an act of God getting the other hand caught up and cuffed. Todd made a swipe at him with his free hand, Chance ducked it and got right up close after wrestling it into the handcuff. 'We're

going to talk. And you're going to behave.'

'Or what?'

'Or I can leave you here,' he said and grabbed the cell phone clipped to Todd's belt. 'Just until you calm down enough to be rational.'

'I'm going to bust your ass when I get out of these.'

'I count on it, but I also plan for you to fuck me when you're done. And then I'll make you dinner. And we'll go out. Like sane rational men who do not run away when they like someone.'

Todd frowned. He looked so angry Chance was grateful he was chained up.

'Well.'

'Well what?' Chance asked.

'Well, what are you waiting for? Talk.'

Chance blinked, panicking a bit as the rain continued to pummel them.

'Well?' Todd grunted, testing his bonds.

'Well, you put me on the spot!' Chance said, yelling to be heard above the wind.

'I put *you* on the spot? I am handcuffed to iron in a storm!' Todd yelled.

'There's no lightning,' Chance reasoned.

'Right *now*.'

'If it comes I'll undo the cuffs. I promise.'

'Don't want me battered and fried?'

'No, I just want you to listen.'

'I'm listening.'

'Why did you run from me?'

'I'm not ready. Now are we done with our feelings?'

'No.' Chance stalked closer and put his face to the other man's. 'We're not done. Look I feel a lot for you. Rational or not. I can talk it out ... fuck it out ... shit, I'd be willing to duke it out, but running?' He blinked, bit his

lip and then ‘Well, that’s a pure pussy move.’

Todd narrowed his eyes at Chance and thrust his jaw forward. ‘Undo the cuffs.’

‘No. Tell me why.’

‘I told you, I was always in charge. Sex, movies, books, food, all of it. I want a partner, not a kid. And it was a long fucked up drawn-out nightmare to extricate myself and I. Am. Not. Ready.’ He yanked at the cuffs so hard Chance feared he’d hurt himself. Then Todd roared like some angry animal. ‘Undo them!’

‘No.’

Todd went still and that made Chance more nervous than the brutish show of strength. He held his breath and waited but Todd said nothing.

‘Now, I’ll admit I am a bit of a bottom, a sub, easy going, along for the ride, however you want to put it. But I also know what I want and for some insane fucked up reason I want you. Even though you ran, even though you’re lying to me when you say you can just walk away. I think there could be ... something here. And we should at least see. Even though you are gruff and angry and surly and annoying stubborn. So you tell me ... would your ex have done this? Taken the situation in hand. Made you angry and provoked you to get you to listen and to get an answer?’

Todd clenched his jaw hard and Chance knew it was sinking in. He was making his point. The wind howled, driving the rain almost sideways and Chance stumbled under the sudden gust. Over them the tree groaned with a creaky moan and both men looked up. ‘Let me out,’ Todd said, his voice no longer angry but anxious and urgent.

Chance looked unsure, but then the storm seemed to calm a bit and he shook his head. ‘Not yet. I want to drive my point home, first.’ He dropped to his knees and his

fingers fumbled and flicked at Todd's jeans.

'Jesus Christ, are you trying to get us killed you crazy mother ...' But his words dropped away like pebbles off a cliff. Chance slipped his lips along Todd's shaft, licking and nuzzling, sucking and kissing like his life depended on it.

He felt like it did.

'I didn't want anyone. Well - maybe a fast fuck. But I want to know you more. More than just the guy who climbs my pole.' His own words caught up to him and he chuckled even as he sucked Todd's balls slowly. One and then the other as if he were savouring a sweet treat instead of flesh and blood. The fear added to his thrill and he could only imagine what it was doing for Todd.

Todd groaned, almost against his will, thrusting up to slide his cock inside the loose slippery fist. Rain pelted them both, driving Chance's pale hair to his head so it looked like a skull cap. His shirt clung to his lean form, but the fear lived on, sizzling along his skin and making his pleasure that much more.

'I like this. I really do. And you're right. I was wrong to bolt. I wasn't prepared ... I mean, I thought I'd fuck you, pet your dog, be on my way. Not have you flitting about in my head like some wraith I couldn't shake. But this storm is getting worse and this tree is unsafe and ...'

'In a minute,' Chance mumbled, sliding his mouth low. His throat full of Todd. His head bobbing like he was in some odd form of prayer. He knelt there, looking both powerful and humble. A dictator and a suppliant.

'God, I wish I could touch your hair. I'd brush the water from your face and hold your chin and hold your jaw while I just fucking thrust deep.' The wind whooped and the tree swayed and there was a very audible snap and crack. 'We won't be fucking or dating or any of that if we

die,' Todd grunted. 'You have to let me go.'

'One hand. This fucking tree has lasted a few storms now. I'll let one hand out.'

Todd shook his head. 'You are a stubborn ass, you know that?'

Chance grinned, nodded, unlocked one arm and then Todd grabbed his face. 'Listen to me. You need to.'

Chance was nodding and grinning and he pushed his lips to Todd's dick, his velvet tongue tracing the veins and outlines of flesh and blood and arousal. 'I know. Just come for me and then we'll go in. We'll go in and get dry.' His hands stroked the skin inside Todd's thighs, between his legs. His fingertip teased at the tight ring of his asshole and then stroked the perineum like a small instrument. Todd thrust, moving his pelvis, his pulse beating like a war drum in his throat so hard that Chance could see it if he looked hard.

'OK, fine. I'll come,' he growled.

'I don't mean to put you out,' Chance snorted.

'Shut up and suck,' Todd growled. He gave in and pushed Chance's blond head down between his legs. Rain dripped from his fingers, his nose and his eyelashes. He watched his new stubborn lover suck him deep and when he gulped over his cock, his throat convulsing, eyelids fluttering, Todd came with a rough sound.

His knees shook a bit, he felt light headed and he said, 'Now uncuff me.'

Chance reached for him, the small key pinched between his fingers and the sudden snap and pop filled their ears. The limb clipped Chance neatly over the right ear and he dropped. A wet sack of laundry shaped like a man. Todd made a shocked sound and he dropped to his knees in the now-muddy back yard. He stretched to his limit, just managing to snag the small cuff key with his

big fingers. Then he worked the cuff, water and fear and panic making his fingers clumsy. His heart filled his throat and he searched Chance's still form for his cell phone muttering, 'Wake up, you goof. Wake up. I don't want you to be hurt. Christ, why are you so accident-prone?'

Tears pricked at his eyes and he angrily brushed them away, telling himself they were just rain.

He dialled emergency services, rolling Chance to his back to check his vitals for the operator.

Chapter Seven

‘IT ALL LOOKS GOOD. We’re gonna hang here for a few and let him sit. Make sure no headaches appear, dizziness, vomiting.’

‘All that fun stuff,’ Chance interjected.

Todd frowned at him and shook his head. The EMTs walked to the front of the ambulance and climbed in to update the radio operator.

‘That was really fucking stupid,’ Todd said. He sat on the back bumper and wrapped a hand around Chance’s wet ankle. He squeezed and Chance took a hit off the oxygen he probably didn’t need at this point.

‘What can I say? I’m not the most shrewd at romance. Anything to get my man.’

‘You could have been hurt. Had this stupid ass tree not been so dead and so dry-rotted you could have been killed. That could have been a much worse knock on the head.’

‘Life isn’t life without one or two hard lessons,’ Chance sighed. He snorted and then coughed from the oxygen.

‘I’ll give you a hard lesson,’ Todd said, shaking his head. He patted Chance’s leg. It wasn’t lost on Chance, how he couldn’t stop touching him as if to reassure himself that he was in fact OK.

‘I’m counting on it.’

Todd leaned in then, surprising Chance, and kissed him hard. He played his tongue along Chance's tongue, sucking it gently until Chance hummed with pleasure. Then he kissed the tip of Chance's nose and pulled back. 'They said you have to stay awake for quite a while and I'm to watch you.'

'Oh, baby.' Chance blew a kiss and rolled his eyes. Then winced for a second, his head hurt pretty good from being clipped by tree debris.

'But no strenuous movement. No stress.'

Chance sighed. 'Of course. Foiled again.'

Todd leaned in for one more kiss and put his hand for just an instant on Chance's fly. 'Oh, I think we can think of something. Trust me, I'm nothing if resourceful.'

Chance echoed himself. 'I'm counting on it.'

Epilogue

Six weeks later

‘YOU’D BETTER BE BACK by the time the baby comes!’ Becca yelled.

‘I’ll be back in plenty of time, dear. Do you know that man hasn’t had a vacation in two and a half years?’ Chance threw yet another pair of jeans in his duffle. You could never have too many pairs of jeans to go hiking in the country during leaf season.

‘That would make anyone uptight,’ she said.

‘True story.’

‘And the tree?’

‘Tree is down. That limb that clipped me was the final straw for him. He had to come out one too many times to deal with it, but when it assaulted his *boyfriend* that was it.’

‘Oh, darling, *boyfriend*.’

‘You heard me, sister.’

Becca laughed and Chance grinned.

‘So what did big, bald and surly do?’

‘Oh, he might have helped it along a bit. Got it so it was leaning precariously and the whole neighbourhood threatened Mr MacGruder with a law suit if his cheap ass didn’t get it down.’

‘How did Todd do that?’

‘Now what kind of personal assistant would I be if I

couldn't keep confidences?'

He nearly heard her roll her eyes. 'Fine. One day you'll tell me.'

'One day perhaps. But not now.'

'Brat.'

'You know it.'

'Have fun,' she said.

'Oh we will. It promises to be a wet, slippery, hard, hot, fun, sexy, coupling kind of trip.'

Chance heard a groan. Becca said, 'Did I mention you're on speaker?'



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