



## WHY I LOVE GEEKS

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“You never shared one of your friend’s lunches and snacked on Oreos or something like that?”

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“Hmmm...” Chuck finished both hot dogs and wiped his hands on a napkin. “I suggest you should stop by a grocery store and pick up some sugar snacks. Oreos, Twinkies, Hostess cupcakes. Anything guaranteed to give you the jitters.”

“Why would I want to do that?”

“To experience something different.” His phone rang. “Shit.”

He flipped open the phone and punched the button. “Yeah.”

“Davidson, get back here. We caught a body,” his partner, Petrovic, growled in his ear.

“Okay. I’m just a few blocks away, grabbing lunch. I’ll be right there.”

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# WHY I LOVE GEEKS

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BY

T. A. CHASE

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WHY I LOVE GEEKS  
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*To all my blog readers who wanted something funny.  
Chuck and Herb are for you*

# CHAPTER 1

Chuck stared at his phone, cursing God and every intelligent person who created such an evil invention. It beeped its cheerful chimes, and he fought back the shout threatening to rip free from his throat.

What possessed him to accept the stupid thing? His boss swore Chuck needed one. He'd be able to get a hold of Chuck faster, but he never understood Chuck's aversion to electronics.

The upbeat chimes rang again and he raised his hand to throw it under the fast approaching bus. Chuck was sure Summerson would accept an accident excuse. Not his fault he tripped and it flew out of his hand. An evil grin formed on his face.

"Wait. Can I help?"

The offending instrument seemed to fly from his hand and not

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toward the road like he'd intended. Chuck turned to glare at the man who dared intervene in the upcoming destruction of his phone.

"Only if you can make that thing stop ringing." Chuck gestured toward the rectangular object the stranger held in his hands.

Bright green eyes blinked at him from behind thick glasses. "Did you try answering it?"

Chuck inhaled, silently repeating the mantra his therapist gave him to calm his temper. "If I knew how to answer it, I'd have done so by now."

A twitch of plump lips and Chuck knew the man was laughing at him. Indignation rocketed through him.

He dragged his gaze over the shorter man, trying to stifle his own chuckle. Longish black curls stuck out at enough random angles for Chuck to surmise it wasn't done on purpose. Baggy jeans hung on lean hips and a ragged T-shirt barely covered his flat, pale stomach. Beat-up sneakers completed the ensemble, along with a black messenger bag slung cross-wise over his chest.

"Didn't anyone show you how to use it when you got it?" He flipped open the phone and started pushing buttons.

"I was busy. My boss tossed it to me as I was leaving on a case." Chuck crossed his arms and tried not to look disgruntled. "I don't need a new phone."

"You have ten voicemails."

His elegant, long fingered hand held the phone to Chuck's face, letting him see the number of messages.

"Great. The first one is probably from my mother and the other nine are her complaining I never call her."

His lips twitched again, and Chuck wanted to ask if he had a nervous tick or something because, God knows, the kid wasn't



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laughing at him.

“Well, if you do this and push this button, you can get the messages.”

The guy’s fingers flew over the small buttons, and Chuck didn’t even try to keep track of what he was doing. Lord knew he wasn’t going to keep the thing. He had his pager and that was good enough, though the stupid thing didn’t always work. Probably had to do with the fact he tended to forget to charge it.

“You’re right. It’s your mom.”

Rolling his eyes, Chuck gestured vaguely. “Just delete them. I’ve heard everything she has to say.”

“Actually, she wants you to come for dinner tonight because your baby sister will be there. And you haven’t seen her in a month. She thinks you’ve been avoiding the family.” The stranger tilted his head. “Why would you avoid your family? Heck, if my parents remembered I was alive and wanted me to come to dinner, I’d be there every chance I got.”

“How many siblings do you have?” Chuck checked his watch. He still had time left on his lunch hour. He’d grab a hot dog from the corner vendor before he went inside.

“None. Only child. Though I wish I had a bunch of brothers and sisters. It would have been so much fun, building forts and going on picnics. We could do things for the science fair and practice for the spelling bee. So much fun,” the kid muttered.

Chuck snorted. “Kid, I don’t want to burst your bubble, but I have six brothers and sisters, all younger. Not so much fun. There’s a lot of arguing, teasing, and the girls hogged the bathroom. There wasn’t much solitude or silence either. Trust me, I don’t think you’d enjoy it.”

“I’m not a kid. I’m twenty-five. That’s not as old as you, I’m

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sure. Maybe that's why you're calling me 'kid.' Trying to act all superior and mature. My name's Herb." Herb stuck out his hand.

Stunned at the words pouring out of Herb's mouth, Chuck shook his hand without saying anything. God, the kid was cute. Sure, Chuck felt like a perv, ogling the younger guy, but thank goodness Herb was older than he looked.

"What's your name? Holy cow, you're tall and hot. Are you gay?" Herb winced. "I shouldn't have said anything like that. Now you'll probably drag me into an alley and beat the shit out of me for coming on to you. I wasn't really. I just have a problem keeping things in my head. They tend to spill out as I talk. Don't get angry with me."

"Kid, take a breath. I'm gay, so you're safe there. Thanks for telling me I'm hot. It's always good to get a compliment, but you really do need to watch what you say or you're going to get your ass kicked." Chuck took the phone and stuffed it in his pocket. He'd lose it before he got back to the precinct.

Herb hitched his messenger bag higher up on his shoulder, shoved his hand through his dark curls, and sighed. "I know, but I have so much stuff going on in my head, I just don't have the energy to censor what I say. I mean, really, why should I have to worry about watching what I say? Others should have to deal with it."

Chuck took Herb by the elbow and led the shorter man away from the curb while Herb chattered at him. They ended up by a corner hot dog vendor, and Chuck decided he'd get one there instead of from the guy outside the precinct. That guy would yell at him about the crime ruining the streets and shit like that. Chuck heard it enough from his own family; he didn't need to get it from the guy feeding him.

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“You want one?”

Herb wrinkled his nose and gagged. “Are you kidding me? Do you know all the crap they put in hot dogs? None of it’s good for you.”

“Don’t worry, Herb. I have a list of all the nasty stuff printed out and pinned to my bulletin board. Having two doctors in the family ensures I know all the terrible ingredients in all the stuff I love to eat. I bet you know what they put in Twinkies to make sure they’ll survive a nuclear holocaust.”

“Umm...no. Do you?” Herb’s eyes brightened. “That could be a great experiment. I don’t have anything to do this weekend. I might have to set up something to find out. I’d love to know.”

“No, you don’t. It’ll put you off eating them for life.” Chuck took two hot dogs from the vendor, just mustard for dressing.

“I’ve never had a Twinkie,” Herb admitted.

Chuck froze, one hot dog a few inches from his mouth, and stared at Herb. “You haven’t eaten a Twinkie. Were your parents granola lovers or something?”

“What does that have to do with Twinkies? No, I never ate dinner with them. I usually ate with the cook, and Marie always made sure I had healthy food.”

“You never shared one of your friend’s lunches and snacked on Oreos or something like that?”

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\* \* \*

“Hey, Chuck, I’ve got someone I’d like you to meet.”

He glanced up from his dinner to eye his youngest sister, Jessie, with suspicion. His sisters had been trying to set him up since they found out he was gay. It was like they had a hundred gay friends just sitting around waiting for him to sweep them off their feet. Oh, it wasn’t that bad. Some of the guys were nice and some he dated once or twice, but eventually his job would get in the way of anything going further than a date or two.

For some reason, people just couldn’t deal with the long hours and the terrible things that scarred his psyche. He couldn’t always

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leave his job at the precinct. There were nights when he didn't sleep at all because his mind would race with thoughts and possibilities. The images of the dead haunted his sleep.

"Thanks, but no thanks. I told you the last time I didn't want you to hook me up with anyone." He shook his head before turning to his mother. "Have you heard from John lately?"

John was his youngest brother and was serving in the army, stationed in Afghanistan at the moment. It was hard for John to get time to call, so everyone relied on their mother to pass on news about their brother.

"No. I'm afraid things might not be going well for him." Mom glared at him. "You'd know this if you ever called me back. What's the point of having a cell phone if you won't answer it?"

"That thing hates me, Mom. It kept deleting the messages you left me. I managed to get the dinner invite, so I thought I'd come to catch up with Jessie."

His sister rolled her eyes at him, and he hid his smile. Yeah, Jessie smelled the bullshit from the other side of the table.

"I call B.S. on that, Chuck. We know you hate technology. How did you ever figure out how to check your messages?" Luke, the brother closest to him in age, settled back in his chair and smirked at him.

Chuck took a swig of beer and swallowed before answering. "Some cute little guy got the messages off the phone for me."

"Great. How do you find some cute guy to help you while I search the clubs every weekend and can't find one damn guy who isn't interested in one-night stands or is married and looking to cheat?"

He shrugged and grinned at Debbie, his middle sister. "I think it has more to do with your taste in men than my ability to find

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cute guys.”

“Hush, all of you. Jessie’s young man sounds wonderful, Charles. You should consider taking his number and calling him. You’re not getting any younger. I don’t want you to be alone when your father and I are gone.” His mother leaned over and patted his hand.

Groaning, he hid his face in his hands. “Mom, I’m not middle-aged or anything like that. What makes you think I’ll be alone when I’m blessed with three brothers and three sisters I have to look after?”

Protests rang out and soon friendly arguments filled the air. Chuck finished his meal without having to discuss his personal life with his mother or the rest of his family.

It wasn’t that he didn’t want a guy to spend the rest of his life with. It would be great to have someone to come home to and to cook for, but his career choice didn’t lend itself to solid relationships. He wasn’t the only one who had problems. Even a lot of the straight cops had difficulty holding onto their marriages. Chuck realized it took a special person to stay with a cop. He just hadn’t been lucky enough to find that person yet. Inside his heart, he kept hope burning that he’d run into the perfect man soon.

\* \* \*

“Oh, my God.” Herb groaned as he bit into the spongy yellow cake. He licked the cream from his lips.

The stranger had been right. Twinkies were proof there was a God and He loved humans. Why had no one ever told him about these wonderful little yellow cakes filled with delicious cream? Or those black and white cookies—yummy on their own—but when

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dunked in milk, they became otherworldly.

He moaned again as he unwrapped and ate another Twinkie.

“Herb, what’s going on in here?”

Looking up, he grinned as Jessie, one of the new hires at the pharmaceutical company where Herb worked, walked in. She eyed the half-devoured snack in his hand.

“Are you eating a Twinkie?”

He nodded joyously. “These are marvelous. Have you had one before?”

She sat down across the table from him. “Of course, I have. My brothers, sisters, and I used to beg our parents to get these as our treats at night. Though my oldest brother always wanted Oreos instead.”

Jessie shook her head, obviously confused about what would possess anyone to choose a cookie over a Twinkie.

“Oreos are amazing. I stopped by the grocery store on my way home last night and bought a bunch of them, along with some milk. I never knew how wonderful these could be. All I ever thought about, really, were all the things in it that are bad for you.” He bit his bottom lip and paused. “I’m doing it again.”

“Doing what?” Jessie braced her elbow on the table and rested her chin on her hand to study him.

“I’m babbling. I have a bad habit of talking a lot without letting anyone else talk. But, God, I can’t believe my cook at home never gave me one of these. You know, the guy I met yesterday afternoon was the one who told me about them. I thought, hell, he’s so incredibly gorgeous, these treats can’t be all that bad. Of course, he ate two hot dogs from a vendor on the corner.” He wrinkled his nose.

“Wow, he must like to live dangerously. I wouldn’t eat one of

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those if my life depended on it. I've heard all the horror stories about what's in those things. Two of my siblings are doctors and they've given the rest of us a list of all the foods that are really bad for us."

Herb held out one of his Twinkies to her. She took it with a smile. He liked her, even though he hadn't had much time to talk to her. They would probably end up working together. His research section needed more manpower, and Jessie came highly recommended by her college professors. She still had to finish her doctorate, but Herb knew it wouldn't be long until people would be calling her Dr. Jessie Davidson.

"Hmmm..." Jessie hummed as she bit into the cake, as enthralled with the Twinkie as he was.

"I know. Aren't they marvelous?" He tossed his empty wrapper onto a pile of transparent plastic.

Poking the pile, she glanced at him. "How many of these things have you had, Herb?"

"Oh, I don't know. I bought two boxes last night. I must've eaten one whole box last night, then I brought the other box for lunch today. Plus I have Oreos as well. Would you like some of those?" He pushed over the lunch box he'd brought with him. "Jessie, have you ever been kissed?"

"Ummm..."

"Maybe I shouldn't be asking you these things. I mean, we just met the other day, but you're the only person close to my age, though you are older than me. If I'm making you uncomfortable, please tell me. I don't have any idea of how to talk to people. I was an only child and went to a private school where the other kids laughed at me. I'm way smarter than most people, which makes them jealous, so they tend to make fun of me."



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“Herb.” Jessie placed her hand on Herb’s. “Take a deep breath. I’m thinking so much sugar might not be a good thing for you.”

“The sugar doesn’t have anything to do with my talking. I always talk this way. Gosh, you’re pretty. You remind me of the guy I met yesterday. He kissed me. Did I tell you that all ready?”

*And what a kiss it was.* Perfect in every way—though Herb had no benchmark to compare it with—but it was wonderful. He got hot just thinking about it and the guy who’d kissed him.

“You kissed some guy you just met that day?” Jessie frowned. “Do you usually work that fast?”

“Fast? What are you talking about? I didn’t kiss him. He kissed me. Wait...was I not supposed to let him do that? It wasn’t like he was a serial killer or anything. I mean he had a badge, so I assume he was a cop or something like that. I guess he could’ve been a security guard. Do security guards have badges?”

His thoughts dashed through his head. There hadn’t been anything threatening about the guy. God, if he had been a jerk, he would have walked away from Herb as he rambled on, but though he looked a little shell-shocked, much like Jessie did at the moment, he hadn’t seemed irritated by Herb’s diarrhea of the mouth.

“I told him he was totally hot, then I panicked because he could’ve been straight and I didn’t want to get my ass kicked. That’s happened to me a few times.” He slumped in his seat, fingering one of the plastic wrappers.

“I have been kissed, but you have to promise not to tell my brothers. I’m the baby of the family and they don’t like to think I’ve grown up. I’m not a virgin either.” She winked at him and stood, wandering over to the vending machine to buy a soda.

As much as he wanted to blurt out that he was a virgin, he

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managed to gain control of his wayward tongue before he admitted his shame. He fidgeted while Jessie returned to the table.

“So what did this man among men look like?” She crossed her legs and settled back, folding her arms over her chest.

Herb closed his eyes and brought up an image of the man in his mind. “Tall. I mean really tall, like six-five or so, and big, but not fat big. He seems very muscular. He wore a suit, and I didn’t get a good look at his body, though he seemed fit. He had dark hair and dark eyes like you. He’s older than both of us.” He grimaced. “Not like middle-aged old or anything like that. He’s mature and didn’t treat me like a complete idiot.”

A low chuckle burst from him, and Jessie raised an eyebrow at him. He waved his hand.

“I think I saved his phone from meeting an untimely death. I’d been following him for a block or two, watching as he grumbled and fiddled with the thing. When he stopped at the curb and clutched it in his hand, I just had this feeling he was going to throw it into the street. I couldn’t let that happen. It was a really nice piece of technology.”

Jessie narrowed her eyes. “Where did you meet this paragon?”

“Uh.” He screwed up his face, trying to remember where he’d ended up on his walk from the library to the subway station. Herb tended to get lost easily because he didn’t pay close enough attention to where he was going.

“I think I was about three blocks away from one of the police stations. The only reason I remember that was because I saw several uniformed men wandering into one of the buildings. God, some men shouldn’t be allowed to wear uniforms. It’s enough to make a man drown in drool.”

A curious expression passed over her face. “Did you get a

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number or a name even?"

"No. I completely forgot getting anything like that, and I don't think, even though he kissed me, he'd be interested in me. I do know his mother was upset about him not having seen his baby sister in a month and the fact he hasn't been to family dinner for a while. He said he had a big family and he was the oldest."

Heaving a sigh, Herb crumpled the wrappers up and pushed his chair back to stand. He tossed them in the trash and packed up the rest of his cookies. Jessie chugged her soda and threw the can in the recycle bin. They left the lunchroom and wandered back toward the lab where they'd been working.

Herb needed to turn his mind back to his experiments, but thoughts of his first kiss wouldn't leave him alone. After grabbing his lab coat off the hanger from the back of the door, he slipped it on, then handed Jessie hers.

"You know what? I think you should come with me to one of my family dinners. I have a pretty big family as well. My mom would love you, and I'd love for you to meet my oldest brother."

"Why? Is he gay? Are you one of those people who try to set your gay brother up with every gay man you meet? Because I don't think that's right. I think the two people should have something in common before they go on a date. You didn't say a date, did you? I'm making assumptions. You just said to come for dinner." Herb took off his glasses and polished them carefully before setting them back on his nose.

Jessie started laughing, arms wrapped around her stomach and bent over, barely managing to stay on her feet. He ignored her and went back to his tests. Finally, when she wiped the tears from her cheeks and caught her breath, she set her hand on his shoulder.

"I'm not laughing at you. I think you'd be perfect for my

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brother. He tends to be a very serious kind of guy and you'd shake up his perfect little world." Jessie hugged him. "Just come to dinner with me one Sunday. I promise you won't regret it. Even if things don't work out between you and Chuck, I'd like you to meet my family. You and I are going to be good friends, Herb."

"Do we have anything in common? Chuck must be smart. He is your brother after all. I might be inexperienced, but I have to think there needs to be more than just both of us being intelligent."

"Out of the Twinkies and the Oreos, which ones do you like better?"

What kind of question was that? He thought carefully about his answer.

"After having tasted plenty of both of them, I have to say my favorite is the Oreos."

She clapped her hands in triumph. "There you go. Chuck's favorite nighttime snack is Oreos and a glass of milk right before bed."

Hmmm...he wasn't convinced sharing a favorite snack food was the best basis for a relationship, but he was tempted to go and experience a true family dinner. He'd never had one when he was still living at home. He'd more often than not eaten his meals alone or in the kitchen with the cook.

It could be an interesting field study to see how normal families interacted with each other.

"I guess I could come sometime. I'd have to check my schedule to make sure I didn't have anything else going on," Herb lied through his teeth.

He didn't have a schedule because he rarely did anything besides work and hang out at his apartment playing video games. He was pretty sure he could fit dinner in at some point.

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“Great. I’ll ask my mom what day would be best for her and get back to you.”

She sounded excited and Herb couldn’t help getting a little hyped up about it as well. Maybe he’d get a new friend out of this, if not a date.

## CHAPTER 2

Chuck snarled at the sound of “Living La Vida Loca” blaring from his pocket. Petrovic grinned and wandered off. After digging around in his pocket, Chuck yanked his phone out and glared at it. He knew who was calling him, and he didn’t really want to talk to Jessie.

Ever since their last family dinner together, Jessie had been calling him about setting him up with this great guy she knew. All Chuck knew was that Jessie’s great guys tended not to be into a closing-in-on-middle-age homicide detective who might keep himself in shape, but who didn’t make enough money to keep them in the luxury they’d become accustomed to. Or there were the ones who loved the idea he carried a gun and handcuffs, and wanted him to cuff them to the bed and beat them.

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Christ, he was too old to play kinky games like that. He didn't want to be any man's daddy or master. All he wanted was to find a guy who didn't care that his partner might have to leave their bed in the middle of the night because violence took place somewhere in the city. He wanted a guy who wouldn't look down at him because he never got an advanced degree in anything. All his experience came from life, not from books.

Chuck would be the first to admit he wasn't particularly book smart, but he'd managed to survive so far without a Master's or a doctorate degree. He let his siblings do all the extra schooling.

The phone started ringing again, and Petrovic returned, grabbed the phone out of his hand and answered it.

"Hey, Jessie, that's quite the ring tone you picked out for Chuck's phone." Petrovic laughed. "Of course, I knew you picked it. Chuck still hasn't figured out how to answer a friggin' phone call. Yeah, he's standing here glaring at me. Talk to you later, Jessie."

His partner held out the phone. "It's your sister."

"No shit, Sherlock." He yanked the phone from Petrovic and wandered over to the wall of windows overlooking the city streets. "Hi, Jessie."

"Why haven't you been answering your phone? What if something had happened to Mom or Dad? How are we supposed to get a hold of you?"

Chuck winced. "You could've called the switchboard and they'd have transferred the call to me."

"What if it had been an emergency, Chuck?"

"Is it an emergency, Jessica?"

The silence coming over the phone told him what he thought.

"It isn't and I'm still saying no. I'm sure the guy is a really

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great person, but I don't think he'd enjoy going to a football game with me this weekend."

"I wonder if he's ever seen a football game," Jessie mumbled.

Chuck frowned. "You're kidding. What guy hasn't seen a game? Where's he been living—under a rock somewhere?" He paused. "Oh, wait, he works with you. He's probably been locked in a lab somewhere since he was born."

"Chuck, that's not very nice. Not everyone understands or enjoys sports like you do." Jessie huffed out a put-upon sigh. "Fine. I'll leave you alone about asking him out."

"Un-uh...you never give in this easy."

And that was the truth. Jessie got her tenacious pit bull ability to grab something and hang on until he gave in from their mother. Mom was a champion nagger.

"What do I have to do to get you to leave me alone about the date?"

Jessie hesitated, and Chuck had the oddest feeling he was going to regret whatever she asked him.

"Two things."

"Now wait. You're only giving me one thing. Why do I have to do two things for you?"

"Because you want me to stop bugging you far more than I want you to do what I'm going to ask you."

*Shit.* She had a point. He pinched the bridge of his nose and took a deep breath. "Fine. Tell me."

"First of all, I want you to come to the parents' for Sunday dinner next weekend. I won't say this Sunday because I know you have tickets."

"Who's all going to be there?"

"All of us. Oh, and Luke is bringing a girl for us to check out."



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*God help the woman.* He wanted to learn her name and call her to warn her. He wanted to suggest she run while she still could before she was sucked into the family black hole. Hell, Chuck wasn't sure he'd ever subject a man to dinner with his family. Maybe five years after they moved in together.

"So what do you need me there for? Handcuff her to the chair when she decides you all have hit too much of the sauce before she got there." He chuckled.

The last guy Debbie brought to meet the family declared them all insane and stormed out of the house. They'd spent the rest of the night breaking out in laughter. At first, Debbie hadn't thought their teasing was funny, but she figured out that any guy who couldn't take their jokes wasn't the right guy for her. It's not like she could have abandoned her family for him. That would never have happened. Mom would have hunted her down and camped out on her front steps until Debbie acknowledged her.

Donald was the only one of them married, and his wife was as crazy as the rest of them. She got the family jokes and instigated some of her own. Chuck's niece and nephew were going to be holy terrors when they hit school.

"No. I just think it's important we're all there to support Luke. He must really care about her if he's willing to risk introducing her to us."

"Has Mom vetted her yet?"

"The aunties haven't heard anything about her family, so that's a good thing."

"Jessie, why would anyone sane want to be a part of our family?" Chuck rested his head against the window.

"Because as crazy as we are, we love each other. We might annoy the shit out of each other, but God forbid anyone else mess

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with one of us.”

“Right.”

Petrovic poked him in the shoulder. He glanced over and saw his partner gesture that they had a call-out.

“I have to get going.”

“But I didn’t tell you what the second thing I need was.”

He could hear the pout in her voice.

“Don’t worry. Call me back tomorrow, and I’ll answer the phone. You can tell me then.”

“Thanks. Love you.”

“Love you, too.”

He managed to end the call and stuff his phone back in his pocket.

“You know, any perp we bring in is scared stiff of you, but if any of them ever saw you talking to the female members of your family, they’d know what kind of big softie you are.”

“Fuck me, Petrovic.” His insult didn’t hold any heat.

He and Petrovic had worked together for five years and the man knew him well. It was true. If it had been any of his brothers, he would have been able to hold out at least for another day or so before giving in to whatever they wanted. But have one of his sisters or his mother call, and he rolled over like a big teddy bear. It was rather embarrassing, all things considered.

“What did she want?”

They headed downstairs to one of the unit cars. Chuck caught the keys Petrovic tossed to him. After they were on their way to the scene, Chuck grunted.

“She wants me to come to Sunday dinner.”

“What about the game? You’ve been talking about going to the Jets game for months now.” Petrovic sounded surprised Chuck

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would consider giving up the game to appease Jessie.

“Nah. She said I could go to next week’s dinner. She knows how long it took me to get these tickets. You sure you can’t go?”

Petrovic shook his head. “Hell, no. It’s my mom’s birthday and I’m stuck going to the party.”

Chuck winced in sympathy. He would take the madness of his family over the bitterness that ran rampant among Petrovic’s relatives.

“Sorry about that.”

“What’s that second thing she wanted you to do?”

“Have no idea. I’m sure I’ll regret agreeing to do it, no matter what it is.”

They arrived at the scene and focused on the business of homicide. It wasn’t glamorous or elegant. Most of the time, it smelled and boggled the mind that people would do things like what they saw before them.

“Christ, here we go again.”

Chuck nodded as they climbed out of the car.

\* \* \*

“God, I’m fucking hungry,” Chuck complained quietly as he wandered out of the precinct toward the hot dog vendor on the corner.

He tried to avoid eating too many hot dogs. He did understand all the things that sucked about them, but sometimes he was so busy, he didn’t have a choice. He signaled to the man that he’d take two of them as his phone rang.

This time he did answer it since he’d promised Jessie he would when she called him next.

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“Hey, Jess, what’s this second thing you want me to do for you?”

“No small talk? No, ‘Hey, Jess, how you doing’?”

He rubbed the back of his neck and frowned. “Listen, I haven’t been to bed yet, and probably won’t be for another four hours. I’m running short on patience and very short on caring about anything except a hot shower and my bed.”

Jessie instantly went into mother hen mode. “What happened? Oh, did you catch that big socialite murder case? No wonder you’ve been working all night. And now you’re probably eating hot dogs. You shouldn’t eat those, Chuck. It’ll make your ulcer kick up.”

“All the coffee I’ve drunk over the last twenty-four hours hasn’t anything to do with the fact my chest hurts and my throat’s on fire.”

Chuck looked at the food the vendor held out to him and sighed. Shaking his head, he gestured for the two people behind him to take the dogs. He paid for them and waved off their gratitude.

“I couldn’t do it. Does that make you feel better? Now, I’m going to have to find something else to eat.”

“Don’t worry. I’ll call Linda. I’m sure she’ll send her personal assistant over with some kind of healthy meal. She’s the only one besides Donald and Debbie who has read the list of healthy things we got.”

After walking over to the stairs leading up to the precinct doors, Chuck leaned against the enormous stone pillar there. He rested the back of his head on the edifice and closed his eyes.

The sound of the city rushed around him, car horns and people shouting. The rush of footsteps as people raced from one building

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to another. God, at times, he loved New York City. The city felt alive around him, but at other times, when he was barely awake on his feet, he hated it with every fiber of his body.

“You don’t have to do that, Jessie. Linda’s busy with her practice. She doesn’t have time to worry about feeding her oldest brother.”

“If we don’t take care of you, who will?” Jessie paused. “I worry about you being alone all the time, Chuck. The rest of us, our jobs aren’t as harsh on emotions as yours. You see all the bad things humanity does, and that worries me.”

He didn’t want to talk about this. “So what else did you want me to do for you, Jessie?”

“Oh, could you bring Oreos and Twinkies for dessert when you come next week?”

Holding the phone away from his ear, he stared at it in shock. After returning it to its former position, he said, “Are you kidding? Mom will pitch a fit if I show up with that shit for dessert.”

“Come on, Chuck. It’ll be great. Good memories of us growing up and snack time right before we went to bed.”

The pleading in her voice got to him every time.

“Fine. I’ll bring Oreos and Twinkies. You make sure there’s milk because I don’t eat my Oreos without milk.”

Jessie squealed. “Yay! He’s going to fall in love with you the minute he sees you standing there with those.”

“He? Who he? You better not be setting me up with anyone.”

“Oh, look at the time. Gotta a meeting to get to. See you next Sunday. ’Bye.” She hung up.

Chuck fought the urge to throw his phone into the middle of the street. Summerson had warned him that if he lost another phone, the office would start taking the cost out of his paycheck and, God

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knew, he couldn't afford that.

Jessie was setting him up again, but this time he couldn't back out. He'd promised and he worked hard on keeping his word. At least, he was going to get Oreos out of the night.

\* \* \*

"Are you sure your parents don't mind you bringing someone with you to dinner? I don't want to intrude or anything. I've never been to a family dinner before. What's it like?" Herb paused.

Jessie giggled. "If you never had any friends, how did you learn to talk so much?"

He shrugged. "I don't know. Maybe because it was just me talking to myself, I never had to learn how to listen to someone else or wait for them to answer me. What about you? What was it like growing up with siblings? How many do you have?"

Leaning against the door of her car, he angled his body so he could see her. She was a good driver, and he envied the ease with which she handled the car. He'd never learned how to drive. No reason to since he lived in the city and been driven everywhere when he was younger. Now that he'd gotten rid of the driver, it was just easier to take public transportation wherever he needed to go.

"I have four brothers and two sisters. When we were younger, dinnertime was a free-for-all. We all tried to get my parents' attention and tell them about our day. Finally, Mom organized it so we each got a turn." She frowned a little bit. "It always seemed a little unfair because by the time it got to me, everyone else was finished eating and wanted to leave the table. Dad wouldn't let them do that, though. He forced them to sit there and listen to what

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I had to say.”

“What’s your dad like?” Herb was fascinated by the dynamics of her relatives and couldn’t wait to study them in their natural habitat.

“He’s quiet and watches us all like we’re exotic animals he happened to wander into the middle of by accident. Dad’s direct and doesn’t mess around. He usually knows within a few minutes of meeting someone whether he likes him or not. Must come from being a detective for so many years.”

“A detective? Was your father a policeman?”

An image of the dark-haired man he’d met the other day popped into his head. Herb’s cock stiffened and he shifted in his seat. Who knew he had a police fetish? Though, it could just be a strong attraction to the man whose phone he’d rescued. He never reacted that way to any other police officer he’d met, not that he’d met a lot of them.

“Yeah. Dad retired from the force about ten years ago. My oldest brother, Chuck, is a homicide detective. Third-generation New York City policeman.”

The obvious pride Jessie felt for her brother and father showed in her voice, and Herb wondered if he’d ever been proud of anything his family had done. Nothing came to mind.

“Your grandfather was a police officer as well?”

Jessie nodded. “He walked a beat for his entire career. Didn’t want to be a detective or anything like that. Granddad liked knowing the people he protected. He was a good man as well.”

“Why didn’t any of the rest of you follow in your dad’s footsteps? I mean, I’d have thought maybe more than just Chuck would have chosen to go into law enforcement. Odds are good you would.”

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“Well, we’ve gone into other areas where we help to keep people safe. Two of my siblings are lawyers. Two are doctors. John, the brother closest to me in age, is in the army and serves in some covert unit in the army.” She shot him a smile. “I’m the oddball, to be honest. Biochemistry isn’t really a life-saving career.”

“But you work at a pharmaceutical company, where you’re doing research on treatments for curing terminal illnesses. I think that’s trying to keep people safe.” He stared out his window for a moment. “I went into biochemistry because it’s what my parents do and I’m good at it. My mind’s suited for numbers and formulas. Not so much for common sense and people skills, you know.

“Of course, I never learned how to deal with people that well. I spent most of my education separate from others because of my age. Now, it’s easier to just spend time alone than try to start up a conversation with a stranger.”

He jumped when Jessie reached out and patted his knee. Herb wasn’t used to being touched so casually. His family wasn’t a touchy-feely group of people. They tended to act more like strangers with each other than people who shared the same blood. Just showed that sometimes family needed more than the DNA connecting them.

“Don’t worry. You’ll be fine. Trust me, you won’t have to talk at all if you don’t want to. Not with my family. Just sit back and let the rest of us go.” She chuckled. “That’s usually what Dad and Chuck do.”

“Chuck is the one you want me to meet.”

Jessie nodded. “I think you two would get along really well, but if there’s no spark, don’t feel pressured into anything else. Believe me, I’m not trying to hook you two up because I think all



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you need to be perfect for each other is the fact that you're both gay."

Herb frowned, but stayed silent. He'd never been set up before, so he didn't know what the protocol for it was. He was afraid he'd screw it up and embarrass Jessie. Embarrassing himself came natural to him, but he didn't want to hurt her. She'd become a good friend over the months since they first met. He didn't have enough of those to risk losing one.

"Chuck hates it when I try to set him up, but I think he's too picky and too set in his ways. He thinks no guy would put up with his crazy hours and the rather depressing aspects of his job."

"Depressing aspects? What kind?"

"He's a homicide detective. He deals with dead bodies and murder. All sorts of violence and crap like that. Poor guy has become so cynical over the years."

"Oh."

"We're here."

Jessie pulled into the driveway of a small, white, two-story house with a porch on the front. There were cars tightly packed in the driveway and on the street.

"They always leave one spot for me in the driveway. I guess they don't like the thought of me crossing the street to get to the house."

They climbed out of the car, and Herb looked at Jessie. "But you cross the street all the time around the company building."

Jessie took his hand and tugged him up the walk to the porch. "See, they don't like thinking about the fact I'm an adult and take care of myself."

"You're still the baby of the family, Jessie. I helped raise you, so I'm allowed to be protective of you."

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The deep voice coming from behind them froze Herb in his tracks and caused his cock to stiffen again. He groaned silently, fighting the urge to adjust himself. Oh, my God, he'd heard that voice before. It had been part of his fantasies for a week or so since he'd first heard it on the street.

Standing on the top step, he slowly turned around as Jessie launched herself from the porch into the arms of the big dark-haired man standing at the bottom of the steps. His eyes almost crossed at the sound of the low laughter escaping from the man's throat.

"Watch it, Jess. If you squish the Twinkies or the Oreos, I'm not going back out to get more. Everyone's just going to have to deal with crushed desserts."

*Twinkies? Oreos?* Herb dragged his gaze from the strong chin and slight smile on those thin lips to see that the man held a box of Twinkies in one hand and a package of Double-stuffed Oreos in the other. Herb was torn between grabbing the snacks from him or throwing himself in his arms like Jessie.

He must have made some noise because those dark brown eyes moved from Jessie to him. Surprise and heat flared in them before the man blinked and turned a narrow-eyed glance at Jessie.

"How long have you known?"

"Known what?" Jessie looked like butter wouldn't melt in her mouth. "Come on...we have to get inside. You know Mom already has dinner ready and is just waiting for us to get here."

"Who's your friend, Jessica?" The tone in the man's voice warned Herb that he expected to get an answer.

Jessie snagged Herb's hand and dragged him down the steps to where they stood. He looked up at the man, who by now he'd figured must be Chuck, and licked his lips. Wow...the man was

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big and it was all Herb could do to keep from climbing him like a tree. He wanted Chuck's lips on his again, only he wanted more than just a passing kiss. He wanted tongue and teeth with their bodies crushed as tightly together as humanly possible.

Chuck's eyebrows shot up like he knew just what kinds of thoughts danced through Herb's mind. "Hello, Herb."

"Hello, Chuck. I only know you're Chuck because Jessie told me about you and that you were the one she wanted me to meet. I didn't, like, stalk you or anything to find out your name after you kissed me. I wouldn't do that, no matter how much I liked the kiss or how badly I'd love for you to do it again."

He slapped his hand over his mouth, and Chuck laughed softly. The older man handed the treats to Jessie.

"Here, take these in and tell Mom we'll be there in a few minutes. I want to talk to Herb alone."

"You're not to scare him away, Chuck," Jessie protested. "I like him."

"Funny, Jessie. I happen to like him as well." Chuck gave Jessie a little shove. "Now get out of here."

They stood staring at each other until the screen door slamming announced they were alone.

"So you'd like me to kiss you again, huh?"

Chuck took a step closer, and Herb almost closed his eyes in happiness at all the heat radiating from the man. Breathing deeply, he savored the scent of pine and leather drifting from Chuck.

"Oh God, yes." He moaned. "It was my first kiss, you know, and while I thought it was great, I don't really have anything to compare it to. I'd have liked to do some experiments to see if it was just me or if it was a really great kiss, but I don't know any other guys I'd feel comfortable enough with to ask them to kiss

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me.”

The rumble from Chuck’s throat sounded like jealousy. “If you want another kiss, all you have to do is ask me.”

“But how could I do that when I didn’t even know your name? I thought about taking the long way home every night after work, just in case I might run into you again. I told Jessie about our meeting, and she must have figured out who you were by what I said.” He frowned slightly. “It might’ve been when I told her she looked like you and that you’d told me I should try a Twinkie or Oreos.”

“Jessie’s a pretty smart girl.” Chuck slipped a hand around to cradle the back of Herb’s head and bent, his hot breath warming Herb’s lips. “Would you like another kiss? Just as an experiment to see if the first one was a fluke.”

Herb whimpered and inched closer, not able to nod his head because of the hold Chuck had of his curls. He lifted his gaze and met Chuck’s intense stare. He’d never felt like he was going to burst into flames just from being close to someone before. Never before had the urge to strip naked and offer himself up in front of the whole world hit him, yet he trembled with the need to do just that.

“Hush now, little one. I’ll give you what you want.”

He closed his eyes and relaxed, realizing Chuck knew what he wanted and was willing to give it to him. Right as Chuck’s lips touched his, a female voice interrupted.

“Charles, you bring that boy in here and quit freaking the neighbors out.”

## CHAPTER 3

Chuck almost didn't listen to his mother because when he pulled away, Herb gave a little frustrated sigh. Chuck rubbed his thumb over Herb's plump lower lip.

"Yeah, I know how you feel." He chuckled softly. "Nothing like getting cock-blocked by your own mother. She is right. No need to upset the neighbors."

He turned Herb around and pointed him toward the front steps. Resting his hand on the smaller man's lower back, Chuck took a deep breath to calm his hormones. Shit, he'd never once forgotten where he was before, and certainly never had the urge to kiss a guy in his parents' front yard.

His mom and dad were supportive of him, though they would have preferred him not to be gay. Yet they lived in a pretty

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conservative neighborhood and Chuck didn't want his family harassed by narrow-minded bigots.

"But I really, *really* wanted another kiss from you. I'd like to compare it with the first one you gave me. I need to make sure the chemistry between us isn't a fluke." Herb frowned. "How would I know that since I'm still a virgin? Maybe I need to go out and..."

Chuck actually growled, and Herb shot him a surprised look. Chuck couldn't believe the possessive jealousy welling in him. Hell, he'd only seen Herb twice and he was ready to cart the guy off to his house and never let him leave it. God, if that didn't make him seem like a stalker.

"I have to admit I don't like the thought of you going out to get fucked by some stranger to see if our chemistry is real or if any guy will do." He held open the door and came face-to-face with his mother.

Her eyebrows rose in disapproval of his language, but she eyed Herb speculatively. *Shit!* He didn't want her getting ideas about Herb, not when Chuck wasn't even completely sure what he wanted from the guy. Well, he wasn't sure if he wanted anything else beside Herb spread underneath him while he reamed the man's pert ass.

Biting his lip, Chuck tried to will his erection down after that thought. No hard-ons around Mom. With her mom intuition, she already sensed that Chuck liked Herb. Chuck knew by the way she smiled at Herb.

"Sarah, is Chuck in yet? The food's getting cold." Chuck's dad strolled out of the dining room and grinned as he saw the three of them standing in the hallway. "Great. We can start as soon as you all sit down."

"Who is this young man, Charles?"

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Mom was the only one who called him Charles, and he could tell by the tone of her voice she wasn't moving until Chuck introduced them. He cleared his throat.

"I'm Herbert Pommerset, ma'am." Herb stepped forward and offered his hand. "I work with your daughter, Jessica, at Burke Pharmaceuticals. In fact, I'm her boss for now, but she's so intelligent, I'm sure it won't be long before she's running her own research team. I love your house. Have you lived here long? The decorating is wonderful. Did you do it all on your own?"

Both parents blinked as Herb kept talking. Chuck laughed silently as Herb maneuvered them all into the dining room where the others sat. Jessie grinned at him, obviously quite proud of herself. Passing by her to his usual seat, he leaned down and whispered, "I'll get you back at some point. Just remember paybacks are a bitch."

Herb handled Chuck's parents perfectly, making sure they were seated before he took his spot next to Jessie, which put him beside Chuck as well. Everyone stared at Herb with bemused looks in their eyes since the guy hadn't stopped talking. Finally, Herb paused to take a breath, and Dad spoke up.

"Nice to meet you, Herbert. I'm Glen and this is Karen."

"Please, call me Herb. Only my parents call me Herbert."

Chuck wanted to kiss Herb's wrinkled nose. *Fuck*. He shook his head. Something spoke softly to him, saying Herb just might be more than a casual fling. Yet how would he react when Chuck had to leave the house at three in the morning to work a case? And wasn't that getting ahead of himself? Maybe Herb just wanted someone to fuck him and nothing more. Just because Chuck's emotions were starting to get invested in the younger man didn't mean Herb's were for Chuck.

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Dad went around the table, introducing everyone. The only other new face was Luke's girlfriend, who hadn't been scared off yet. This was the first family dinner she'd attended, and while she looked a little shell-shocked, she held her own. It helped that the sisters liked her. If they didn't, it could have been really uncomfortable because they were bitches to people they didn't like.

Herb smiled at each person and nodded. When Dad got to Chuck, Herb grinned.

"I met Chuck a couple of weeks ago, only I didn't know he was Jessie's brother. I saved him from throwing his phone into the street. I don't think he likes modern technology."

Chuck's cheeks grew warm as his family roared at Herb's simple statement. Jessie leaned over and patted Herb's hand.

"Darling, that's an understatement if I ever heard one."

The floodgates opened and the embarrassment began. Chuck filled his plate and passed the food around while they bombarded Herb with story after story of Chuck's legendary bad luck with electronics and technology.

Herb shot glances between him and the rest of the family, eyes wide as each one brought up another disaster. Finally, his dad took pity on him.

"It's not quite as bad as they're leading you to believe, Herb. Chuck prefers the personal touch instead of how indifferent all this technology makes society."

Chuck looked at his father and snorted when Glen winked at him.

"What a bunch of bullshit."

Herb gasped as Debbie swore.

"Don't worry. Debbie has the worst mouth out of all of us."



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Chuck leaned over to tell Herb, making sure he spoke loudly enough for his sister to hear.

“Fuck off, Chuck.” Debbie flipped him the finger.

Both Herb and Luke’s girl stared at them, their mouths hanging open. The others bent over in their chairs, laughing so hard tears rolled down their faces.

“Are you still wishing you had siblings?” Jessie asked Herb.

Herb nodded his head. “This is wonderful. The way you interact with each other. Each vying for your parents’ attention, yet allowing the others to have their say as well. It’s like a well-oiled pack of wolves. You all want the alpha pair to give you their approval. Yet you’re each independent and have your own lives to live. I can see the love you have for each other and it makes me sad I never knew that with my parents.”

Chuck reached out and took Herb’s hand in his. He squeezed gently and smiled as Herb met his gaze. “You’re more than welcome to borrow my family any time you want, Herb. Trust me...after spending a full day with them, you’ll be calling me to take them back.”

Herb’s expression was earnest when he shook his head. “Oh, I’d never get tired of spending time with your family. Of course, if it meant I got to spend more time with you, I’d be even more thrilled because you’re all I can think about and I really want you to kiss me again.”

Shock skated across Herb’s face as the younger man slapped a hand over his mouth. Unfortunately, he used the hand Chuck held and smacked his face with both hands.

“Ow!”

Luke and his girlfriend suddenly found their plates very interesting, while the rest of Chuck’s family bit their lips to keep

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from snickering. Chuck lifted Herb's chin with his free hand.

"Are you okay?"

Herb peeked at him from behind their fingers. "Embarrassed mostly. You should know I'm not very good in social situations and I can very easily screw up. So, if you get embarrassed easily, you might want to consider not dating me. Of course, I don't think you ever really said you wanted to date me, so maybe I'm seeing things there that aren't. I've never been very imaginative, though."

God, Chuck couldn't fight it. He swept Herb into his arms and stood. Karen nodded as he walked past.

"Go, check and make sure he didn't hurt himself, Charles. We'll take care of the dishes. I believe you brought dessert—Twinkies and Oreos. Jessie brought milk."

"Twinkies and Oreos? Hot damn. It's been years since I had a Twinkie."

He heard Donald yell his approval of dessert as he made his way to the downstairs bathroom. He set Herb down, letting the slender man slide the length of his body and made sure Herb felt the erection bulging behind his zipper.

"Oh, wow," Herb whispered, his bright green eyes huge behind his glasses. "Did I cause that?"

"Yes, little one. You did."

Chuck cradled Herb's face in his hands and checked to make sure there weren't any bruises or anything. Herb studied his face with intense focus, like the man was memorizing every angle and curve.

"I can't resist," Chuck murmured.

Bending, he pressed his lips to Herb's and accepted Herb's gasp happily. He nibbled along Herb's plump bottom lip before sweeping his tongue in to stroke along Herb's. He jerked slightly

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when Herb practically climbed him and wrapped his long legs around Chuck's waist.

Chuck stumbled and managed to lean back against the sink, burying his hands in Herb's dark curls while diving deeper into Herb's mouth. They kissed like their very lives depended on how much they could learn about each other. Chuck slid his hands down from Herb's waist to grab Herb's ass and squeeze the firm muscle.

"Oh, my." Herb moaned, his head dropping back as he rocked against Chuck's groin.

He agreed with Herb and trailed kisses over Herb's jaw to the small triangle of skin pulsing at the base of Herb's throat. He sucked there as Herb rubbed over Chuck's prick.

"God, can we be naked...like now? I want to feel you against my skin. I bet you'll be hot and rough just like a guy should. I don't have a lot of hair, but I bet you do. I want to feel it. I want to suck your cock. I want to swallow your cum to see what it tastes like. Will it be salty or bitter or both?"

Herb babbled as he kept dry humping Chuck, and Chuck found himself smiling as his cock twitched in agreement with Herb's desire to suck it. God, he couldn't wait until Herb was on his knees in front of him with his lips wrapped around his prick.

"When can we have sex? When can I see you naked? I bet you're totally hot when you're not wearing any clothes."

Herb's skin flushed, and Chuck bet the man was close to coming. A knock sounded on the door and he snapped, "What?"

"I think Herb is fine and we want to have our dessert. It's not fair you get to have yours first."

Chuck snarled as Herb froze, surprise tensing his muscles.

"I'm going to kill every single member of my family, except

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maybe my dad,” he grumbled under his breath. “We’ll be out in a minute.”

“Sure. I’ll tell Mom so she doesn’t come to check on Herb herself.” Linda’s voice held an evil tone of laughter.

“Oh, my God!” Herb scrambled down from him and held his hands in front of his jeans. “I can’t believe we almost had sex in your parents’ bathroom. I’m not going to be able to look them in the eye.”

Trying not to laugh, Chuck took Herb’s shoulders in his hands and smiled down at him. “Don’t worry. They might tease us a little bit, but they know better than to harass you about it.”

“Why? How could they know better? From what I’ve seen, your family doesn’t know how *not* harass each other. I mean, they’ve been picking at each other since we got here.” Herb looked panicked.

Chuck did what he thought would work best on calming Herb down. He leaned forward and kissed him. This time, their kiss was slow and gentle, giving Herb something else to think about. After a minute, Chuck eased back.

“Let’s go have some Oreos.”

Herb’s eyes lit up. “I love Oreos, especially the double stuffed ones. Jessie said Oreos were your favorites as well. That’s one of the reasons she thinks we should date.”

Chuck couldn’t wait to hear what the other reasons were, but he wasn’t so inclined to kill his sister anymore. Herb was proving to be adorable and sexy, a combination Chuck seemed to have a thing for.

\* \* \*

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Herb never realized just how sexy watching someone dunk an Oreo into milk could be. Maybe it was the way Chuck sucked the milk from his fingers after eating the cookie. Or it could just be everything Chuck did turned Herb on. He didn't know and, not having any experience, he didn't know if he was over-reacting or not.

Shifting in his chair, he tried to adjust his dick without anyone noticing, but Chuck eyed him knowingly. He ducked his head, and Chuck patted his knee to catch his attention. He peered up through his eyelashes and blushed as he spied the large bulge in Chuck's jeans.

Well, thank God, he wasn't the only one who seemed to have some strange kink about Oreos, and milk.

"Oh, Chuck, I need you to drive Herb home. I totally forgot I have to meet up with some friends to do some research."

"Could you possibly be any more obvious?" Glen grimaced and shook his head at Jessie. "You probably wouldn't have had to lie by the looks Chuck's been giving your friend there."

"Shit," Chuck muttered under his breath.

"Oh, don't worry. I can take a bus or the subway. I do it all the time. No big deal."

He didn't want to be a problem to Chuck, especially if they were going to date or anything.

"NO!"

Herb jumped as both Jessie and Chuck almost shouted at him.

"Ummm...okay."

"I'll take you home. You shouldn't be wandering around the city at night alone."

Herb met Chuck's gaze and saw desire burning in Chuck's dark eyes. He hoped it was desire. Would Chuck come up to his

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apartment and kiss him again? God, he wanted to leave right now. He fought the urge to look at his watch.

Chuck stood and stretched, yawning as he did. "I worked all day yesterday and early this morning. I need to get home and sleep. Thank God, I have tomorrow off."

It was the sign for everyone to pack up and get ready to leave. Jessie hugged everyone and she grabbed Herb's hand, dragging him down the hall to the front porch. Glancing back over his shoulder, Herb caught Chuck smiling at him before turning back to his mother.

"So do you like my big brother?" Jessie folded her arms over her chest and grinned at him.

"No. Not at all." He barely kept his own grin from his face.

"I'd hate to see how you act when you like someone. I thought Chuck was going to fuck you in the bathroom."

Herb choked, embarrassed again at how he let his hormones take over. He didn't know what to say and floundered until two large hands landed on his shoulders. Bending to the pressure, he leaned back against Chuck's warm, hard chest.

"Jessie, leave him alone. He's not used to our kind of teasing. And even if he was, you're over the line."

His embarrassment disappeared as Chuck slid his arms around his waist and pulled him closer. Herb never thought that having someone else stick up for him would turn him on as much as it apparently did.

Frowning, Jessie studied him. "I'm sorry if I upset you, Herb. Trust me, I was just teasing." She gave them both a quick hug before heading down the stairs. "I'll see you tomorrow at the lab. Talk to you later, Chuck."

"I should say good-bye to your parents." He hesitated.

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“Nah. Don’t worry about it. You’ll see them next week, I’m sure.” Chuck kept his arm around Herb’s waist and escorted him down the sidewalk to a dark burgundy sports car at the curb.

“Wow. Nice car. What kind is it? I’m not surprised you’d drive something like this. Or you should have a big four-wheel drive truck. Of course, a truck wouldn’t be practical for driving in the city.” He slipped into the passenger seat, running his hand over the leather. “I’ve always thought cars like this were hot. What kind of car is it?”

Chuck climbed behind the wheel and turned the car on. The growl of the engine hit Herb low in his groin, causing him to moan softly.

“It’s a Camaro, V-8 engine. First new car I ever bought myself. Couldn’t resist.” Chuck winked at him and reached over to lay a hand over Herb’s erection. “Does that to me all the time.”

Herb closed his eyes and arched his hips, pressing hard against Chuck’s palm. “I love your hands on my body. I’ve never had anyone touch me like you do. I’ve never touched myself. Why would you affect me? Why do I want you to do anything you want to me? I mean, I would fall to my knees and do whatever you wanted. I don’t tend to listen to people very well. Too much going on in my head.”

Chuck squeezed gently, and Herb’s eyes rolled back in his head.

“Herb, give me directions to your apartment.”

“I don’t think I remember where I live. You need to not touch me. My brain short-circuits when you’re near me. All I can think about is kissing you or you kissing me. I can’t seem to focus on anything else, which is why we ended up almost fucking in your mother’s bathroom. I can’t believe it. I don’t usually do things like

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that.”

“I hope not.”

Chuck took his hand off Herb’s groin and started driving. Herb rested his head back against the seat, breathing slowly and trying to calm his heartbeat. All he could think about was getting home and doing all those things he heard about when other guys talked. Well, when most of them talked, it was about their girls, but it had to be sort of the same thing as when they messed around.

He gave Chuck clear directions since the man wasn’t touching him anymore. Chuck drove confidently and quickly, weaving through traffic without hesitation. Herb was impressed. He’d never learned to drive because he tended to get so distracted with his own thoughts he didn’t pay attention to what was going on around him, plus his parents had the money to pay for someone to drive Herb around the city when he was younger. Distraction was dangerous while driving a vehicle that could reach speeds of a hundred miles per hour. Not that he’d ever drive so fast anyway.

What would happen when they got to his apartment? Would Chuck want to come up? Wait, had he cleaned up all the dishes and dirty clothes? *Crap!* He couldn’t remember the last time he cleaned. He rarely ate more than a bowl of cereal or a sandwich from the little deli down the block for dinner. No one ever came over to visit him, so he didn’t have to worry about anyone seeing the inside of his place.

Chuck took Herb’s hand and laid it on his thigh. “You’re thinking too much.”

“How can you tell?”

“I can almost see the steam pouring from your ears.”

“Really? I didn’t think that was true.” Herb tilted his head and frowned. “I was wondering what you wanted to do when we got to



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my place. I hoped you'd come up and we could, maybe, continue what we were doing at your parents' house, but you're probably tired and I don't want you to do anything you don't want to."

"Honey, it's okay. I did work late last night and this morning, but I'm fine and I have tomorrow off. It's all good." Chuck sent him a wink.

"Oh, okay. Does that mean you want to come up?"

Somehow, Chuck found a parking spot close to Herb's apartment building. They climbed out and Chuck joined Herb on the sidewalk. Cupping the side of Herb's face, Chuck leaned down to brush a quick kiss over his lips. After he straightened, he smiled.

"Lead me to your place, Herb. I'd love to spend some time with you without my family around."

"Thank God." Herb grabbed Chuck's hand and dragged him into the building and up the stairs. "I was really hoping you'd want to come up because I didn't want to take care of this erection on my own. I want you to fuck me or I can suck you. Either way. I'd probably come if I sucked you, though, and I'd rather do that while you're fucking me."

Chuck groaned. "Whoa, Herb. You're going to make me cream my jeans just by talking to me about this. I don't want that to happen. It'd take me a little while to get it back up. I'm not as young as you are."

"Well, of course you aren't, but you aren't old or anything like that. I'll try to keep my mouth shut." Herb bit his lip and fidgeted in the elevator, willing it to move faster, which was stupid because he couldn't actually make a machine move any faster than it was programmed to go.

He rushed from the elevator when it stopped on his floor and fumbled to get his keys out of his pocket. Chuck crowded him into

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the door while he tried to unlock it. Frustration drew a little whimper from him, and Chuck took pity on him by taking the keys from him and unlocking the door.

The door opened and Herb found himself propelled into his entryway, swung around, and practically knocked unconscious as his back hit the wall. He gasped, and Chuck took his mouth. There was even more desperation in this kiss than the others. It was like Chuck had done all the waiting he could and finally snapped. That was fine with Herb, who wound his arms around Chuck's shoulders and encircled Chuck's waist with his legs, climbing him like a jungle gym.

He dropped his head back, and Chuck scraped his teeth over Herb's jugular, causing all sort of interesting sensations to race through Herb's body. All of them landed in his groin where his prick stiffened until it ached with the need to come.

"Please, Chuck, do something. Anything. I think I'm going to explode into little pieces all over the floor. That wouldn't be a good thing because then you'd have to clean it up. God, I love how strong you are and that thing you're doing with your teeth," Herb babbled, not sure what he was saying, but knowing every inch of him needed something from Chuck. Unfortunately, he didn't know what to ask for.

All of this was new to him. He'd never so much as kissed a guy before. Too awkward and too young most of the time wasn't conducive to getting a date, even from horny college students. Though, he had to cut them some slack. He was way underage when he went to college.

Chuck managed to peel him off and prop him against the door, dropping to his knees in front of Herb. Herb protested, but Chuck met his pout with a sexy grin.

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“Trust me, little one. I’ll give you exactly what you need.”

Herb swallowed and nodded. He didn’t know much about Chuck, but somehow he knew Chuck wouldn’t do anything to hurt him.

“Fuck!”

The cool air of the apartment washed over his hot flesh as Chuck unbuttoned and pushed his jeans down to his knees, revealing Herb’s proudly standing erection.

“Hmmm...” Chuck hummed, running a finger up the length of Herb’s shaft. “Very impressive, Doctor. All those guys missed out when they overlooked you.”

“Well, it’s not like I’m a stud or anything. I’m not built like you. I’m just a little geek. Oh, my God.”

Herb’s eyes drifted shut for a few seconds as Chuck sucked Herb down to the root. Herb couldn’t help it—every nerve in his body screamed “move,” so he did. He thrust in and out of Chuck’s mouth, hoping he didn’t choke the man while he did it. That would really suck. He giggled a little, and Chuck sent him a questioning look from where he knelt, mouth full of Herb.

Herb’s sac tightened and drew closer to his body. Tingling built at the base of his spine. All were signs that his climax was near.

“I’m coming.”

It was the only warning he could give before he exploded, flooding Chuck’s mouth and throat with his cum. The pleasure was too much for Herb and he blacked out.

He wasn’t sure how long he was out, but when he came back to himself, he was naked and lying under the blankets of his bed. He sighed and opened his eyes. Chuck braced his head with a hand and looked down at him.

“Was that good?”

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“It was great, though as I’ve said before, I don’t really have any experience to compare it to, but I’m sure it was the best I’d have ever had, if I’d done that before.”

Chuck chuckled and shook his head. “You don’t have any internal filter, do you, honey?”

“Uh, no.” He stared up at Chuck. “You might get tired of that, and I completely understand. Not that you were planning on doing any more than what we did tonight. God, I hope we’re going to do more than just you giving me a blowjob. I want to give you one. I don’t know if I’ll like doing it, but I should experiment and make sure it’s something I *can* do. Also, I want you to fuck me. I want to know what it’s like to be filled by a man.”

He swore Chuck’s eyes crossed at his rush of words, but the man didn’t go running away. Chuck simply leaned down and kissed him, stopping the words rushing from his mouth. Herb could get used to being shut up that way.

## CHAPTER 4

The ringing of his alarm clock woke Herb and he wrinkled his nose at the thought of having to get out of his nice warm bed. After reaching out to shut off his clock, he snuggled back against the hard body behind him and sighed.

His eyes popped open. *Hard body?* There shouldn't be anyone in bed with him. He never brought guys home, mostly because he never got offers for sex from men. They tended to overlook him.

*What was that saying?* Men don't make passes at girls who wear glasses. Well, that usually happened to him. One look at his glasses and rather haphazard way of dressing, and any normal guy would walk by him without a second thought.

"Christ, Herb, it's too early in the morning to be thinking that hard about anything."

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Herb stiffened as one muscled arm wrapped around his waist and pulled him even tighter to the lightly hairy chest behind him. He bit his lip as a hard cock nudged at his ass. Rocking his hips, he rubbed against it.

“Keep that up, and you’re going to be late to work.”

“At this moment, I don’t care if I’m late. Your cock feels too good for me to worry about being late. I really want you to fuck me.”

Chuck’s laugh bathed the nape of Herb’s neck, and Herb shivered.

“I want it just as much as you do, but you’re going to be late, and we don’t want that to happen.”

“Why not?”

Herb couldn’t think of any reason why he should be worried about his job. It would be there whenever he got out of bed. He couldn’t be sure about Chuck, though. The man might come to his senses at some point and decide Herb was too much work, though he never thought of himself as high maintenance. Other men had told Herb he was a lot of work, yet he didn’t make any demands on them at all.

Maybe it was because his brain worked faster than most people’s and it took a lot to get him to slow down. Focusing on a research project could become the entire center of his universe at times, and Herb knew some people didn’t like it when their lovers didn’t pay enough attention to them, or that was what the women Herb talked to said about their boyfriends.

“Herb, stop.”

Chuck rolled him over onto his back, and he found himself staring up into Chuck’s dark eyes. He frowned, wondering what Chuck wanted him to stop. Was Chuck going to kiss him? Oh God,

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he had morning breath. That wasn't sexy at all. He struggled to get out from under Chuck. He needed to go brush his teeth.

"What the hell is wrong?"

He froze as Chuck pinned him to the mattress, using his entire body. Herb groaned as Chuck's cock lined up with his and stroked. Chuck leaned down, and Herb turned his head away.

"Herb?"

Shaking his head, he said, "You don't want to kiss me. Morning breath."

"Oh, honey, I don't care about that."

Chuck reached up and took hold of Herb's chin, holding him still until their lips met. He gasped, and Chuck swept his tongue in to tease Herb. Herb went limp, his hands clutching the sheets beneath him as he arched up into Chuck. He spread his legs, allowing Chuck to settle between them.

As the kiss continued, they moved together, picking up a rhythm perfect for rubbing off on each other. Herb's entire body tightened, nerves strung to the breaking point as his prick swelled and ached to explode. He threw his head back and panted, filling his depleted lungs with much needed oxygen. Chuck scraped his teeth over Herb's Adam's apple before latching onto a piece of skin, where he sucked up a dark mark.

"Chuck," Herb cried as he came, spilling his cum over their stomachs.

"Fuck." Chuck ground the curse out between gritted teeth as his own hot spunk mingled with Herb's on their bodies.

Their movements became less frantic as their heartbeats slowed. When Chuck rolled away from him and off the bed, Herb protested.

"Come on, lazy bones. We need to grab a shower and get you

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off to work. You're going to be a few minutes late, but I think you won't get into too much trouble for that." Chuck paused in the middle of pulling Herb from the bed. "Of course, you're going to have to deal with Jessie pestering you all day about this."

Herb stumbled to his feet and grimaced at the sticky, cooling mess on his skin. "Don't worry. I'm sure I can find projects for her to work on that'll keep her away from me most of the day."

He followed Chuck into the bathroom and stood quietly while Chuck got the shower started. Chuck glanced at him over his shoulder as he stepped into the tub. "Are you okay?"

"Yeah. I tend to wake up slowly, and coming doesn't help. Makes my brain mush."

Slipping in, he found himself caught between Chuck's large body and the cool tiles. He squeaked as his ass hit the cold porcelain.

"Your shower isn't really meant for more than one person at a time," Chuck pointed out. "Maybe you should just take a shower, and I'll rinse off after you."

"No." Herb grabbed Chuck's arm before the man could get out. "We'll deal with it. I like being close to you and this just gives me a good excuse to do it."

He must have said the right thing because Chuck kissed him silly and proceeded to wash him off. Herb had never had anyone want to take care of him like that. It was nice.

They climbed out and Chuck dried them both off quickly. He jumped as Chuck smacked him on the ass. He rubbed the offended cheek while glaring at the man.

"Get dressed."

Herb watched Chuck tug on his jeans and T-shirt before leaving the bedroom. After the distraction of all that well-toned



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flesh disappeared down the hall, Herb headed to his closet to dig out clothes.

Ten minutes later, he walked into the living room to find Chuck standing there, ready to go. He put on his jacket and grabbed his messenger bag. Chuck handed him a paper bag.

"I made you lunch because something tells me you tend to forget about taking something with you, so you skip lunch a lot."

Herb looked down at his skinny body. "What makes you say that? I just have a high metabolism. I burn off anything I eat very quickly. Makes it hard to gain weight. I've tried, but unless I want to take steroids, I have to make do with what nature gave me. I won't do steroids because they cause all sorts of medical problems like shrinking your junk."

Chuck blinked. "I see the shower woke you up."

Nodding, Herb locked the door after them and led the way to the elevator. "What are you doing today?"

"I have to head back to my place and change my clothes, then I need to get back to the precinct and go over the evidence for a couple cases I'm working."

"Sounds way more interesting than my work. I have to go in and check on an experiment to see whether some of the cells I grew have split at the molecular level. If they did, I might be able to take the chemicals I used to dissect the diseased cells and cut out the bad part."

He paused and glanced over at Chuck. He could tell he'd lost the man somewhere, but Chuck still managed to look interested.

"Never mind. It's only interesting to other biochemists."

"I can't say I understand anything you're talking about, but I like the way your eyes light up while you explain." Chuck threaded his fingers through Herb's curls and brushed a kiss over Herb's

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upturned lips. “I’m going to give you a ride to work. That way you don’t have to worry about being even later.”

“You’re just worried about me taking the subway,” he murmured.

“Guilty as charged, but I just discovered you, Herb, and I don’t want anything to happen to you before I’ve learned everything there is to learn about you.”

“Wow. The things you say. You know, I’m pretty deep. It could take a really long time to dig up all my secrets. Are you sure you’re in it for the long haul?” he teased, nervous to hear Chuck’s response.

“Oh, I think I have the time and the stamina for this adventure.” Chuck kissed him again, breaking away only when the elevator doors opened on the first floor.

They climbed into Chuck’s car and drove toward the research facility. The silence inside the vehicle was comfortable and, for the first time in a long time, Herb didn’t babble inanely. He was proud of himself, but knew Chuck’s hand holding his kept him from fidgeting as well.

After pulling up in front of the gate, Chuck put the car in park and wrapped his hand behind Herb’s neck, pulling him in. They kissed for a moment until a car honked behind them. He broke away, touching his fingers to his tingling lips.

“Just keep that kiss in mind today, and I’ll call you tonight. Maybe we could get together for dinner later this week. If I don’t catch a new case or anything.”

“I’d like that, especially if dinner leads back to my place or yours and a bed. I want to feel you inside me soon, Chuck. I can’t get the thought out of my head. I’m going to be hard all day. Thank God, the lab coats cover my groin. I don’t need your sister or any

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of the other lab assistants commenting on my erection during the day.”

Chuck moaned. “Great, now I’m going to be hard all day as well. Christ, the things that come out of your mouth, Herb.”

“I’d rather you put something in my mouth.” He patted the bulge in Chuck’s pants.

“Shit.” Chuck jerked and leaned back, gripping the steering wheel with white-knuckled strength. “You need to get out and go on in, Herb, or you might see how flexible you are and whether it’s comfortable to fuck in a Camaro.”

“Okay.”

He snatched up all his stuff and scrambled from the car. He stopped at the gate, turned, and waved to his lover who watched him. Chuck waved back, and pulled away from the curb.

Herb flashed his ID to the security guard at the desk and headed up to the fifth floor to his lab rooms. Some of his colleagues smiled at him as he walked past them and it was only when he got to his office that he realized he was humming.

A few minutes later, he was settled in front of his computer, a cup of coffee in hand, and he was checking his email. A knock sounded on his door and he called out for whomever it was to come in. Jessie bounced into the room and took a seat across from him without hesitation.

“So how’d it go last night?”

Her dark eyes, so much like Chuck’s, sparkled with speculation, and Herb’s face burned. Heavens, he was blushing. “Fine.”

Jessie giggled. “I’m thinking it was more than fine by how red your face is and the fact I saw my brother drop you off at work.”

“Jessie, it really isn’t any of your business,” he admonished

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her.

She shrugged. "Of course it isn't, but that's never stopped any one of us from being nosy. Trust me, Chuck knew what was going to happen today the minute he offered to take you home last night. He's just glad I'm bugging you and not him."

"Why not go bug him?" Herb waved a hand at his computer screen. "As you can tell, I'm busy here."

"Ah, but he can ignore my phone calls. You, my dear Dr. Pommerset, are captive here."

Shoot, what should he say? Herb didn't think Chuck would like him to tell Jessie what happened between them last night. It wasn't any of her business that Herb was well on his way to falling in love with her oldest brother.

"I don't think you really want to know all the details about our time together." He pursed his lips and tried to focus on his emails.

She crossed her legs and folded her hands in her lap. "Oh, I think I can just imagine what happened and it does ick me out a little. Because...well, Chuck is my brother, but I'm a little happy both of you got some last night. You both needed to get laid in the worse way."

"Jessie, I really don't think you should be talking like this about your brother and me."

Laughing, she stood up and came around the desk. She leaned down and kissed the top of his head. "You're a good guy, Herb, and completely perfect for my big brother. I give you my seal of approval."

He didn't say anything as she left, but there was a small piece of his heart that was glad because she approved of his relationship with Chuck.

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Chuck glared at his phone, gritting his teeth, and fighting the usual urge to heave the thing as far away from him as possible.

“Hey, Chuck, you still there?” Luke’s voice came over the phone.

“Yes, and I have a question for you.”

“Shoot, man. I’m an open book.”

He snorted. “Yeah, right. Okay, here’s my question. When have I ever, in all the years you’ve known me, called you up and asked you about your date the night before?”

Silence greeted his question.

“Thought so. I’ve never done it. Not even when we were all still living at home. I’m not like our mother or any other member of our family. I don’t want to know how your date went last night. I don’t want to know if you took her back to your place and you fucked like bunnies. I like the girl, Luke. She seems nice and everything, but I don’t care what the two of you do when you’re alone.”

He stopped and took a deep breath before continuing. “You do realize you’re the fourth person who has called me this morning about the whole situation? Mom was the first and she didn’t even wait until I had my first cup of coffee.”

The two people he didn’t expect to call him were his father and John. His youngest brother was in the Middle East, still Afghanistan probably, and hadn’t called home in a while. His dad had learned a long time ago to stay out of his children’s business. Their mother was nosy enough for both of them.

“Sorry, Chuck. I didn’t think about it. Herb’s the first guy you ever brought to dinner. I just wanted to know if it’s serious.”

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"I didn't bring him to dinner. Jessie did," Chuck pointed out.

"Whatever. Dude, everyone knew he was totally into you. Just tell me this and I'll leave you alone. Are you going to see him again?"

Chuck glanced up and Petrovic gestured to him that they had to leave. Pushing to his feet, Chuck shoved a hand through his hair.

"Yes, I'm going to see him again. But I don't think I'll be bringing him to dinner anytime soon. No need to feed him to the vultures again." He tucked the phone between his ear and his shoulder while he pulled his gun out and clipped it to his belt. "Hey, bro, I have to go. Treat your girl good, and we'll grab dinner sometime soon."

"Be safe, Chuck. 'Bye."

He flipped the phone shut and stuck it in his pocket while catching up with Petrovic. They made their way downstairs to the parking lot where the force kept their precinct cars. Chuck let Petrovic drive.

"Family bothering you again?"

"God, you'd swear I never dated anyone before," he muttered, buckling his seat belt.

Petrovic chuckled. "So are you dating someone and how did your family find out? Usually you keep your guys away from them for as long as you possibly can. I'd think they were serial killers or something, the way you hide them away."

"Well, Jessie decided hooking me up with Herb was a good idea, so she invited him to dinner yesterday. My entire family got to meet him without any warning ahead of time."

"Oh, come on, man. Your family isn't that bad. There's just a lot of you, and they all care about you." Petrovic shook his head. "Shouldn't Jessie be looking for a guy for herself instead of you?"

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“Just waiting for the right guy.”

Chuck wasn't about to tell Petrovic that Jessie had the hots for him. The man would completely freak out. Petrovic thought he was too old for Chuck's little sister, and, at one time, Chuck would have agreed with him. Yet as he got to know the Brooklyn native, Chuck realized Petrovic's solid and unflappable personality would be a perfect fit for Jessie's rather scatterbrained brilliance. His sister's crush on his partner was a source of great amusement to the rest of the family.

*Hmmm...* Maybe he should try his hand at matchmaking. Giving Jessie a taste of her own medicine wouldn't hurt. Grimacing, he realized throwing a party at his house was the best way to get his partner and his sister together in the same house. Christ, maybe he should just skip it. Planning parties were not his forte. He glanced over at Petrovic and mentally sighed. Okay, for the sake of his sister's future happiness and maybe to get her off his back, he'd do it.

“Where are we going?”

“One of the uniforms called in a body behind one of the bars a couple blocks from here.” Petrovic checked his mirrors before cutting across two lanes of traffic and turning onto the right street. “Even though we have three other open cases, the captain tossed us this one.”

“Guess that's what happens when you're the best,” he joked.

Petrovic rolled his eyes and pulled to a stop behind a marked police car. A crowd had gathered at the entrance of the alley, but the crime scene tape and a couple other uniformed officers kept them from seeing anything.

They flashed their badges and slipped under the tape. As they pulled gloves out of their pockets, they studied the scene. The M.E.

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was already there, along with the crime scene techs. The two detectives stayed out of the way as the others worked the scene and the body.

Chuck's phone rang and he frowned.

"Answer it and get it over with. Maybe once you've talked to all of them, they'll leave you alone," Petrovic joked.

"Fuck off." Chuck yanked his phone out and flipped it open. "I'm not telling you anything about what Herb and I did last night, Jessie, so just hang up now and quit wasting my time."

The low chuckle hit his ear and he froze. "The family giving you a hard time again, brother?"

"John?"

Petrovic looked up from where he crouched next to the body, surprise coloring his expression. No one had heard from John since right before he went on his most recent deployment.

"Has it been that long since we talked that you don't recognize my voice?"

"No, man. Just wasn't expecting you to call, that's all. Have you gotten a chance to talk to Mom yet?" Chuck moved away from the crowd, farther down the alley.

John grunted. "No. I can't talk to her, Chuck. You know she'll ask all these questions I can't answer. I hate not being able to tell her anything."

Something in John's voice put Chuck on high alert. "John, are you physically okay?"

"Yes."

So, whatever was bothering his younger brother wasn't a combat injury or anything. He knew there were things John couldn't discuss having to do with his unit, and Chuck tried very hard not to ask questions John would have to lie to answer.



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“Good. I’ll tell her when I mention you called.”

“Thanks. I should be back in the States within a month or so. If I came up for a visit, could I stay with you?”

Now Chuck was really worried. John usually stayed with their parents when he came on leave. “Sure. I’ve got the room. You want to talk when you get up here?”

John sighed. “I think I need to talk to someone, and you’re the only one who might understand what I’m going through.”

Chuck leaned his shoulder against the brick wall and stared down at his shoe. “You know I’m here for you, John, and whatever you tell me won’t be passed on to Mom.”

“You were always good at keeping secrets.” A muffled voice in the background called to John. “I have to go, bro. Tell everyone I love them, and I’ll call you when I’m back in country.”

“Be safe, John, and I’m here for you.”

“Is there someone who’s there for you, Chuck? You’ve been our rock for years, even with Mom and Dad around. I just wonder if there’s someone you can lean on.”

“I think I found him. You can meet him when you come home.”

“Cool. Talk to you later.”

John hung up, and Chuck ended the call. Slowly returning the phone to his pocket, he thought about his younger brother. John might be the youngest child, but he’d always been independent, never wanting anyone to help him out. Yet he’d turned to Chuck during some of the soul-searching parts of his life. Like when John had figured out he was gay, but still wanted to go into the military. There had been many nights they’d sat up talking about it, and ultimately John decided he could deal with the don’t-ask-don’t-tell policy. Maybe his brother had discovered he couldn’t take hiding

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who he really was.

No one else in the family knew about John's sexuality. Not even Jessie, who was John's best friend growing up. That's how Chuck had become the keeper of secrets for John and the others as they grew up. As much as he grumbled about them, Chuck wouldn't change his family for anything in the world. They were loud and crazy, but they loved with open arms and hearts. Yet there were some things each of them didn't want the others to know about, even with all the love.

"Hey, Chuck, that John?"

He nodded as he went back toward Petrovic. A flash of color caught his eye and he stopped, glancing to his left at the space between the dumpster and the wall.

"I found something. One of you techs, get over here and bag it." He waved for one of the crime scene guys.

"What is it?" Petrovic yelled.

"Looks like a back pack or maybe a messenger bag. Do we have any ID on the guy?" Chuck asked as he got closer to the body.

Petrovic handed him a wallet. "Doesn't look like a robbery. If it was, the robber got scared off before he could take anything. His wallet was in his jacket pocket."

"Find anything else on him?"

"Not yet."

Chuck opened the wallet and checked the driver's license. "Dr. Yuri Fardanov. He lives on Long Island. We'll have to go over and check his place out."

He pulled out an ID badge and swore softly. Petrovic frowned at him.

"Fardanov works at Burke Pharmaceuticals."

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“Isn’t that where Jessie works?”

“And Herb.” Chuck didn’t like the fact his newest murder case had any sort of connection to Herb and Jessie. He copied down the deceased’s address before handing the wallet off to a tech.

“Herb your new guy?” Petrovic walked next to him as they left the alley.

“Yeah. Okay. The M.E. has this. We’ll call it in and head out to Long Island to check Fardanov’s place. Maybe you should call Jessie and see if she knew the man.”

Petrovic lowered his eyebrows and glowered at Chuck. “Why me?”

“Because I don’t want to get stuck talking to her about what happened between Herb and me last night. I’m sure she’s already cornered him at work.” He slid into the car and buckled up.

His partner hummed in disbelief, but didn’t speak as they merged into traffic and headed out toward Long Island. Chuck didn’t think Jessie or Herb were in danger. He just didn’t like their world being touched by the sordidness of his.

Jessie was used to the police world, being the daughter and granddaughter of cops, but Herb didn’t know how violent and messy being a detective could be. Chuck didn’t want Herb to lose the innocence Chuck found so appealing. Yet as much as he didn’t want to expose Herb to the seamy side of life, Chuck didn’t think he could walk away from the sexy scientist. Herb had wormed his way into Chuck’s heart, even in the short time they’d known each other.

“Do you think the guy’s murder had something to do with where he worked?”

Chuck shook his head. “I think it’s a botched robbery, but we won’t know for sure until we get all the information. I doubt Herb

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or Jessie are in danger.”

Chuck sent a little prayer up to heaven, asking God to make what he said true.

## CHAPTER 5

“Do you think this guy had OCD or something?”

Chuck glanced up from where he sat at Fardanov’s table, thumbing through the man’s mail. “What makes you say that?”

“Because I think I could eat off the man’s furniture and his floors. Hell, it looks like he doesn’t even live here.”

“Well, all his bills come here, but I’m getting the feeling he hasn’t been here in quite a few days.” He held up the stack of envelopes they’d picked up from the floor when they entered.

“Yeah, he’s not be here for four or five days.”

They turned to see a little elderly lady dressed in a blue housecoat lurking in the doorway. She peered at them through thick glasses.

“You friends of Yuri’s?” She shook her head, not waiting for

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an answer. "He's a good boy. Always has time to talk to me. Not like most of young people today. All in a hurry to forget the old country and the old ways."

Chuck shared a glance with Petrovic, and his partner moved away to keep looking around the house.

"How long have you and Yuri been neighbors, Mrs...."

"Elena Botsova. Yuri move in here about three years ago." She tapped one gnarled finger to her lips. "He big scientist somewhere. Always coming and going at all hours of the night, but he tries to be quiet and not wake me up with slamming doors."

"That's very considerate of him, Mrs. Botsova. When was the last time you saw Yuri?" He tugged out his notebook and a pen.

"As I said, he not been here for four or five days. What day is today?"

"It's Monday."

"Right. Tomorrow garbage day, but Yuri not here to take out my trash for me." She eyed Chuck speculatively.

Heaving a mental sigh, Chuck tucked his notebook back in his pocket and smiled. "I'd be happy to take your trash out for you."

She beamed up at him and patted his arm. "Good boy. Your parents must be proud."

Petrovic snorted, and Chuck glared at him over Mrs. Botsova's head. She led the way across the front yard to her house where she pointed to two large trashcans. He gritted his teeth and hauled them to the curb for her.

When he finished, she motioned him to sit in one of the rocking chairs on her front porch. She settled in the one next to him, straightened her skirt, and folded her hands in her lap.

"I saw Yuri last time on Wednesday. He in hurry, so he not say good-bye to me in the morning. He usually very polite, so I

notice.”

Chuck nodded, not sure where the lady was going, but willing to listen. Mrs. Botsova was the type of person who knew everything going on in the neighborhood.

“I also notice the large black truck thingie pulls out as Yuri leaves. Same vehicle sits outside his house for four days in a row before Wednesday.”

He perked up. Now they were talking. “Did you happen to notice anything else about the vehicle, Mrs. Botsova?”

She pulled a piece of paper out of her pocket and handed it to Chuck. “Yes. Back in old country, is never good to have a vehicle sit outside your house for so long. Means police come for you at some point. At least in old days. Now not so much, but always must be careful, you know.”

Chuck restrained himself and calmly took the paper. Petrovic had stepped out on Fardanov’s porch. Chuck waved him over.

“Run this plate number. It belongs to a black SUV parked outside Fardanov’s place several days before the man disappeared.”

Petrovic nodded and headed to their car to call it in. Chuck turned back to the elderly lady.

“Is there anything else you can tell me about the vehicle, the people in it, or maybe Yuri’s attitude the last couple of days before you last saw him?”

“Two men. Large, not big like you. Fat large. One total pig. He throw his trash out his window, instead of taking care of it like he suppose to.” She shook her head, clearly very put out at how careless the man was. “They both bald and always wear sunglasses, even at night. Not very good at blending in.”

“I’m not sure blending in was what they were trying to do,”

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Chuck commented as he wrote down everything Mrs. Botsova told him.

“True.” She paused and rubbed her hands together before continuing, “Yuri very nervous last month or so. When I ask him about it, he says it’s nothing, but I think it has something to do with his job. That big drug place where he works.”

Chuck so didn’t want to hear that. Even if Herb and Jessie had nothing to do with Fardanov, this would hit too close to home for him.

“He began to work late, not come home until midnight or so. He leave early in morning as well. Often I see him pacing in his home, talking on phone, and gesturing wildly. I see he very upset about something, but he don’t talk to me. Maybe he worried something happen to me.” Mrs. Botsova met Chuck’s gaze with sad knowledge in her eyes. “Yuri is dead, yes?”

Leaning forward, Chuck covered her thin hands with his. “I’m sorry to tell you this, but yes, Yuri Fardanov is dead.”

“Murdered by those fat guys, I bet.” She shook her head, and Chuck saw her trembling. “I should have called the police the first day I spotted them. I knew something bad would happen.”

“We don’t know yet who killed him. His body was discovered in the alley of a bar earlier this morning.”

She frowned. “Bar? Yuri no drink. His father was an alcoholic back in Ukraine, so Yuri never touched alcohol. Oh, his poor mother. She still lives in Ukraine.”

“Do you have her phone number?” He’d have to get an interpreter to call Fardanov’s mother and break the news to her.

“No. It probably on his little phone. He good son and calls his mother every Sunday.”

Petrovic cleared his throat, and Chuck looked up.



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“We got a hit on the SUV.”

“Good.” After standing, he held out a business card to Mrs. Botsova. “Please call me if you remember anything else. There’ll be police men coming and going from Dr. Fardanov’s house most of today and tomorrow, but if you see anything suspicious when they aren’t there, don’t hesitate to call.”

“Certainly, Detective Davidson.” She studied his card. “I hope you get the fat bastards who killed Yuri.”

He blinked at the viciousness in her voice, but didn’t say anything else. From her age, Chuck believed Mrs. Botsova probably lived in Russia during communism, so her outlook might be a little more biased than most.

“We’ll do our best, Mrs. Botsova.”

He and Petrovic walked to the car. After climbing in, he turned to look at his partner. “So what did you find out?”

“It’s registered to The Pteriran Corporation. Don’t know much more than that at the moment. The computer guys are seeing what they can find. Also, I put an APB out for it, considering it might be our best lead to find out who decided to shorten Dr. Fardanov’s life.”

Chuck agreed and started the car. “I guess we better head over to Burke and find out what he was working on. His neighbor said he started acting strange about two months ago, and seemed really nervous the last week or so.”

“Something the guy working on worry somebody?”

“Maybe, or we could be right and it could’ve been just a simple robbery.” He ignored Petrovic’s loud grunt. “Yeah, I know. Nothing about this case says fucked-up robbery. I’m just not happy it might be connected to Jessie and Herb.”

“What? Do you think they know anything about it?”

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Chuck shook his head. “No, but the dead guy worked at the same place they do, so they’re connected.”

He saw Petrovic roll his eyes.

“Come on, Chuck. I doubt either one of them is in danger. It’s probably just a jealous boyfriend or something like that.”

His friend might be right, but with the kind of luck Chuck had, he wouldn’t be surprised to find out Herb worked directly with the guy.

“Let’s go over there and talk to someone.”

Forty minutes later, Chuck and Petrovic walked into the lobby of Burke Pharmaceuticals. They approached the security desk and flashed their badges.

“We need to talk to Dr. Yuri Fardanov’s supervisor. Please.”

The security guard frowned, but lifted the phone and called someone. “Yes, sir. There are two detectives here to talk to you about Dr. Fardanov.” Pause. “No, sir. Dr. Fardanov didn’t come in yet today.”

Chuck glanced around. He’d never visited Jessie at work. Of course, she’d been employed at the research facility for just six months. Besides, unlike the rest of his family, he didn’t believe in bothering his siblings while they were at work.

“Chuck?”

“Fuck,” he swore softly as he turned to see Herb standing there.

“Why are you here asking about Yuri?”

“Please, tell me you aren’t Fardanov’s supervisor.”

“Okay. I’m not his supervisor. Why do you want me to tell you that? Because it isn’t true. Yuri is working on his own little research project, but I’m the one who has to make sure he stays on deadline and under budget. He didn’t really consult me about his research, just gave me little updates when his deadlines neared.”

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Herb wandered closer to him. "I'm glad to see you. Probably shouldn't be because if you're asking about Yuri and he isn't here, then something bad probably happened to him, right? Poor guy. Seemed like things were finally working out for him."

"Herbert Pommersset, this is Alexei Petrovic, my partner."

Herb held out his hand for Petrovic to shake, but he kept his gaze on Chuck. "I'd forgotten you worked homicide. Yuri's dead, isn't he?" Tears welled in Herb's eyes.

"Is there somewhere we can go to talk about this, Herb? I don't want it all over the place just yet." Chuck glanced over at Petrovic. "Oh, and we're going to need access to Fardanov's office and his papers."

"Do you really think he was killed because of something he was working on?" Herb gestured for them to follow him to the bank of elevators. "That sounds odd because he wasn't doing anything special. Just testing the effects of a new heart medicine on mice. We needed to see if the chemical compounds were right or if they were too strong. We don't want to cause heart attacks when we're trying to prevent them. Come on. You know your sister has been harassing me all day about you. I tried not to tell her anything. It's not really any of her business, right?"

Chuck shot a quick peek at Petrovic. His partner's stunned expression as he stared at Herb brought a smile to Chuck's face. Herb seemed to have that affect on others.

"No, Herb, it isn't any of her business. Stick to your guns and don't let her wear you down about it. She doesn't need to know any details." Chuck reached out and ran his hand over Herb's shoulder. "How are you doing?"

Herb wrinkled his nose. "I'm fine. Why wouldn't I be fine? Oh, you mean because of Yuri. I worked with him for a couple years,

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but he and I weren't very close. I think he was a little jealous of me because I was smarter than him. I mean, I was younger and his supervisor. It's hard not be upset about that."

"I wouldn't know. Never was smarter than anyone I worked with."

"That's the truth. I could tell you weren't nearly as swift on the uptake as me," Petrovic joked.

"Hey, that's not fair. Chuck is the smartest man I know who hasn't gone to college. You know being smart doesn't mean just being book smart. I'm not very street smart, but Chuck has continued to flourish without the help of a degree. It's not very nice to tease him because he didn't have the opportunity to go to a university." Herb whirled on Petrovic

"Now wait a minute. I could've gone to Columbia, but I wasn't interested in a higher education. I wanted to be out on the streets, helping people and catching criminals." Chuck caught himself. Why was he defending his choices? Herb wasn't making fun of him. The guy was just being honest, like he always was. He took a breath. "Can we get back to why we're here?"

"Right. I'll escort you to Fardanov's office. I'll have to stay with you because all of the records are corporate property. Other companies would pay a lot of money to get their hands on those papers. It could mean millions of dollars in revenue."

"And there we have motive," Petrovic muttered.

Herb stepped out of the elevator and led the way down the corridor to a closed door. "You think Yuri was killed because of his research? That doesn't sound right. Sure, our research could mean millions for not only our company, but others. Without Yuri, it would be very difficult to replicate the experiments. Unless he told them all about his research before they killed him."

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Herb opened the door and stood to the side, allowing Chuck and Petrovic to enter before him.

“This doesn’t look like the same guy worked here who lived in the house on Long Island.”

Chuck and Petrovic stood in the midst of a destruction scene—glass broken on the floor and papers strewn all over the place. The man’s computer was smashed and books torn from the shelves. Someone was looking for something and didn’t worry about being neat about it.

Turning, Chuck saw Herb’s mouth drop open. The man looked stunned.

“What kind of experiments could Yuri do in such a messy office?”

And that was why Chuck was falling in love with Herb. The man didn’t have a suspicious bone in his body.

\* \* \*

Petrovic snorted, and Herb looked at Chuck, who gave him a fond smile.

“What?”

“I think you had a break-in. You might want to alert your security team, and I’ll call the crime scene techs. We might get lucky and get fingerprints of who did this.” Chuck glanced over at Petrovic. “Actually, why don’t you call Summerson and update him on what we’re doing, plus get the crime guys over here?”

“You just want to kiss your boyfriend,” Petrovic grumbled good-naturedly while moving off a few feet.

Herb blushed as Chuck laughed.

“He’s right, you know.” Chuck eased closer to him.

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“Right about what? Me being your boyfriend or about you wanting to kiss me? Or both? Am I really your boyfriend? I’ve never had a boyfriend before.” He ducked his head. “I’ve never had anything before. Neither a friend nor a boyfriend. It’s weird thinking you’re my boyfriend. I mean, we only spent one night together. Doesn’t that count as a one-night stand and not a relationship?”

Chuck pressed a finger against Herb’s lips, forcing him to stop talking. “As much as I’d love to kiss you right now, I can’t. It wouldn’t be professional to do that while I’m working a case, and you’re working as well. But keep that thought because the next time I see you without all of this around us, I’m going to kiss you silly.”

“I think I’m already silly. I can’t really seem to focus when you’re touching me. I told you that all ready, didn’t I? I believe I did. Why would you want to kiss me silly? Seems like a strange thing to want to do to someone.” Herb wrinkled his nose as he tried to work out the reasoning behind that.

“It’s an expression, honey. Don’t worry about it.” Chuck sighed and stepped away. “You need to call your security guys, Herb.”

“Why? Do you really think someone broke in here and messed up Yuri’s lab? Maybe he’s just a slob. I know a few of our scientists who are like that. It’s awful. I’ve always wondered how they could work in a pigsty like their offices.”

Petrovic rejoined them. “The captain said to keep working the angles. And the techs are on their way. We’ve been to Fardanov’s house and, trust me, he wouldn’t have left his office like this.”

A shiver skated down Herb’s spine. He didn’t like the idea of someone breaking into the facility and trashing Yuri’s office. He

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went to use the phone that had, somehow, missed being destroyed. As he reached for it, Chuck stopped him.

“Wait. Go use a phone in one of the other offices, Herb. This is officially a crime scene now, and we don’t want to contaminate it anymore than we already have.”

“Okay.” He wandered out into the corridor and down two doors to his office, barely acknowledging the fact Chuck and Petrovic stepped out into the hallway as well, shutting the door behind them.

Why hadn’t he noticed anything different? Was it because his mind was too caught up in Chuck, so he missed all the signs things were not right in the world? He should have known Yuri was in trouble when the man hadn’t been in his lab by the time Herb got to work this morning.

For the past two months or so, Yuri had been in the lab way before any of the other scientists and stayed later, like past midnight every night. Herb just thought the man was on the verge of a breakthrough on the heart medicine. Maybe he was and that breakthrough was what had killed him.

*Wow... Yuri’s dead.* It was the first time anyone Herb knew had died. It was creepy and sad to think Yuri wouldn’t be storming around his lab, hands gesturing wildly while spouting Russian at him as he asked about budget things. Herb pushed open his door and went to the phone.

He pressed the button connecting him to the security department.

“McKinley.”

“This is Dr. Pommerset,” he informed the man who answered.

“Yes, Dr. Pommerset?”

“I want to report a break-in.” He was proud of the fact his voice

didn't shake.

"Right now?" Urgency collected in the deep voice on the other end of the line.

"Ummm...I'm not sure when it happened, but I just discovered it. It's Dr. Fardanov's office."

The voice swore. "Shit. Does this have anything to do with the detectives who came to speak to you?"

"Yes, though they aren't the ones who broke in. I let them in because Yuri's dead and they needed to see where he worked. They're in the hallway right now. Their crime scene techs are on their way to process the scene, I guess. That's what crime techs do, right? They take fingerprints and DNA samples to try and find the killer?" He was babbling, but he couldn't help it.

"Take a deep breath, Doctor. I'll be up there myself to talk to the detectives and check things over."

Their call disconnected, and Herb set the receiver down in its cradle. He stared at his neat desk, nothing out of place or even out of order. He didn't know what to do. Should he rejoin Chuck in the hallway? Should he stay out of the way and let the professionals do their job? It was hard to decide when all he really wanted to do was throw himself into Chuck's arms and hide from the world. He started to freak out a little.

"Herb? Are you okay? What are Chuck and Alexei doing here?" Jessie poked her head into his office. "Chuck wouldn't tell me anything. Did he come for some afternoon delight?"

Herb frowned. "I don't know what that means, but no. Yuri's dead, murdered more than likely. Someone broke into his office and destroyed it. Or at least that's what Chuck said. They're here to investigate the murder.

"Why would anyone want to murder Yuri? I've been tempted



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to strangle the man myself when he got on his soapbox about how superior his education was to mine, but I wouldn't have done anything to harm him. Not really."

Jessie gasped. "Yuri? Oh no, that's terrible. None of us really liked the man, but he was brilliant. Is Chuck going to want to talk to us about him?"

"I don't know. I've never been involved in a crime before, so I don't know how things like this proceed. I can't think it's just like in the movies or on TV. Of course, I haven't seen a lot of shows on TV. I don't own a TV. My parents didn't believe in them, saying they ruined children's brains at too early an age. Maybe that's why I ended up as smart as I am."

He didn't move when Jessie rounded the desk and wrapped her arms around him. He embraced her, resting his forehead on her shoulder while he tried to organize his scattered thoughts. He needed to focus or he wouldn't be any help to Chuck. She patted his back a few times before stepping away.

"You stay here. I'm going to talk to Chuck for a sec."

She dashed from the room and he wandered over to the one window he had. Staring out, he watched people going about their normal day without any knowledge of what had happened a few short yards away from them. Why did he feel violated when it was Yuri who was killed and Yuri's office trashed? Probably because it was the first time violence had touched his life was touched.

Through the reflection in the glass, he watched Chuck enter the room, but didn't turn to face him. Chuck shut the door and came up behind him, encircling his waist with both arms. He sighed and leaned back against Chuck's broad chest. Chuck buried his face in Herb's curls and breathed deeply.

"I'm scared," Herb admitted, not afraid to confess to fear. After

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all, Chuck was there and Herb was sure Chuck would protect him, no matter the danger.

“I know, honey, but don’t worry. Nothing’s going to happen to you. Unfortunately, Fardanov’s killers probably already have whatever they were looking for, so they won’t need to bother you or anyone else here.”

The words were meant to reassure, yet Herb couldn’t help but detect a hint of disbelief in them. He wanted to call Chuck on his lies. He just didn’t have the strength at the moment. He’d get on his case later about lying to him. Herb was an adult and brilliant to boot. He didn’t need to be sheltered from the bad world around him. Did it matter that he wanted to be? That he wanted to stay in Chuck’s arms forever, watching the world pass by through a pane of glass?

Chuck turned him around and bent to kiss him. Herb opened the instant Chuck’s tongue touched his lips. He moaned as Chuck stroked his tongue over his teeth, re-learning every inch of his mouth. He chased Chuck back into his own mouth and his hands twisted into Chuck’s jacket as the man sucked on his tongue.

Holy honeysuckle, could Chuck kiss. Herb no longer thought his attraction was something he’d feel with any other man he kissed. No. It was all Chuck, and he wanted to continue finding out all the different ways Chuck could blow his mind.

He pressed closer, wrapping one leg around Chuck’s thigh and rocking against the man. *Oh, right there.* Chuck slid his hands down to grasp Herb’s ass and ground their groins together. They humped each other. Their erections were happy to have something hard to move against.

Herb dropped his head back and begged. “Please.”

Before Chuck could reply, a knock sounded on the door.

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“Doctor Pommerset,” a deep voice called through the wooden panels.

“Fuck,” Chuck swore and set Herb away from him.

Herb panted, hating whoever knocked with a fierce anger. Of course, it wasn’t his fault since he didn’t know what was going on. Herb adjusted his hard-on in his pants and tugged his lab coat closer, glad he’d chosen to wear one that day. Chuck buttoned his jacket, covering his own bulging pants, before going to open the door.

McKinley, head of Burke’s security, stood with his hand raised, ready to knock on the door again. “Who are you?”

Herb swore Chuck’s eyebrows almost shot off his head at the belligerent question. As he watched, Chuck’s shoulders straightened and his boyfriend pulled himself to his full height, which was still about two inches shorter than McKinley. Chuck pulled out his badge.

“I’m Detective Chuck Davidson. My partner and I are investigating the murder of Dr. Yuri Fardanov.”

“Then why are you in Dr. Pommerset’s office and not in Fardanov’s?”

*What an odd question.* Why did it matter where he and Chuck were? It wasn’t like Chuck dragged him in here and forced himself on him. Herb blinked, the image of being bent over his desk while Chuck fucked him superimposed itself over the actual sight before him. Christ, that would be awesome. He might have to discuss an event like that with Chuck later.

“I’m Dr. Pommerset’s boyfriend and I was comforting him because one of his colleagues has been murdered. Do you have a problem with that?” Chuck challenged McKinley.

McKinley looked over Chuck’s head toward Herb. “Are you

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okay, Dr. Pommerset?”

“Of course, I am. Why wouldn’t I be? Okay, so I’m a little freaked out because Yuri’s dead and it looks like whoever killed him broke into our facility, but other than that, I’m fine. Though you did interrupt something and I’m not fine about that.”

He heard Chuck muffle his laugh while McKinley stared at him, trying to puzzle out what he might have interrupted. Herb waved his hand, gesturing for the two men to leave.

“It’s not important. Right now, what’s important is trying to figure out why they destroyed Yuri’s office and killed him. Dr. Davidson and I will go over Yuri’s case notes to see what he might have been doing. We need to know if he worked on anything other than the heart drug.”

Both men eyed him for a moment, and he wondered where he got off ordering two men the size of mountains around. Neither man would do anything to him, but still it took a lot of balls to boss them around. Maybe he was absorbing some self-confidence from Jessie. And that was a scary thought.

## CHAPTER 6

Herb glanced up at Chuck's annoyed huff. "What seems to be the problem?"

"How does any of this stuff make sense to you?" Chuck waved around the sheaf of papers he held. "It's all numbers and symbols to me."

"That's because you don't have an advanced degree in biochemistry. If you did, those symbols and numbers wouldn't look like a foreign language to you. Of course, the only foreign language it might resemble at the moment is Arabic, and you don't speak or read Arabic, do you?"

Chuck shook his head, and Herb smiled.

"I didn't think so. Why don't you bring those over to me and we can see what Yuri might have been working on? I still don't

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think he was doing anything that would get him killed, but heck, he could've been genetically engineering mutant dung beetles for all I know. He would only consult me when he needed more money and I had to explain, yet again, what a budget was. He couldn't grasp the concept. Yuri was very secretive about his research, and Mr. Burke allowed him the leeway not to tell me anything important." He gestured for Chuck to join him over at his desk.

"Neither did you until the head of accounting worked out a formula that made sense to your scientific brain," Jessie teased from where she sat next to Petrovic, going over her own set of papers.

"Don't harass Herb, Jessie. There was a time when you didn't understand what budgeting your money meant. It must not be something geniuses need to care about. Mom did encourage your disability, though," Chuck admitted. He glanced at Herb. "No matter how much she was overdrawn, Mom would keep putting money into her account. Until one day Dad put his foot down and made Jessie take an accounting class. Finally, we didn't have to worry about her draining my parents' retirement fund dry."

"Ass." Jessie wadded up a piece of paper and tossed it at Chuck.

"Hey, that better not have been one of Fardanov's notes," Petrovic protested.

Herb studied the way Chuck's partner sat so close to Jessie. He was amazed the man wasn't sitting in her lap or that Jessie didn't shove him away. She wasn't a person who enjoyed others invading her personal space. Yet maybe it didn't matter because she knew Petrovic. She blushed as the blond detective leaned closer to her and whispered something in her ear.

"I was trying to figure out how to get the two of them together.

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Maybe I can skip the get-together I was planning.”

Herb jumped as Chuck spoke softly into his ear. The man moved so quietly Herb hadn’t even heard him come up beside him. As he lifted his head to meet Chuck’s gaze, Chuck leaned down and brushed a kiss over his lips.

“Okay, you two. None of that. We’re in the middle of a murder investigation. You can’t be kissing over evidence.”

He jerked away and caught Chuck flipping Petrovic off. The friends laughed together, but Chuck did move away from Herb, to his disappointment. He took the papers Chuck held out to him and smoothed them out on his desk.

As he focused on the numbers and notes written in Yuri’s precise scrawl, their voices faded away. Herb dug out a fresh blank notebook and yanked a pencil out of his pocket. Scribbling as fast as the connection came to him, he started to see a pattern evolving.

“Holy crap.” He breathed the words.

“What?” Jessie’s voice came from right in front of him.

Blinking, he refocused on the people in the room with him, only to find all of them crowding around his desk. He eased back a few inches, but pushed his findings to Jessie.

“Look these over before I say anything.” He also shoved Yuri’s notes at her as well.

“Hmmm...” She picked up the sheets and wandered back to the couch.

“What?” Chuck glanced between Herb and Jessie. “Was Yuri mutating dung beetles or something like that?”

“No. Mutating dung beetles is already being done. It’s not nearly as fascinating as the research being done on making mice smarter. I mean, there are scientists who have gotten some amazing results on increased brain activity for lab mice and rats. I went to a

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conference last year where a team of scientists was demonstrating how they trained their mice to answer simple questions. They said they were hoping to expand into harder questions as the mice matured.”

Chuck and Petrovic’s blank stares informed Herb they weren’t quite as excited about gene manipulation as he was. Jessie would have been, but she wasn’t paying attention to him.

“What did you discover to get a reaction from you? And remember to dumb it down a little for the rest of us non-scientist people in the room.”

Chuck smiled, reassuring Herb he didn’t feel particularly bad about not understanding what he meant. It was nice to meet a guy who didn’t seem intimidated by Herb’s intelligence. Of course, he had never dated any guys, dumb or otherwise. Was that why he never was asked out—because he couldn’t play dumb or at least a little less intelligent than the guy who wanted to ask him out?

It was probably one reason, but most of the time he simply got overlooked because he wasn’t gorgeous like Chuck, or even good-looking. He was just an average man with glasses and an inability to keep his mouth shut at times. He’d found his motor mouth tended to turn guys off as well.

“Herb?”

“What?” He looked at Chuck, who nodded toward Jessie. “Oh, right. I think I might’ve figured out one reason why Yuri was killed, or at least why they wanted him. I want Jessie to validate my discovery before I say anything. Also, I’ll need to go back to Yuri’s office and see if I can find some more notes.”

“Petrovic, can you go and check with the techs to see if the crime scene can be released to Herb and the other scientists? Also, send McKinley back in here. I need to talk to him.”



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“Will do.”

Petrovic strolled out while Jessie continued to work through the formulas and numbers. After coming around the desk, Chuck took Herb's hand in his and pulled him from his chair. He sighed as Chuck encircled his waist with his strong arms. Herb rested his hands on Chuck's chest and looked up into Chuck's dark eyes.

“You'll be careful, won't you?”

Chuck's question confused him. “Why would I be careful? I doubt they're going to be after me.”

“You and Jessie have figured out what Fardanov was doing. What if they killed him before they got the truth from him? What if he gave them the notes, but not the key to figuring out the formula? They could decide to come back and find a scientist to do the work for them.”

“Dr. Pommerset and Dr. Davidson are safe here, Detective Davidson.” McKinley's voice held indignation at Chuck's comment.

Chuck let Herb go and turned to face the security chief. They studied each other like two prizefighters would, or like Herb always imagined prizefighters would eyeball each other.

“Oh, please, stop it. It's like you're sizing each other up,” he complained.

McKinley blinked and laughed in surprise. Chuck grinned before stepping forward and holding out his hand. The two men shook hands.

“I wasn't disparaging your security here, McKinley. I know Herb and Jessie are as safe here as you can possibly make it. The people who broke in more than likely used Fardanov's ID.”

“So far, that's what we determined, but my men are still looking into it. I want to make sure they really did use his ID or

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maybe they forced him to come in with them.” McKinley pursed his lips. “The destruction of his lab leads me to think he wasn’t there with them. He wouldn’t allow them to trash the place. Dr. Fardanov would’ve given them what they wanted to keep them from finding anything that might be important to other research being done at the facility.”

Herb agreed. “You’re right, considering Yuri tended to be a little compulsive about how clean everything had to be, especially in his lab.”

Jessie snorted, and Herb glared at her. “What?”

“I’m not saying a word, kettle.” Jessie mimed locking her lips and throwing away a key.

Rolling his eyes, Herb sighed. “All right, fine. I’m just as bad, but it’s really irritating to be looking for something and not being able to find it because it’s not in the right spot. I hate having to dig through stuff to find a pencil or a beaker. My experiments are very time sensitive, and if I have to search for something, it can ruin something that took me half a day to set up.”

“All right. All right.” Chuck held up his hands. “No one said being neat was a bad thing.”

“Being neat isn’t bad. Being obsessive about it—like actually returning a glass to the exact spot you got it from—might be. Making sure it’s at the same angle to the other items on your desk might be.” Jessie stood, papers rolled in her hand.

“Jessie, leave him alone. I remember you throwing a fit every time John and Donald raided your room for your Ken dolls,” Chuck interceded.

“It’s okay, Chuck. I don’t need you to stick up for me. I’m perfectly content with my own issues. It doesn’t really matter in the end. It’s my lab. I can set it up however I like it, and when

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Jessie gets her own lab, she can do the same.”

Herb laughed as Jessie winked at him. He really didn’t get upset when Jessie pointed out his own complexes. He’d had those issues since he was a kid, learned to deal with them, and allowed them not to run his life entirely. Herb returned to Chuck’s request.

“Do you really think Jessie and I could be in danger? I don’t think anyone would consider her or me important to Yuri’s work. Neither one of us had anything to do with his stuff. I mean, just because we figured out what he’d done doesn’t mean we could repeat what he did. Even with his notes, there are things he could’ve added without writing it down.” He wrinkled his nose. “That’s not true. He wouldn’t have done anything without documenting it.”

Chuck grabbed his hand and pulled him close. Herb noticed Petrovic had returned and moved closer to Jessie.

“You have to understand we’re trained to expect the worse. McKinley will tell you the same. Until we catch who did this to Yuri, I want you to be very careful and pay attention to everyone around you. Believe me, Herb, I know how hard that’s going to be for you.” Chuck gave him an earnest stare. “You’re important to me and I don’t want anything to happen to you before we get even more serious because I care a lot for you.”

“Welcome to the family, Herb. This is just the beginning. My mom will be calling you, along with the rest of the brothers and sisters. Trust me, the only two people you’ll not hear from—and you’ll be glad about it—are my dad and John.” Jessie giggled as she elbowed Petrovic. “Even this guy will bug you.”

“I think he’ll be bugging you more than me. Something strikes me that I’m not Alexei’s type. Omph!” He rubbed his stomach and glared at Chuck. “What did you elbow me for?”

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McKinley chuckled. "I'm going back to work with my men. I'll make sure to get you all the security footage we have from the weekend. I think that's when the break-in happened, simply because not many people are around except for the guards. I'd appreciate it if you could keep me in the loop on the case."

"Certainly. I'm trusting you with their safety while at work, so you need to know what's going on and who to look for. I'll give you a call tomorrow morning with an update."

"Thanks." McKinley handed Chuck his card and nodded to Herb. "Dr. Pommerset. Dr. Davidson."

"I'm important to you? You care about me?" Herb rewound their conversation to what Chuck had said to him. "Even though we haven't had sex yet?"

\* \* \*

A muffled snort and an unabashed giggle caused Chuck to glare at his sister and partner. All Petrovic did was roll his eyes, but Jessie burst out laughing, leaning on Petrovic for support. Turning back, Chuck saw Herb staring at his sister like she was an unusual bug and he was trying to figure out what made her tick.

"Ignore them. They're juvenile." Chuck took hold of Herb's hand and tugged the man after him to a more private spot in Herb's office. Not that there were many, considering Jessie and Petrovic strained to hear everything he said, yet he wanted to create the perception of privacy.

"Sex is only one reason why people like each other. I'm really attracted to you and we'll get to the bed part of the relationship soon enough, but I also like your mind."

"You don't mind I'm smarter than you?" Herb frowned.

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“Maybe I shouldn’t have said that.”

Chuck laughed. “Honey, don’t worry. You’ve met my family, remember? All of them are smarter than me. I’m more muscles than brains.” He pressed his finger to Herb’s lips. “I’ve come to terms with the fact I’m surrounded by geniuses. Hey, someone has to have some common sense among us.”

Herb wrapped his lips around Chuck’s finger and sucked on it. Chuck’s cock stiffened with each tug of Herb’s mouth and stroke of the man’s tongue over the tip of his finger. Chuck bit his lip to keep from moaning and was glad he’d thought to block the terrible twosome’s view of Herb. He closed his eyes and breathed in, praying for the strength not to drag Herb into the closest supply closet and fuck the man silly.

“You need to stop if you don’t want me to fuck you in front of my best friend and my sister.”

Herb’s half-closed eyes widened in horror and he opened his mouth, allowing Chuck to remove his finger.

“Oh, my God! Your sister would so watch and that isn’t something I ever want to do. I’ve never been an exhibitionist. Or at least, I don’t think I am and I think I’d be scarred for life if I were to do something in front of someone I work with.” He studied Chuck. “There’s no way she’d want to see her brother have sex. It’s just icky.”

“You’re right, Herb. I wouldn’t want to watch you and Chuck get it on, but if you have some other friends who wouldn’t mind giving a poor sheltered girl a glimpse into something really hot...” Jessie teased.

“You need to keep an eye on her, Petrovic. She’s going to get herself into trouble,” Chuck said over his shoulder.

Petrovic looked surprised and slightly embarrassed. “Why

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would I keep an eye on her? She's your sister."

"Yeah, but I have my hands full with my own guy. Jessie's going to need a bodyguard for a little while."

Chuck winked at Herb, whose confusion marked itself in the frown on his forehead.

"Stop being such a big brother. I'm perfectly capable of watching out for myself." Jessie huffed in annoyance.

"I thought you'd be used to me looking out for you. Get used to having someone check on you at night, Jessie, until this case is solved. We can't guarantee the killers got what they wanted and that they can understand what they got. There's nothing to stop them from grabbing another scientist, except for keeping your eyes open and accepting help from friends." He glared at his sister. "I don't want to have to explain to Mom and Dad why I didn't protect either of you from getting kidnapped."

Jessie wrinkled her nose, but she didn't argue anymore. Just the threat of Chuck telling their parents about anything was enough to stop any protest in its tracks.

"Okay, we need to head back to the precinct, and you guys need to get back to whatever kind of work you do when we're not interrupting."

"Wait, don't you want to know what we discovered?" Herb brought them all back to the beginning of the conversation.

"Shit. Yeah, we should probably know that before we head back. Summerson is going to want to know what we've got so far, and I'd hate to tell him nothing."

Herb moved around Chuck and grabbed the papers Jessie still held. After smoothing them out on his desk, he gestured for them to gather around. Chuck pressed as close as he could get to Herb with his clothes on and hid his proud smile as the man shivered

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from the contact.

“Stop it,” Jessie muttered at him, giving him the evil eye over Herb’s head.

“What?” He could play innocent.

“Leave Herb alone unless you really are going to take care of him.” She wiggled her eyebrows.

Chuck glanced at Herb, who seemed caught up in the numbers again, before leaning over to whisper in Jessie’s ear.

“I’m thinking I’ll take care of our little problem tonight if I don’t catch another body.”

Jessie’s eyes lit up and her bright smile almost blinded him. “Oh, goodie. Just what I didn’t need to know.”

He shook his head and returned to staring over Herb’s shoulder at the list of numbers and squiggly lines. None of which made any sense to him.

“So give us the scoop, Herb.” He nudged Herb’s side with his elbow.

Herb started and straightened. “What? Oh, right. Sorry, got working on how to explain it in a way you’d be able to understand. I will need to get back into Yuri’s lab to see if I can find any other papers or notes about this particular experiment.”

Petrovic nodded. “The techs have released the lab for use again. You can go in whenever you want, though McKinley might not let you take anything out of there until he’s done with his investigation.”

“I don’t need to remove anything. I can read the notes there as easily as I can here.” Herb pointed to one long line of odd symbols. “I don’t suppose you know how to read Russian, Alexei.”

“Nope. I speak it better than I read it, so I’m pretty sure whatever Fardanov wrote there is beyond me.”

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““I need not fear my enemies because the most they can do is attack me. I need not fear my friends because the most they can do is betray me. But I have much to fear from people who are indifferent.”” Herb read the sentence.

“What does that mean?” Chuck asked what all three of them were thinking.

“I think Yuri was feeling a little under-appreciated here, or that those people who are indifferent to his research are the ones who are going to do the most damage.” Herb shrugged. “I was never very good at deciphering proverbs like this one.”

“Why would someone be indifferent to his research? Wasn’t he trying to discover some kind of heart medicine? Tons of people need that stuff.” Petrovic scowled.

“I know, but *this* research didn’t have anything to do with the heart medicine. Oh, it might have at one time, but he broke away from what he was supposed to be doing to focus on this new discovery.”

“Which is?” Chuck nudged verbally.

“He discovered a way to render a person invisible.”

Silence hung in the room for a moment before Chuck and Petrovic burst out laughing.

“That’s a good one, Herb. I didn’t know you were such a kiddie.” Chuck encircled Herb’s waist and hugged him close. “Why don’t you tell us what Fardanov really did?”

Herb looked annoyed. “I told you. He developed some sort of serum to render a person invisible to the human eye or electronics. I haven’t figured out which one yet.”

Chuck checked with Jessie and when she nodded, he groaned. “Guys, I can’t tell my captain that. Not without some kind of proof.”



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“We’d get laughed out of the precinct,” Petrovic added.

“We realize that, but we can’t try to duplicate his experiment until we know for sure we have all of his notes. We could end up harming ourselves or others without having the right measurements and compounds. I didn’t think invisibility was possible. I saw those old black-and-white movies, you know, and it seemed kind of scary. Why would anyone want to be invisible to other people? I feel like that without the help of a drug all the time anyway and it’s not fun.”

Chuck’s heart skipped at the matter-of-fact tone in Herb’s voice. Oh, his poor little scientist felt unnoticed. Well, Chuck planned to change that as soon as he possibly could.

“I don’t know all the reasons, but I bet terrorists would like it so they could sneak into places undetected to wreak havoc and destruction. Spies and thieves would love to use it and take stuff they could sell.” Jessie tapped her fingernail against her bottom lip. “That would be a very good reason to kill Yuri...or at least to take him hostage.”

“Okay. Here’s what I’m going to need you two to do for me, if it’s okay with the powers that be here at Burke. I need you to try and repeat Fardanov’s experiment.” Chuck turned to Petrovic. “Something tells me we’ll be getting a call from the FBI soon. Burke might have some kind of government contract with them.”

“We have done research and development of some drugs for the government, but Yuri wasn’t part of those projects.” Herb frowned. “I’d hate having someone from the government staring over my shoulder while I’m doing this. Probably end up screwing something up and turning water into wine or something odd like that.”

“If you could turn lead into gold, then we’d have it made.”

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Jessie poked Herb in the shoulder.

“That’s just a legend. Not even possible.” A thoughtful expression passed over Herb’s face. “I wonder... You know, back in the medieval times when they tried it, they didn’t know all the stuff we do about science and nature. I wonder if we could turn lead into gold. That would be a great trick, wouldn’t it?”

“Let’s focus on one miracle at a time, guys. Make someone invisible for me before you work on making gold.” Chuck shook his head.

He kissed and hugged Herb before doing the same to his sister. Petrovic hugged Jessie, taking his time letting her go. Chuck noticed Jessie didn’t complain. Things were getting interesting between those two and Chuck was going to do all he could to insure they grew closer. Petrovic was the perfect guy for Jessie. He’d let her run while keeping her safe.

“I’ll be stopping by your place later tonight, Herb.”

“Yay! Herb will be getting some tonight.” Jessie pumped her fist in the air as Chuck and Petrovic left.

“Your sister is becoming a bit of a handful,” Petrovic commented as they climbed into their car.

“You’re just noticing this? She’s been a handful since she was born. Now she’s like two handfuls,” Chuck joked.

“I’m looking forward to trying to handle her.” Petrovic held up his hands at Chuck’s glare. “I know how that sounded, and it wasn’t how I meant it. Trust me, I’m not going to make any rude comment while you’re driving. You know just how to slam into something without taking any damage and I’ll have two broken legs or some shit like that.”

Actually, Chuck knew Petrovic wasn’t the usual crude guy who chatted about his conquests in the locker room. Hell, no, Petrovic

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was raised by his mother and grandmother, two strong Russian females who taught him how to respect women or suffer the consequences.

“Sounds like you’ll be getting some tonight.” Petrovic angled his back against the door so he could look at Chuck.

“Thought you didn’t want to know about my escapades.”

“Dude, if you had escapades, I wouldn’t want to know, but you’ve been living like a monk for the last year or so. I thought you might have joined the priesthood or something.”

“Well, after tonight, there won’t be any doubt about the absurdity of me taking vows, though my mother wouldn’t be upset. She always wanted a priest in the family. Raises the Davidson cachet in the neighborhood.” He snorted. “She was greatly disappointed when I told her I was gay. Knew there wasn’t a chance of me going to the church.”

“Yeah, the whole gay thing does cause a slight problem.” Petrovic slapped Chuck on the shoulder. “You need to pick up some stuff to make Herb feel good. You know, romantic stuff.”

“He’s not a girl, you know.”

Petrovic’s laugh burst out, filling the car with joy. “I know, jackass, but still he’s a virgin. I’d bet everything I own on it. You need to make him understand you care for him, even before throwing the stickiness of sex into the situation.”

Chuck grunted. “Can you imagine what sex is going to be like with him?”

“You’ll just have to find a way to keep his mouth busy or full.”

And with that, they stopped in front of the precinct and climbed out, heading in to brief their captain on several of the cases they were working on. It was going to be a long day, but Chuck had something to look forward to.

## CHAPTER 7

Some faint sound brought Herb back to the mundane world around him. Blinking, he refocused from the scientific journal he'd been reading to try to figure out what he'd heard. The buzz of the intercom startled him and the magazine threw through the air to land in the middle of the living room floor.

After standing, he wandered over to the door and pushed the button. "Hello?"

"It's Chuck."

"Oh, hi, Chuck." Herb frowned, pushing his glasses up. "Did we have a date tonight?"

Chuck's warm laugh flowed through the speaker. "No, honey. Why don't you buzz me up and I'll tell you why I'm here."

"Okay." He pushed the button and heard the buzzer sound from

below.

Herb had started for the door when he realized his apartment was a mess. When he'd gotten home, he tossed his coat toward the chair it never landed on. His briefcase perched precariously on the coffee table and, somehow, his tie wound up dangling from the lamp. Goodness, it looked like a strip show gone bad.

He bent to pick up his slippers that were trying to disappear under the cushions of the couch. The firm knock on his door surprised him and he dropped the slippers to put his hand to his chest.

"Are you going to open the door?"

Glancing wildly around one more time, Herb shrugged. Nothing he could do about it now. Just because his work place was pristine didn't mean his home would be. No one knew what a complete slob he was at home either, and he wasn't sure he wanted Chuck to know yet. Of course, Chuck had seen it Sunday night, but it wasn't too bad then.

"Herb? Honey, are you still in there?"

"Yes," he called out, making his way to the door. As he pulled it open, he said, "I'm sorry about the way the place looks. I haven't had time to clean lately. Been busy at the lab and having to write a research paper at the same time for a journal I contribute to. Also, the day I usually clean up is Sunday and I was with you all day and night. I'd do some cleaning, but I think the mess multiples when I'm not looking."

Chuck leaned down and kissed him, taking no prisoners as he devoured Herb's mouth. All the strength drained out of Herb's body, forcing him to grab Chuck like a drowning man does a life preserver. He opened, allowing Chuck's tongue to invade and play with his. Herb wrapped his arms and legs around Chuck, clinging

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to the man in his best octopus impression.

Only when he realized his swimming brain wasn't because of the kiss, but because of oxygen deprivation did Herb break away with a whimper. He didn't let go of Chuck, not being sure his legs would hold him up.

"What did you want to tell me?" He panted, opening his eyes and narrowing his eyes at Chuck's blurry face. "Where did my glasses go? I don't think my knees are going to work for a while. Maybe we should go sit down on the couch or something."

"I'm thinking we need to get horizontal."

"Horizontal? What for? We can keep kissing when we're on the couch. I want you to kiss me again. I love your mouth on mine. It makes my body go up in flames. Are you going to suck me again? Or wait...can I suck you? I really want to know what you taste like. You're so thick, I bet you'd fill me up."

He wiggled in Chuck's arms, adoring the sensations of the man's jean-covered erection rubbing against his. "Hey, you changed. Did you stop by your place? Did you get something to eat? I could probably cook you something, but not right now. I want to get to bed with you."

Chuck nuzzled his chin, so Herb tilted his head slightly to give Chuck more flesh to taste. He shivered as Chuck's lips moved over his skin while the man spoke.

"I'm not hungry at the moment, and we're going to get horizontal so I can fuck this tight little ass of yours. Isn't that what you've been saying you wanted?"

"Oh God, really? You're really to going to fuck me?" Herb practically bounced, excitement getting the best of his brain.

"Whoa there. Be careful you don't knock us over. Spending the night in the hospital isn't my idea of fun." Chuck tightened his

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arms around Herb's waist and continued on toward Herb's bedroom, not hard to find in the small living space.

Herb barely managed to contain himself long enough for Chuck to deposit him on the bed. He knelt there and reached out for the belt on Chuck's jeans. Chuck grabbed his hands.

"Wait, honey. Why don't you get the condoms and lube out of my pocket first?"

Herb jerked his hands free and reached for Chuck's pocket. He pulled the small packet of lube and the foil package out. "You didn't have to bring stuff. I went out and bought a box of condoms earlier today along with a bottle of lube. I hate not being prepared, though I wasn't a Boy Scout or anything. It kills the mood, not that I've ever been in the middle of something with a mood."

A muffled snort made him look up, but Chuck's face was hidden in his shirt. He stared at Chuck's bare chest, covered in dark hair. Holy Mother of God, the man was a walking wet dream, not just for gay men everywhere, but for everyone out there. Chuck's T-shirt was tossed over toward the corner and Chuck met Herb's gaze.

"Like what you see?"

"Are you kidding? It's like God looked into my darkest fantasies and created you to be my perfect guy." He ran his fingers through Chuck's dark chest hair and trailed them down the line leading toward Chuck's waistband. "It's like Christmas and my birthday all together and I've been the best boy in the entire world. Someone up there must love geeky guys in glasses."

"I hope He was thinking of me when you were born because you're the most adorable thing I've seen in forever." Chuck carded his fingers through Herb's hair.

Blushing, Herb ducked his head, biting his bottom lip between

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his teeth as he undid Chuck's belt and jeans. No one had ever talked to him like that. No one had ever looked at him like he was the cherry on top of the ice cream sundae. Herb decided he liked being special to someone, and having Chuck be the person made him doubly happy.

He gasped as Chuck's dick sprang from the confines of his clothes. It was thick and long, the head already coated with precum. Without thinking, he leaned down and licked the clear drop of liquid from the slit. Chuck moaned, and Herb sucked the spongy head in. The salty taste from Chuck's skin burst in Herb's mouth and he closed his eyes, applying his tongue to the hot flesh and discovering how much he loved the taste.

Chuck's long fingers wrapped around Herb's head, encouraging him to move up and down. He didn't try to take the entire length in, knowing he didn't have the experience to deep-throat it. With practice, he would and he planned practicing on Chuck for as long as it took to be able to it.

Chuck didn't force him, but just let him know how much he enjoyed the suction and feel of Herb's mouth around his cock.

"Just like that. You're a natural, honey. That's it. Use a little teeth next time."

No one ever accused Herb of not learning quickly. He braced one hand on Chuck's thigh and wrapped the other around the base of Chuck's cock. He pumped as he sucked, up and down. His spit slicked the way as he worked his soon-to-be lover.

"Herb, if you want me to fuck you, you need to stop."

Get fucked by Chuck or get to taste Chuck's cum? God, he'd never had such a hard choice to make, but he knew what he wanted. He wanted to stop being a virgin. He wanted that "just been laid" glow. He looked forward to the ache in his ass



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reminding him he'd shared his body with someone else.

"I want you to fuck me," he said after letting Chuck's cock slide from his mouth. "I want to feel you deep inside me and I want you to take me hard and fast until I feel you for the rest of the week. I've heard about how great sex is and I want to find out if what they say is true or if it's all just a bunch of crap."

Chuck stepped back and bent, stripping off his jeans. He gestured for Herb to stand. "Let's get you naked then."

Herb shot to his feet and started stripping, flinging his clothes left and right. All he cared about was getting naked and spread on the bed. After he turned and climbed up on the bed, Chuck slapped his ass while it was stuck up in the air.

Squeaking, Herb scooted forward a little. "How do you want me?"

"Like this for now." Chuck caressed Herb's spine from between his shoulders down to the base, and he trembled at the tingles racing over his body under his skin.

Herb dropped his head down, resting it on his folded arms. He spread his legs a little more to give Chuck access to whatever he wanted. Not having ever done this before, he didn't know what to expect, but he soaked up everything Chuck did.

"Oh God, I love it. I didn't know doing that would make me feel this good." Herb babbled as Chuck rubbed his lubed finger over Herb's hole. "Please, more. Do something. Anything. I need more. I don't know what I need, but I want you, Chuck. Come on. Don't tease me. I need your cock. I want you to fuck me."

A soft chuckle came from behind him and pressure built at his hole.

"Relax and push out, honey."

He did what his lover told him and was rewarded by a burning

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sensation as Chuck's finger slid into him. He tensed, and Chuck stopped, rubbing the small of Herb's back.

"Just breathe. We'll take it slow. There's no rush, no matter how much you want me to take you." Chuck brushed a kiss over Herb's shoulder blade.

"Oh, wow. That feels so big. I bet your cock will feel even bigger. How the hell are you going to fit inside me? I'm a scientist. I can do the formula and I don't think you're going to stuff all of it inside me." He moaned as the burn turned into something else. "Move. I want to move. I need to move. Why?"

Chuck started thrusting his finger in and out of Herb, who whimpered each time Chuck pushed back in. Suddenly, Chuck's knuckle hit something inside Herb making Herb shout out.

"Oh, my God! What the heck? It felt like electricity running through me. I didn't know there was a spot inside me like that. Why didn't I know? Hit it again."

"Yes, sir."

Chuck removed his finger, and Herb glared over his shoulder.

"What are you waiting for? I want to feel it again."

A stinging slap to one of his ass cheeks drew a gasp from him. He fought the urge to reach back and rub the injured flesh. Chuck winked at him.

"Don't worry. I was just getting more slick. Now try to relax. I'm putting two fingers in."

Herb groaned as Chuck breached his ass with two fingers, but within seconds, he was rocking back onto them. He couldn't stop talking, even though he didn't know what he was saying. He closed his eyes and impaled himself time and time again.

The sudden absence of Chuck's fingers cleared Herb's mind and he glanced over his shoulder when the mattress dipped down.

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Chuck knelt behind him, sheathed cock in hand, and positioned it at Herb's opening.

"Are you ready, honey?"

God, if he were any more ready, he'd explode. His cock ached and his balls had drawn up tight to his body. He'd been so close to coming he almost wanted to yell at Chuck for stopping before he came. Almost as his gaze measured the girth of Chuck's cock.

"Yes. Yes. Yes. I'm ready. I want your cock in me. Please, Chuck. Don't make me wait any longer."

All his ability to speak left Herb as Chuck pressed his entire length into Herb's passage without stopping until he was buried balls deep.

"Holy fuck." Herb breathed, trying to relax. What the hell had he been thinking?

\* \* \*

Chuck froze, his hands gripping Herb's hips tight enough to leave bruises. "Are you okay? I'm not hurting you, am I?"

"Well, yes, you are, but that's okay. I asked for it and I do know the pain will go away, but, wow...I wasn't really expecting it."

Herb couldn't be hurting too badly if he could talk like that. Herb stroked his hands up and down Herb's back.

"Try to relax. Breathe."

"What do you think I'm doing?"

Chuck's eyebrows shot up. *Well...well...seems someone was getting a little testy.* He laughed and leaned forward to press a kiss to the nape of Herb's neck.

"Oh." Herb jerked.

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Pumping his hips slightly, Chuck somehow managed to keep the head of his cock working Herb's gland. Herb whimpered and shuddered, turning Chuck on even more.

"Christ, I love the way you tremble for me," Chuck muttered in Herb's ear, licking the outside edge of it.

"Oh, good, because I think I'll be trembling even more if you keep that up. I knew the prostate was suppose to make sex between guys pleasurable, but I never imagined it'd be this good."

All Herb's talking inflated Chuck's ego, except the man shouldn't have been talking at all. He should have been moaning and begging Chuck to fuck him harder.

Chuck pulled out, much to Herb's clear displeasure.

"Wait, where are you going? I wasn't done yet. Uh-oh," Herb squeaked when Chuck flipped him over on his back.

Without hesitating, Chuck slid back inside Herb, and Herb arched up, crying out. Chuck paused, but when Herb made no move to stop him, he started reaming his lover's ass. Herb went wild, reaching up and bracing his hands against the headboard.

Each shove in was met by Herb pushing back. Chuck groaned as Herb massaged Chuck's cock with his inner muscles.

"I thought you hadn't done this before," Chuck gasped out, his eyes rolling at the tightness of Herb's ass.

"I haven't, but I read and watch stuff on the internet." Herb panted.

Startled, Chuck stopped and stared down at Herb. "You watch porn?"

Those bright green eyes and rumpled curls, along with the disgruntled expression on Herb's face, brought a grin to Chuck's face. His lover didn't seem happy he'd stopped.

"Of course, I watch porn. How am I supposed to learn anything

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if I don't study? It's not like I've had many opportunities to do any experimenting." Herb reached up and pinched one of Chuck's nipples. "Now, fuck me, Chuck. I don't want to wait any longer."

"Ow. Okay." He grabbed Herb's wrists and pinned them to the bed beside Herb's head. "Are you ready?"

"I've been ready. Please, Chuck."

He couldn't resist those pleading eyes. Herb wrapped his legs around Chuck's waist, digging his heels into Chuck's ass, and clenched his inner channel.

"Oh, shit," Chuck murmured.

Stroking in and out, he held Herb's gaze while he rode him hard. Chuck made sure he hit Herb's gland with every thrust.

"Fuck," Herb swore, his eyes closing as he grunted and wet heat spread between them.

*Wow.* Chuck had never had a lover come just from him fucking them. Of course, Herb was hot and primed for it, so it wasn't too surprising. He slammed deep into Herb and froze, filling the condom with his cum. He had enough thought in his head to fall to the side when he collapsed.

Herb rolled with him and they ended snuggling close while their breathing slowed down. Chuck stared up at the ceiling, running his hand up and down Herb's back. He blinked and frowned.

"Do you have stars on your ceiling?"

Looking up as well, Herb nodded. "Yes. They correspond with the constellations. I like staring at them before I go to bed. It reminds me of sleeping outside, except without the bugs, the dirt, and the cold."

"You like to camp?"

"Not really, but I like to look at the night sky and imagine what

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life is like on other planets.” Herb trailed his hands through the drying cum on Chuck’s lower stomach. “We should probably clean up.”

“Yeah.”

Climbing out of bed, he carried Herb toward the bathroom. Herb clung to him like a barnacle. Chuck didn’t mind. He had the strength, and Herb didn’t weight that much. He set his lover down to get the water started while Chuck took care of the condom.

After tossing it in the trash, he picked Herb up and stepped under the water. Herb squealed and tried to climb over Chuck to get out of the stream. Chuck edged around, blocking the downpour and not letting the warm shower hit Herb.

“Your shower’s not very big,” he commented as he reached for the soap.

They squished together, but Chuck’s elbows kept hitting the wall beside them.

“I didn’t need a bigger one because I’ve never taken a shower with another person. Hmmm...is your shower bigger?” Herb slicked up his hands and rubbed them over Chuck’s chest and stomach, washing him. “You know I always wondered what the fascination was with men taking showers together. In the books I read, they were some of the cleanest guys I knew because they were always in the shower, but I think I know why.”

“Why is that?” Chuck poured some shampoo into the palm of his hand and scrubbed his hair.

“Because your skin all slick and glistening with water makes me want to lick you all over. Can I do that when we have some time and nowhere else to be? I never have anywhere to be besides work, so I’m free most of the time, but you’re busy with other things. Maybe we could make a date.”

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“A date for you to lick me all over?” Chuck laughed. “I think I could schedule you in at least once a week for that.”

“Really?” Herb’s eyes brightened. “I can’t wait. There are some other things I’d like to try. Things I’ve read in books or saw in the movies seemed like fun. I love learning new things. It’s so much fun.”

Chuck threaded his fingers through Herb’s wet hair and tilted his lover’s head up so their gazes met. “You’ll only be learning those things with me from now on. No other guys.”

“Of course not. I don’t know any other guys who’d want to have sex with me. I’m not exactly model material. I’m just skinny, geeky, little me. Not many guys like my body type. I’ve tried, you know. Went to some clubs, but either it was the glasses or maybe it’s the fact I can’t dance. No one hit on me.”

Herb’s disappointed pout tugged at Chuck’s heart. He wanted to sweep Herb into his arms and tell him Chuck would always ask the man to dance and he found Herb’s glasses one of the sexiest things about him. He pressed kisses along Herb’s chin.

“Honey, if you want to go to the clubs, I’ll go with you. You can show me off and I’ll tell all those guys who passed you over what they’re missing. I don’t know why none of them tried picking you up.”

“I don’t either. They kept buying me drinks, but I’m not sure why. I don’t drink. Alcohol kills brain cells, and while I have more than enough to spare, I don’t like to make myself stupid just to drink.” Herb frowned. “And they have no concept of personal space. Strangers kept brushing up against me and grabbing my ass. I just don’t understand the attraction of clubs. I’ll be happy just to stay home with you and have sex.”

Shaking his head, Chuck rinsed away all the soap and shampoo

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before turning off the shower. Apparently no one had ever told Herb about what went on at bars and clubs.

“Herb, they *were* hitting on you.” He dried Herb off quickly and wiped the towel over his body.

Herb grimaced. “No, they weren’t. Who hits on people by grabbing their ass and trying to get them drunk? That’s not the way to make someone want to date you. Yet it’s what you did, isn’t it? You grabbed me and kissed me, which convinced me I would enjoy going out with you. Okay, so not necessarily going out, but definitely seeing you again and kissing you. I really am happy Jessie is your sister, so I was able to find you and get you to fuck me.”

“Sweetheart, they weren’t looking for a date. They wanted to get lucky.”

“Luck? Why? I’m not a good luck charm and none of them looked like gamblers.”

Herb couldn’t be that innocent or naive. Studying Herb’s inquisitive expression, Chuck amended the thought. Herb just might be. God, Chuck was going to have to keep an eye on the younger man. Going to a club would be like throwing fresh meat out among the lions. Chuck would have his work cut out for him, trying to keep the men off his lover.

Yet Chuck would bet Herb could dance, and slow dancing with the way Herb wrapped himself around Chuck’s body probably would drive Chuck to cream his jeans. He’d have to make a point of taking Herb out dancing next weekend.

A phone ringing caught their attention as they strolled back into Herb’s bedroom. Chuck snatched his pants up off the floor and tugged out his phone. After answering it, he stuck it between his ear and shoulder while he put his jeans on.



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“Talk to me, Petrovic.”

“Long Island cops called us. Seems someone broke into Fardanov’s house. Your friend, Mrs. Botsova, called it in.”

“Shit. Okay. I’m at Herb’s. I’ll meet you out at Fardanov’s.” He took the shirt Herb held out for him.

“Good. I’m heading out right now.” Petrovic hung up, and Chuck tossed his phone toward the bed, not wincing when it hit the floor with a solid thud. Herb shook his head and picked it up, holding it out to Chuck after he slipped his shirt on.

“Thanks. I’m sorry about having to leave.”

Herb shrugged. “It’s okay. Crime doesn’t stop just because you’re getting busy with your boyfriend. Will you be coming back here when you’re done? I just want to know if I should leave a light on in the living room.”

Chuck wandered out to the living room, found his shoes, and sat to put them on. “Do you have an extra key? That way, if I get away from there early enough, I can come back and not worry about waking you. If it’s too late or early in the morning, I’ll head home and call you later.”

“Sure.” Herb went to a table and dug around in a bowl. There were keys, coins, and pieces of paper piled in the bowl. “Here it is.”

Taking the key from Herb struck Chuck as an important point in their relationship. Things were moving far faster than Chuck ever imagined they would. And why wasn’t he freaked out by the idea he had a key to Herb’s house? He’d never had that kind of intimacy with any of the other guys he’d dated. None of them had ever met Chuck’s family, yet Herb had and seemed to enjoy them.

Herb didn’t seem fazed by handing his key over to Chuck. Was it because the seriousness of the moment hadn’t hit him? Did he

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see it as a practical issue since Chuck wanted to come back and Herb didn't want to have to wait up for him?

Herb stepped into his embrace, wrapped his arms around Chuck's neck, and brought Chuck's mouth down to his. They shared a warm and gentle kiss before Chuck eased away. Herb patted him on the chest and gestured to the door.

"Now get out of here before I decide to tempt you back to bed. You've got work to do, and I need some sleep. I've never given my key to anyone, not even a friend. While you're gone, I'm probably going to freak out a little bit about the whole thing, but be safe and we'll talk later."

Chuck left Herb's apartment, waiting until he heard the lock click before he walked away. He savored how honest Herb was with him. Knowing his lover was freaking out as much as Chuck was, helped him decide he was ready to make that step. Now to figure out what the hell those men wanted with Fardanov and make sure no harm came to Herb or Jessie.

## CHAPTER 8

“Fuck.”

Chuck looked up from his desk as Petrovic flopped into the chair next to him. “What’s up?”

“We’ve got nothing on last night’s break-in. Mrs. Botsova called as soon as she heard something, but the uniforms didn’t get out there soon enough. The guys were gone, and the place is trashed. I’m afraid they didn’t leave any prints or anything.”

“Of course not. They’re professionals. We just have to figure out professional what. I’m running over to Burke’s to talk to McKinley and see what he’s found out from the security tapes.” Chuck stood and grabbed his gun from the drawer, hooking it on his belt along with his badge and phone. “You want to go with me or do you have something else to do?”

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Petrovic sighed, but shook his head. “Nah. As much as I’d love to watch you make sappy puppy dog eyes at Herb, I have a lead on one of our other cases. I’m going to talk to an informant about it.”

Chuck smiled. “Good. I called on the fingerprints we found at the Sanchez crime scene. Still no match, but they’re only about third of the way through the data bases.”

His partner snorted and gestured to the pile of folders on their shared desks. “Most of these cases would be solved if we didn’t have to wait for the lab reports. Why can’t it be like in the movies?”

“Who knows? Hey, if our lives were a screenplay, who would play you in the movie version?”

“What kind of idiotic question is that?” Petrovic ran his hand over his short cut blond hair. “I’m not sure. Maybe The Rock. You know—that big wrestler turned actor.”

“Seriously?” Chuck rolled his eyes. “I just can’t see him playing you.”

Petrovic looked offended. “Why not? And who would play you, jackass?”

Chuck headed toward the door. “He’s better looking than you. Oh, for me, that guy who plays the werewolf in that vampire show on cable.”

He dashed out into the stairway before Petrovic came after him. Laughing, he raced down to the first level and out to the parking lot. After climbing into his car, he pulled out his phone and scrolled through the numbers until he got to Herb’s.

“Hello?”

“Hey, honey, do you have time for lunch today?” He really did have to go out and talk to McKinley, but nothing said he couldn’t have lunch with his boyfriend first. “I’ll be out at Burke in a little

bit.”

“Are you coming out to see me? Because I probably have time for lunch, but that’s about it. Jessie and I are working on Yuri’s formula and we think we’re closing in on the exact replication of the chemicals. I might not be home until late tonight. Not that you asked when I’ll be home, but I thought you might want to have sex again tonight.”

Chuck leaned his head back against his car seat and grinned up at the roof. God, he loved the way Herb babbled and just said whatever he thought. No filters were great because he never had to worry about what Herb was thinking.

“Well, I was hoping to have some more sex with you tonight, but if you’re too busy, I could just go home tonight and see you tomorrow. Just a second while I switch to hands-free.” Chuck hit the right buttons and got the earpiece set up. “Okay. I’m back. So what do you say? Do you want me to come over when I’m done?”

“Oh, I’m not too busy, but I just might not be home until later than usual. I don’t want you to get upset about waiting for me. Some guys don’t like to wait when they’re horny.” Excitement built in Herb’s voice. “When you get here, I want to show you what we’ve done so far. I’ve managed to make a rat’s leg go invisible for a few seconds, but it didn’t last long and I haven’t been able to get the whole body to disappear. This is awesome, Chuck. Every kid dreams of inventing an invisibility formula.”

“Really? Is that what you dreamed about at night when you were young?” He started his car and drove out into traffic, heading out to Burke Pharmaceuticals.

Herb snorted. “Heck, no. I dreamed about discovering the cure for cancer. You know how much attention I’d get? It would impress my parents and maybe they’d remember my birthday.”

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“Wait. Your parents don’t remember when you were born?” Chuck couldn’t imagine his parents ignoring any of their children’s birthdays.

Even as adults, his mom would make sure all the kids got together at the family house for a big dinner and celebration. She made a big deal, and he never doubted his parents loved him. Chuck’s heart twisted at the thought Herb never knew that his parents loved him.

“Oh, they might remember, but they haven’t acknowledged my birthday for fifteen years...not since I was twelve. The only reason I think we had a party was because my grandmother was in town and she remembered. It was the most fun I’ve ever had.” Herb sighed.

“When’s your birthday?”

“April thirteenth,” Herb muttered. There was a soft hiss in the background. “When’s yours?”

“December twenty-fifth. I was a Christmas baby.” Chuck cut in and out of traffic.

“Did your parents make sure you got extra presents for your birthday as well as for Christmas? What do you want for your birthday, or for Christmas for that matter? Is it too soon to ask? Maybe you thought we weren’t going to be together by then. I shouldn’t have asked yet. Too soon. See, I’m not much good at these relationship rules.”

“Herb, honey, I’m going to do all I can to make sure we’re still together around my birthday. I don’t plan on breaking up with you any time soon. Who’s to say that after we’ve spent some time together, you won’t be the one who calls it quits?” Chuck pointed out.

“No. Not even a remote possibility. Are you crazy? You’re the

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first guy to ever look at me and see a real guy, not some geeky know-it-all whose only redeeming factor is you can cheat off him in biology. Not that you'd cheat off me since we're not in school anymore. But you wouldn't have cheated in the first place. You're honest and completely hot, which is a huge plus, but I think I'd still like you even if you were ugly because you're a nice guy." Herb huffed, obviously not happy with what he said. "I don't think I said that right. Did that make sense?"

*Not really.* "I think I understand what you meant, honey, and I appreciate knowing I can tell my mom to plan another place at the table for you during the holidays. I'm here, so I have to get off the phone. Can you come down and meet me?"

"Yes." Herb hung up with saying good-bye, and Chuck grinned.

He hung up before showing his badge to the gate guard. After being waved in, he parked and headed to the front desk where Herb stood waiting impatiently. Chuck wanted to kiss Herb, but he wasn't sure how his lover would feel about it.

Herb might be out at his work, yet that didn't mean he would like public displays of affection. As he approached Herb, the younger man's face lit up and Herb practically launched himself into Chuck's arms, pressing a huge kiss on Chuck's lips. Chuck kissed him back, invading Herb's mouth with his tongue and enjoying the feeling of his lover's slender body against his.

The sound of someone clearing his throat broke them apart, and Chuck reluctantly let Herb go before turning to see McKinley standing there. The head of security had his arms folded over his chest and he raised his eyebrows at Chuck.

"Sorry about that."

Chuck really wasn't. If someone didn't like him kissing Herb,

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then they could just deal with it. He didn't always care to see straight couples making out either, but people seemed to accept those displays better than they did two guys kissing. Of course, he didn't want to get Herb in trouble with any bigots or anything, though he didn't doubt Herb could take care of himself if it came down to it.

"Were you here just to kiss Doctor Pommerset or did you have another reason for being here, Detective Davidson?" McKinley didn't seem upset about the kiss. He did seem rather distracted.

"Yes, though I wasn't just going to kiss Herb. I thought I'd take him to lunch. I also wanted to touch base with you and see what you might have discovered on your security tapes." Chuck reached out and grabbed Herb's arm as he noticed the man edging away. "Could Herb and I have lunch first?"

"No, actually. I'm sorry. I have a meeting with the CEO of Burke at one, so I need to talk to you about the case. He's going to want an update on the whole cluster-fuck." McKinley frowned.

Chuck would rather have spent time with Herb, but he knew what it was like to have to report to someone. "Gotcha. Hey, Herb, should I call you when I'm ready for lunch or just come and find you?"

"Someone can give you directions to my lab. Jessie and I will be there working on Yuri's research. Oh, you might want to talk to your partner about asking Jessie out. Your sister has the hots for that man and she won't stop talking about it. It's starting to annoy me. I mean, I don't mind talking most of the time."

Chuck shot McKinley an amused glance.

"But she keeps going on and on about how good his ass looks in jeans and how she'd love to run her fingers through his chest hair." Herb wrinkled his nose. "That's TMI. I don't want to think



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about your sister and Alexei in bed together and I especially don't want to think about the man's chest hair. You have just enough, but he looks like he could be mistaken for a bear rug if you lay him down in the middle of the room."

Okay, so Chuck was going to need to see something truly disgusting to get that image out of his head. He laughed and put his hand over Herb's mouth.

"I'm not sure my sister would like you to blab her secrets all over the company, Herb, but I'll take your words under advisement. You can tell my darling sister Petrovic likes her as well, so she might want to think about making a move or two on him."

"Now we're done playing match maker, can we get on with this meeting?" McKinley gestured toward the elevators.

"What's got your briefs in a knot?" Chuck asked as walked to the first elevator.

"I hate meeting with the CEO. He's a hard-nosed bastard who'd rather bust my chops than actually trust me to do my fucking job." McKinley almost growled his frustration.

Herb leaned into Chuck's side, his green eyes studying McKinley from behind his thick glasses. "Are you sure your problem with him isn't that he's very attractive and you might just want to fuck him?"

"What?" McKinley whirled around to glare at Herb. "Where do you get off saying shit like that?"

Chuck stepped between Herb and McKinley. He placed his hand on the security guy's chest and pushed.

"Back up. You don't get to loom over Herb while I'm here." Chuck glanced over his shoulder at Herb. "You really should think sometimes before you say things. Not everyone wants to hear

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every thought in your head.”

Herb tilted his head and pursed his lips. “What’s wrong with what I said? It’s the truth. I’ve seen him and Mr. Burke together and it’s like two alpha males circling each other. With all the pheromones flying around, I figure they’ll either beat the hell out of each other or end up in bed. I’m hoping it’s bed because I think they could do a lot of damage to each other. They’re about the same size and strength. You wouldn’t think Mr. Burke would be that strong, but I bet he works out a lot.”

The elevator door slid open, and Chuck urged Herb out of the car.

“I’ll come find you when I’m done talking to McKinley.” He blew Herb a kiss, not wanting to take a chance on McKinley blowing a gasket at Herb’s words.

Herb waved as he wandered down the hallway, his mind clearly on something else already. McKinley heaved a heavy sigh as the door closed.

“So is he right?”

“About what?” McKinley’s stare dared Chuck to say it.

“Do you want to fuck your boss?”

McKinley shut his eyes and shook his head. “You just had to go there, didn’t you?”

Chuck shrugged. “Man, you practically dared me to say something. I can’t resist a dare. Comes from being taunted by all my brothers and sisters.”

“I’d swear you were the youngest, but I’m betting you’re the oldest.” McKinley didn’t seem inclined to answer Chuck’s question.

“Quit avoiding the question. Do you want to fuck your boss?”

The security chief glared at him. “Your cute little boyfriend can

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get away with asking. You not so much.”

“What are you going to do? Punch me? Just answer the damn question and I’ll leave you alone.” Chuck laughed. “I think Herb takes advantage of his cuteness to say outrageous things. No one has the heart to hit him.”

“That’s the truth.” McKinley hesitated before continuing, “I’m going to say this once and never again because it’s really none of your business. Yes, I want to fuck Burke until the man walks bowlegged, but it’s not the smartest thought I’ve had.”

Chuck nodded. “You’re right. Burke strikes me as a top, and he might fight you on bottoming.”

“And I happen to like the man, so I don’t want to ruin our friendship by fucking him. He wouldn’t take kindly to that.”

“I hope you figure out how to fix your problem, man. Good luck.” Chuck slapped McKinley on the back as the elevator opened.

\* \* \*

Herb stared at the computer screen. He watched the footage from the camera they’d trained on one of the lab rats. Between one frame and the next, the rat disappeared. He sat back in his chair and glanced up to where Jessie stood, bouncing on the balls of her feet in excitement.

“Did you see? It disappeared.”

“Yes, I saw,” he said slowly, drumming his fingers on the desk. Something didn’t feel right to him.

“Why aren’t you excited? I thought you’d go through the roof. We did it, Herb. We created an invisibility serum.” Jessie almost twirled in her joy. “We’re going to be famous.”

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“Actually, we wouldn’t be famous because Yuri was the one who figured it out first,” Herb pointed out, still distracted by the elusive thought playing hide-n-seek in his brain. “How long had you been gone from the lab before this happened?”

Jessie shrugged and, tapping her laptop, brought up the information. “About ten minutes after I gave the rat the injection. I cleaned up a little and left to do a little work on my own research.”

“And when you came back in, you said the rat was visible?”

She nodded. “Yes, the serum must work for a limited time or we have to up the dosage. I was gone for thirty minutes and when I went back to check on him, he was happily digging in his wood chips.”

“Hmmm...”

He hit replay on the video and watched it in slow motion. His heart skipped a beat when, in a blink of an eye, the rat disappeared from the screen. Yet he noticed when Jessie returned to the lab, the rat still wasn’t visible on the camera.

“Jessie, come here and watch this.”

She walked behind the desk and leaned over his shoulder to watch. Her sharply inhaled breath told Herb she’d spotted what he had. Something that he hadn’t seen the first couple of times he watched the video.

Before she could say anything, a knock sounded on his door.

“Come in,” he called.

“You ready for lunch?” Chuck strolled in with a big grin on his face.

“Oh, my God, Chuck, you’ve got to see this.”

Herb watched as Jessie rushed over to Chuck, grabbed his hand, and dragged him around the desk to see the computer screen. He met Chuck’s dark eyes.

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“Hey there,” he whispered, his throat suddenly dry because of Chuck’s close proximity to him. “I really want to kiss you right now.”

Chuck winked and leaned in, but before he could give Herb a proper welcome, Jessie put her hand on Chuck’s chest and pushed him back.

“None of that right now. We might have broken Yuri’s formula.” Jessie pointed to the rat in the cage. “Watch.”

For the first time in his life, Herb became distracted from an experiment. The warmth of Chuck’s hand resting on his shoulder drifted down to pool in his groin. Oh, he knew it was just nature’s way of dealing with his attraction to Chuck, and it was more chemical than spiritual, but he couldn’t help thinking it was more than just pheromones. There were more reasons why he liked Chuck than just the fact he wanted to jump the man every time he was in the same room with him.

“Holy shit, did that rat just disappear?”

Herb blinked and refocused on the discussion at hand. “It would appear so.”

“It would appear so? Does that mean it didn’t really disappear? Did something happen to your camera feed?” Chuck straightened and removed his hand from Herb’s shoulder, to Herb’s enormous disappointment.

“Keep watching,” Jessie insisted.

Herb studied everything happening in the room as they saw Jessie enter and go to the cage. Even though it looked like there was nothing in the cage, Jessie opened the door and picked something out of it. She seemed to be examining it before returning it to the cage.

“What the hell?”

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Both Herb and Jessie laughed at Chuck's exclamation. Herb rewound the video and paused it at the point where Jessie lifted the rat from the cage.

"We don't see the rat on the camera, but Jessie obviously sees it in the lab." He waved a hand toward the screen.

"I was really unhappy when I came back to the lab and the rat was sitting there like nothing happened. Then Herb and I reviewed the video and we noticed I could see the rat, but the camera didn't see it or recognize it at all."

Chuck rubbed his forehead and walked out from behind Herb's desk to pace the length of the room. "So you think you've cracked Fardanov's formula?"

"Yes. We'll do a couple more tests, but we're fairly certain we can recreate it at will."

Herb reached down and adjusted himself. His cock really enjoyed the sight of Chuck stalking from one end of the room to the other, his ass flexing with each step. Chuck had removed his jacket at some point and rolled up the sleeves of his dress shirt. Herb's gaze devoured Chuck's strong hands and longed to have them on him. He shifted in his chair and bit back a moan as Chuck shoved a hand through his hair and muttered something.

If Jessie weren't in the room, Herb would drop to the floor in front of Chuck, and tear open the man's pants to get at Chuck's thick cock. He wanted the man in his mouth or his ass; he didn't care which. He just wanted to feel Chuck in him somehow.

"Oh, for Christ's sake, stop stripping my brother naked with your eyes." Jessie slapped him on the back of the head. "Focus here, Herb. We've discovered the reason Yuri was killed. We need to figure out what's going on with the formula while Chuck and Petrovic figure out who did it."

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“Ow!” He rubbed the back of his head. “I’ll have you know I’m perfect capable of multi-tasking. Thinking about sex with your brother and trying to figure out exactly what’s going on with the rat take two different parts of my brain completely able to work independently from each other. It’s like listening to the radio and cooking dinner at the same time. It’s totally possible to do that.”

He stopped and re-thought the example.

“Not a good example because I can’t cook. I tend to burn water, but it’s because I get distracted by an idea for an experiment and I have to write it down.”

“Hey, I’m glad you want to have sex with me and you find me very attractive, but I’m afraid we do need to focus on the rat. I’m going to call McKinley and get him down here. This might explain some odd things we saw on the security tapes.” Chuck picked up Herb’s phone.

“Isn’t he in a meeting with Mr. Burke?”

“Mr. Burke’s here?” Jessie straightened up and tugged at the hem of her skirt nervously.

“Yes, but don’t worry. I don’t think he’s interested in women. I actually think he and McKinley want each other. I’ve been in a room where they both were together, and you could cut the sexual tension with a knife, but I think they’re both too alpha to admit they like or are attracted to each other.” Herb shook his head. “Silly really because what does it really matter who’s on top? As long as they both enjoy it.”

“Herb.” Both Chuck and Jessie hissed at him.

He closed his mouth and sat back in his chair, arms folded and glaring at the screen. Jessie giggled, and Chuck smiled at him, but he wasn’t mollified. Herb hated being hushed, especially when he wasn’t doing anything wrong.

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“Okay. We’ll see you in a few.” Chuck hung up and came over to kneel in front of Herb. Herb met Chuck’s amused gaze with a disgruntled frown.

“Sweetheart, I love the fact you just blurt out whatever you’re thinking, but not everyone likes it. You should probably watch what you say around your boss. Burke didn’t strike me as an understanding guy.”

“He’s too uptight. He needs to get laid more often,” Herb mumbled.

“True, but you shouldn’t point it out to him. And don’t suggest he sleep with McKinley either. There’s more going on between them than you know about.” Chuck kissed him and stood. “Now let me watch this amazing stealth rat once more.”

“Got it!”

Herb jumped to his feet and raced from his office, almost running over some people in the hallway. Footsteps followed him as he burst into the lab and found the notes he’d salvaged from Yuri’s ransacked office. Flinging papers left and right, he scanned through them to find the one he wanted.

“Here it is.”

“Here is what? And why does your lab look like a tornado went through here?”

At the intrusion of a cold British-accented voice, Herb looked up to see Chuck and Jessie standing to one side and McKinley to the other of a tall, broad-shouldered man dressed in a very expensive suit. Herb might not know any designers by name, but he knew a tailored suit when he saw one. Heck, the man’s chest was so wide he had to have his clothes made for him. There wasn’t any way he’d be able to find something that fit off the rack.

“Hello, Mr. Burke. Glad you could join us.” He waved the



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paper he'd been looking for in the air. "I figured out what Yuri had been trying to do."

Jessie cleared her throat.

"Jessie helped me recreate the formula, so we'll be able to do it again. Probably, we'll have to do it a couple more times to figure out the correct dosage and see how long it'll last, but I got to thinking about why anyone would want to make someone invisible to cameras."

Herb pointed at Chuck.

"Then Chuck called our rat the stealth rat, and it hit me. Yuri wanted to make a serum that, when injected, rendered the person invisible to electronic detection or video surveillance. That's why you couldn't see the rat on the video, but Jessie saw him when she came back. Something in this particular combination of chemicals creates stealth coverage over the subject." He frowned and held the paper close to his face, speeding through the symbols and numbers.

"Why would anyone want to do that?" A puzzled frown marred Jessie's forehead.

"Shit." McKinley looked ill.

"Bloody hell." Burke looked pissed.

Chuck's expression held elation. "Now we have motive for murder. We just need to find the guys who had been following Fardanov and, more than likely, we'll find our killers."

"Why would anyone kill Yuri over this?" Jessie shrugged. "I don't get it."

"Because, sis, what's the easiest way to steal something? By not being seen. As long as they stay out of sight of the guards, they can sneak in just about anywhere and take what they want. The cameras won't tape them, only doors opening by themselves and things like that. A great thief will know how to work those kinks

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out as well.” Chuck grunted. “It’s an almost fool-proof way to cause havoc anywhere, whether you’re a spy, a terrorist, or a simple jewel thief.”

“Shit,” Jessie muttered.

“Right.” Burke’s cold grey eyes met Herb’s. “So do you think the men who murdered Dr. Fardanov know how to use the formula? Or had he made some up that they used when they broke in here, but have no idea how to brew up some more of it? Will they come looking for another scientist to help them?”

“Oh, you don’t brew this stuff up. Adding heat to the mix would probably end up blowing everyone and everything around it into tiny pieces, making it very difficult to find anything in the rubble.” Herb paused. “Though, I assume there are ways to sift through ash and stuff to find bones.”

“Dr. Pommerset, will you please focus on the task at hand?” Burke snarled. “We don’t have time for your tangents. I have to report to the FBI and NSA about this and I’d like to have all the information possible as to not look like a fool.”

“Excuse me, sir, but you’ll look like a fool anyway. You’re not a biochemist. None of this would make any sense to you if I tried to explain it to you. How will you make the men you’re reporting to understand it?” Herb didn’t understand why Burke would assume he’d know how to explain any of it to the FBI. Burke wasn’t a scientist, he was a businessman, and there was a difference in the type of numbers used in those two jobs.

“Fine,” Burke snapped. “You and Dr. Davidson will accompany me to my meeting and you can explain to them what it is that one of my scientists has managed to create.”

Herb didn’t care. “I doubt they’ll understand any of it either.”

“Okay. If you’ll give me a moment with Dr. Pommerset before

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you leave, sir.” Chuck grabbed Herb’s hand and dragged him out of the lab and down to his office.

After the door shut behind them, Chuck kissed Herb breathless. While Herb tried to recover, Chuck rested his forehead against Herb’s.

“You need to be careful when you talk to these guys, Herb. They don’t have a sense of humor and might not appreciate you making them look like idiots.”

“I’m used to doing it, and they’ll have to deal with the fact they aren’t as intelligent as I am.” Herb cradled Chuck’s face. “I’m just sorry we won’t have lunch together. I was hoping to talk you into a quickie here in my office.”

“Christ, Herb, do you have to say things like that while we’re at your work?” Chuck moaned and stepped back. “Now you better get all your stuff ready because I don’t think Burke will be happy if you make him wait. Take care of yourself and I’ll call you later on tonight. We’ll have some fun then, okay?”

“Maybe we could have phone sex. I always wanted to try that.”

Herb went to his desk to gather his papers and his briefcase. Chuck laughed softly, but didn’t touch him. Herb switched mental gears. No more thinking about sex. It was time to show how he managed to get his doctorate in biochemistry at such a young age.

## CHAPTER 9

Herb opened his door to see Chuck leaning against the doorframe, hands tucked into his pockets and a bright grin on his face. Without saying a word, he stepped back and waved Chuck inside.

Chuck's hand brushed over Herb's groin as he walked past him. Herb almost swallowed his tongue at the fleeting touch. Herb shut and locked the door before following Chuck into the living room, his gaze glued to the flexing ass covered by faded jeans.

"So did you manage to keep your job after telling all those idiots at the Bureau everything they didn't understand?"

"I thought you were going to call. I was looking forward to having phone sex. I've never had it before." He paused and thought for a second. "I haven't done much, have I?"

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Chuck grabbed Herb's hand and pulled him down on top of him. "Why don't you make a list of things you haven't done and we'll go about crossing them off."

"Really?"

He started to jump to his feet, but Chuck held him tight. "Where are you going?"

"To get a pen and some paper. I want to make my list." Herb frowned. "You did say make a list."

Chuck laughed. "I know, but I didn't mean right this second. How did the meeting go?"

He shrugged. "It went just like I thought it would. They had no idea what I was talking about. All they cared about was that someone might have gotten their hands on the serum or the formula for making it. I kept trying to tell them it wouldn't matter because there are very few people in the world smart enough to figure out what those symbols and numbers mean."

"And you happen to be one of those few?"

What was it with Chuck, Burke, and McKinley? How many times did he have to tell them that yes, he was the best at what he did? It was like they all thought he was joking.

"Do you need to see my doctorate or the article written about me in the *Journal of Biochemistry*? They named me the foremost authority on biochemistry." He struggled to free himself from Chuck's embrace.

Chuck flipped him so he lay on his back underneath Chuck's bulk. He pouted, not happy with the way Chuck seemed to dismiss his accomplishments. He met Chuck's dark eyes and the affection and desire shining in them melted his ire.

"No, I don't need to see your diploma or any article someone else wrote on you. I know you're the best and the brightest, Herb. I

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don't need proof. I was just messing with you." Chuck kissed Herb quickly and eased back a bit. "Tell me, what did they say when you told them about the formula?"

"Didn't Jessie tell you? I thought she'd have called you right away when we were done." He wasn't mollified. At least not yet.

"I didn't answer her call. I wanted to find out from you." Chuck nuzzled Herb's jaw. "Just tell me and we'll move on to something far more interesting."

"They were very upset Yuri would dare make such a formula. Then they seemed even more pissed he had the nerve to get himself killed because of it." He pursed his lips. "Like he courted death and taunted it to come and get him. I bet Yuri didn't have any true idea some Russian mob guy would come looking for what he discovered."

"No one looks for death, Herb. I bet they weren't happy. It could become a national incident."

Herb didn't care about a national security incident. None of it mattered to him. At the moment, he just wanted more of Chuck pressed against him. He slid his hands over Chuck's sides to grab Chuck's ass. He rocked his pelvis up against Chuck's, whimpering softly.

Suddenly, Chuck broke away from Herb's grip and stood. He bent and scooped Herb into his arms.

"Hey, what are you doing?" Herb squeaked and wrapped his arms around Chuck's neck.

He glanced around to see Chuck was carrying him to his bedroom.

"Are we going to have sex now? I've been looking forward to this all day. I couldn't even really focus on my own experiments because I kept wondering what it would be like to have your cock

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inside me again, especially after you stopped by the lab today.”

“Ah, well, yes, we’re going to have sex, but you’re going to do me instead of me doing you. It’s time for you to learn what it feels like to fuck a man. Of course, I wasn’t going to let you experiment with anyone else.” Chuck tossed him onto the bed.

Herb squeaked again as he bounced once or twice before he sprawled across his mattress. Chuck stripped off his shirt and tossed it over his shoulder toward the closet.

“Are you sure you want me to do you? I’d think as butch as you are, you’d be the top. I liked you fucking me a lot, so maybe that makes me a bottom. Don’t we have to pick the way we like it best and stick with it?”

All the while he babbled, he tugged off his own shirt and dropped it to the floor. He unsnapped his pants and unzipped them before he wiggled and got them off along with his underwear.

Chuck shook his head. “It doesn’t matter to me who’s on top and who’s on bottom. As long as it leads to both of us coming, it’s all good. Come on. I bet you’ve wondered what it was like to slide your cock into my ass.”

Herb nodded so vigorously he almost fell off the bed. “Oh, yes. I want to know what all the fuss is, though I think I might like it better when you fuck me. But, hey, how will I ever know if we don’t try different positions, right? I love to experiment. Maybe that’s what makes me a good scientist, huh?”

“I’m sure your curiosity and intelligence makes you a great scientist.” Chuck dug around in the nightstand. “Where’re your lube and rubbers?”

“Oh, the lube is here.” He scrabbled around under one of the pillows and found it. He set it on the bed and waved a hand toward the bathroom. “The condoms are in the cabinet under the sink. I

got a box from the store on my way home today after the meeting. Figured I should be ready in case you stopped by tonight or whenever we saw each other next. Hey, next time, can we go to your house? I want to see what your place looks like and see how your bed feels when you're fucking me."

"Okay. We'll spend the night at my place on Friday after I take you to a club for some dancing."

"Umm..." Herb didn't like the sound of dancing, but he discovered it was hard to argue with a naked man, especially one with a hard-on like Chuck's, and the knowledge he'd be fucking that man really soon.

Chuck approached him, holding two condoms in his hand.

"Only two? Does your age make it hard to get it up more than once unless you rest in between or something like that? If that's true, there are some medicines you can take for that, but I don't mind at all. You wear me out just doing it once, so I can handle it once or twice a night." Herb reached out and grabbed the condoms. "Do you want me to get you ready or do you want to do it yourself? I'm not sure exactly how to do it. I'm ready right now."

He stroked his erection and moaned, his pre-cum leaking from his slit and slicking his flesh. Chuck climbed on the bed and crawled over Herb, his hands and knees on either side of Herb's.

"I'll get myself ready because I want you inside me quicker than if I let you get me ready. We'll do that next time, and no, I don't have that problem yet. I'm not that old. I only brought two because we both have to sleep at some point tonight." Chuck kissed Herb hard before easing back. "Just wait until this weekend and your ass will be so sore, you won't be able to sit for long periods of time without thinking about me."

"Oh, good. I can't wait because I've always wanted to know



what that's like." He practically bounced with excitement. "I'll put the rubber on now. Get yourself ready, please. I can't wait to feel you around me. I bet you're hot and tight. How are we going to do it? Are you going to be on your hands and knees? Or do you want me to be on top?"

Chuck laughed and shook his head. "We'll do it just like this. Hand me the lube."

Herb gasped as Chuck rested back on his heels, bringing his ass in contact with Herb's cock. Chuck shuddered as he popped the top of the bottle and squirted some of the liquid onto his fingers.

While he opened the foil packet with shaking hands, Herb watched as Chuck reached around and sank his own fingers into his ass. His cock twitched as Chuck's eyes closed and sheer joy crossed his face.

"Oh, my God," he whimpered as Chuck's hips start moving with each thrust of Chuck's fingers.

Chuck's prick jutted proudly from his groin and painted Herb's stomach with pre-cum as Chuck continued to stretch his hole. Herb rolled on the condom before he reached out and wrapped his hand around Chuck's dick. He tightened his grip, giving Chuck something to fuck.

"Shit, Herb. Yes." Chuck hissed and moved faster, impaling himself on his fingers and pumping into Herb's hand.

Herb squeezed hard around the base of Chuck's dick. "Wait. I don't want you to come yet. I want to be inside you when you climax. I bet it'll be like being in a vise." His eyes rolled at the thought.

Chuck halted, dropping his head forward and his chest heaving. After he caught his breath, he said through gritted teeth, "You might want to lube your cock up, Herb. I won't be able to hold out

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much longer. I want you to fuck me now.”

After letting go of Chuck, he scrambled around the sheets to find where Chuck had put the bottle. Triumph ran through him when he found it. He managed to open it and spilled some into his hand. Tossing the tube off the bed, he didn't care where it landed.

“Oh, fuck,” he breathed out as he coated his shaft. It wouldn't take long once he got inside Chuck.

Chuck grasped Herb's cock and positioned in at his opening. Herb held his breath as Chuck lowered himself. They sighed as Chuck's ass met Herb's groin.

“Christ, you are tight and hot. I'm not going to last long. This is incredible. Why haven't I ever done this before? I should've tried harder to find someone who'd have looked past my glasses and geekiness.” Herb's eyes closed as he absorbed the heat from Chuck's inner passage.

“I'm glad you waited, Herb. I'm glad all the men you know were stupid and blind.”

Chuck bit his lip and lifted up until just the head of Herb's cock rested inside. Herb didn't know what Chuck was doing, but he hoped his dick wouldn't slip out. With a loud shout, Chuck slammed back down, and Herb cried out as well.

Suddenly, it was like all restraint had broken and they came together like two rutting bulls. Grunts and shouts filled the room, along with the scents of sex and sweat. Herb grabbed Chuck's hips and reamed his lover's ass, his muscles shaking as he thrust hard and deep.

“That's it, Herb. Come for me. I want to feel you come inside me.”

Chuck's urging and the sudden vise-like massage of Chuck's inner muscles drove Herb over the edge. Shouting, he flooded the

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condom with his cum. Hot liquid splashed onto Herb's stomach, coating his skin with stickiness.

Just as the last drop hit him, Herb felt drained. Chuck collapsed on him, smearing cum on his stomach between their bodies.

"I think we need to do some more experiments because you turned my brain to mush and I need to do it again, so I can remember what it feels like," Herb murmured.

Chuck grunted, but seemed uninterested in a repeat performance. Herb wondered if he hadn't melted Chuck's brain as well.

\* \* \*

"Eye of the Tiger" rang through the night, jerking Chuck out of a sound sleep. Mumbling under his breath, he rolled out of bed and stumbled around the room, searching for his jeans.

"I think they're over next to the dresser." Herb's sleepy voice emerged from the covers.

Chuck grabbed them and managed to get his phone out as it stopped ringing. "Shit."

"Who was it?" Herb's mass of black curls appeared right before Herb's green eyes did.

"I don't know. I think it was Petrovic. Jessie told me she changed his ring tone the other day."

"Why would she use 'Eye of the Tiger' as his ring tone? That doesn't make sense. She should have used the theme song to *Hawaii Five-O* or something like that." Herb rubbed his eyes.

"Petrovic is Russian. She always had a thing for the guy who fought Rocky in *Rocky IV*."

Herb frowned, giving Chuck the clue his lover had no idea

what he was talking about.

“Honey, we’re going to have to widen your education.” Chuck shook his head.

“Why? I’ve got two doctorates and various other degrees. I don’t think I need any more education.” Herb thumped the pillow under his head.

“I meant your social education. I’m going to rent some movies for us to watch together.”

The phone beeped and Chuck swore as he stared at the screen, trying to remember how to get to the voicemail. Herb heaved an exasperated sigh and climbed out of bed. Chuck eyed his naked lover as Herb strolled across the floor toward him.

God, no other man Chuck had seen naked ever looked as good as Herb did. Chuck’s cock took notice as well and perked right up. He reached out and stroked his hand down Herb’s chest to grasp the man’s shaft, while Herb grabbed his phone and started pushing buttons.

Chuck leaned in and bit one of Herb’s nipples. Herb squealed and dropped the phone. Chuck laughed as Herb pushed him away.

“What was that for?” Herb looked disgruntled as he rubbed his chest.

Shrugging, Chuck hid his smile by bending forward to step into his jeans. “Just thought you’d look sexy with a bite mark or two.”

“Jesus, really?” Herb glanced down at his chest, crossing his eyes to try to get a look at the teeth marks. “I wouldn’t think you’d get off on bruises and things like that. This little kink of yours doesn’t mean you’re going to tie me up and start whipping me, does it? Because I have to tell you, I don’t think I’d find it fun at all. I’m not that into pain, you know. Though I will admit, I found a little hurt rather intriguing, but that might have to do with the fact

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you had a hold of my prick at the time.”

Chuck blinked, not sure how Herb could say all those words while still being half asleep. He could barely get dressed before he had his first cup of coffee.

“Here.” Herb slammed his phone against his chest before stomping back to bed. “I’m going back to sleep.”

“You’re pretty grumpy when you wake up,” he commented as he held the phone to his ear.

Herb flipped him off and climbed into bed. Chuck laughed and bent to pick up his shirt from the edge of the dresser.

“Davidson, call me right away. We have a problem with the Fardanov case. Seems like someone paid a visit to Mrs. Botsova tonight.”

“Fuck.” He hung up and dialed Petrovic’s phone.

Herb peeked over the edge of his blankets. “What’s wrong?”

“I think something happened to Mrs. Botsova.”

“Who’s Mrs. Botsova?”

He held up his finger as Petrovic answered.

“It’s about time you called me back.”

“About time? You called me like five minutes ago. It took me a little while to find my phone. Our clothes are scattered around the room.”

Petrovic choked. “Okay, I don’t need to know about your wild sex life, asshole. Especially since I haven’t gotten any in a month or so.”

“Well, I hope if you did get some, and that some was my sister, you wouldn’t brag to me about it.” Chuck looked around to see if he could find his socks. “What happened to Mrs. Botsova?”

“Nothing happened to her, but I think the guys who trashed Fardanov’s house will think twice about going after her.” Petrovic

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laughed. “They tried breaking into her house and she met them at the door with a shotgun. She fired a round of birdshot into the ass of one of the guys.”

“So what are we supposed to do? Look for a Russian with holes in his ass?” He shook his head. “Does she want us to come out and talk to her?”

“Yes. Because not only did she shoot him, but we have blood. So we can get a DNA match, if need be, when we catch a suspect. Mrs. Botsova said she remembered something else Fardanov told her right before he disappeared.”

“Sometimes being old is hell,” he muttered.

“What does that mean?” Herb and Petrovic both asked.

“What that means is she doesn’t need a lot of sleep, so having us come out right now won’t bother her. Yet we’ll be dragging ass tomorrow.”

“True.” Petrovic grunted. “I’ll swing by Herb’s and pick you up since it’s on the way out to Long Island.”

“Works for me. See you in a few.”

Chuck hung up and stuffed his phone in his back pocket. After sitting on the edge of the bed, he reached out and ran his hand over Herb’s hair. “Sorry I have to leave yet again.”

Herb smiled at him. “It’s okay. I’ll see you when you get back. Unless it’s the morning and I’m gone, then you probably don’t want to come in.”

“I’m actually supposed to have tomorrow off. Maybe I could crash here and we can go out to dinner when you get home.” He wasn’t sure why he suggested it, but he did want to start treating Herb more like a boyfriend and less like a fuck buddy.

“Like a real date? I’ve never been on a date before. I keep repeating myself about that, don’t I? But it’s true. You’re

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broadening my horizons, and I appreciate it. Not just because I don't feel like quite the geek I did before, but because I really, *really* like you." Herb took a deep breath. "If you want, you can stay here tomorrow and I'll call when I'm on my way home. That way you can be ready and we'll head out right when I get back."

Chuck kissed Herb and stood. Herb protested, but Chuck shook his head.

"If I keep kissing you, we'll end up in bed together and I'll be fucking you again. Petrovic won't be happy to have to wait while I get lucky again."

"I'm beginning not to like Alexei. He needs to find a girlfriend or get over his shyness and ask your sister out. I thought he was keeping an eye on her."

"Yeah, but keeping an eye doesn't mean he shares her bed."

"But you're keeping an eye on me and you're sharing my bed. Maybe not all night long, but you have been sleeping in my bed with me. I don't understand why he wouldn't do the same thing with her. He likes her, and I know she likes him. She's told me over and over again, plus she talks about his ass and his muscles until I want to choke her."

Chuck fought the urge to cover his ears and say la-la-la. He didn't want to hear anything about his sister's attraction to his partner. He liked to believe his sister was still a virgin, though he knew better.

His phone rang and he answered after patting Herb on the knee. "Yeah?"

"I'm downstairs, waiting for you," Petrovic said.

He stuffed his feet into his shoes and waved to Herb before he jogged down the stairs and out of the building. Petrovic pushed open the passenger door, and Chuck slid in.

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"Sometimes I hate being an detective," Chuck mumbled as he snapped his seatbelt.

Petrovic grunted in agreement and nodded toward the cup stuck in the center console. "I brought you some coffee. Thought it might wake you up for the ride over."

"Thanks. Do we have any idea what they might've been looking for at Mrs. Botsova's house?"

"Have no idea. She didn't say on the phone either. She's a cagey old broad. I wouldn't be surprised if she actually knows far more than she's told us." Petrovic drove through the night. "How're things going with you and Herb?"

"Good. I'm taking him out to dinner tomorrow."

"Do you really think we'll still get our day off tomorrow?"

"Fuck," Chuck swore, frustration zinging through him.

Why couldn't he have met Herb during one of those slow months when their cases rarely broke or were easily solved? It would figure he'd meet a guy he liked during one of the most complicated cases of his career.

Usually, he could ignore everything going on around him and focus on the case, but Herb distracted him. Not just with his babble and slightly overblown ego. With all his scholarly knowledge, Herb was innocent of so many things out in the real world. Chuck found he wanted to be the man to show Herb everything he'd never seen. Movies. Clubs and dancing. Date nights. Family dinners and holidays with friends.

It amazed Chuck that everyone seemed to overlook Herb or pass him off as just a geeky scientist. There was so much more hidden beneath his cute surface. While Herb's formidable intelligence did intimidate Chuck a little, Chuck knew his lover didn't think of him as stupid. Well, only about scientific things, not



the rest of the world.

“We’re here.”

He looked up to see Petrovic had parked in front of Mrs. Botsova’s house. There was a uniform unit standing on the porch and Chuck waved at them as he climbed out of the car.

They showed the men their badges before heading inside. Mrs. Botsova sat in her chair, cup of tea in hand, watching them walk in. She gestured for them to sit on the couch across from her.

“Thank you for coming so soon, detectives.”

“We figured, with all the excitement, you wouldn’t have gotten back to sleep anytime soon, so getting here now would ensure it was fresh in your mind.” Petrovic pulled out his notebook and pen from his pocket.

“Meaning I’m old and I might forget something important if you waited too long.” She grinned at Petrovic’s sheepish expression. “My dear boy, I happen to have an excellent memory. I requested a sketch artist from the police officers who responded to my call.”

“I’ll go see what the status is on that.” Petrovic shot to his feet and raced out the front door.

Mrs. Botsova and Chuck shared a smile. “I seem to make your partner nervous.”

“I think you remind him a lot of his grandma, and that woman rules her family with an iron fist.” Chuck shrugged. “So what did Dr. Fardanov tell you before he died?”

She set her teacup on the table next to her and folded her hands in her lap. “Yuri must’ve known they were watching him. One night shortly before he disappeared, he came over to my house. He used the back door, which is unusual, but they were in front of his place.”

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Chuck jotted down what she said, but he saw how her eyes went distant, like she was seeing Yuri in front of her.

“He was scared. Told me that he’d discovered something a lot of important people would want. I asked him why he didn’t go to the company he worked for. Yuri said he didn’t know who he could trust.”

He stopped writing, tapping the pencil to his bottom lip. “Sounds like he didn’t trust someone at his office.”

“Silly really. I doubt very much one of them hired those bullies to kill him.” She sounded sure. “It’s probably corporate espionage like in those movies you see all the time. A rival company wanted what Yuri had. He said he’d been getting phone calls for the last couple of months. Harassing and threatening calls.”

Chuck made a note to check Fardanov’s phone records. They should have gotten those by now. He and Mrs. Botsova continued chatting until Petrovic returned with the sketch artist. Maybe at last, they would be able to put faces to Dr. Fardanov’s killers.

## CHAPTER 10

“This fucking sucks,” Chuck grouched as he tossed the folder he was looking at onto the desk in front of him.

His partner looked up from where he sat, hunched over a folder of his own. “Nothing. We have nothing except what Ms. Botsova told us and the perps thinking she has something or knows something.”

“She’s observant, that’s for sure. The descriptions she gave us of each man was incredible, but I’ve run them through every database I could think of and got nothing. It’s like they don’t exist.”

He shoved his chair back and stood, frustration rushing through him. They were working overtime and Chuck was getting cranky because he hadn’t seen Herb in twenty-four hours. Talking to his

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lover on the phone could bring a smile to his face, but it didn't make him happy.

As he paced between their desks and the window, he went over everything they knew so far. They had the reason why the perps would want what Fardanov was working on. They could figure out why the scientist died. He gave them what they wanted and they didn't need him anymore.

But why were they still hanging around? Why hadn't they taken the formula and run like any intelligent spy would? What he feared—and all his instincts screamed it was going to happen—was that they would go after Herb and Jessie. That scared him because neither his sister nor his boyfriend understood how dangerous these men were.

Of course, both of them would tell him he was over-reacting and the bad guys wouldn't come after them. They were scientists, for God's sake. No one was interested in anything they did.

Yet Chuck didn't believe it. He had the terrible feeling Fardanov didn't give his killers everything they needed to create a working serum. Now they'd figured it out, they were doing everything they could think of to find the rest of the formula or someone who could re-create it. And that made Chuck scared and angry.

"Should we put a patrol on Mrs. Botsova, Jessie, and Herb? I trust McKinley to take care of Herb and Jessie while they're at work, but you and I can't be with them all the time. Damn it, and that's when they'll get snatched because neither one of them pays attention to what's going on around them. Neither one of them believes the bad guys would be interested in them."

Petrovic reached for the phone. "I'll call the guys out on Long Island and have them send out a car to Mrs. Botsova's."

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“That’s very nice of you, son, but they’d be guarding an empty house at the moment.”

Both Petrovic and Chuck whirled to see Mrs. Botsova winding her way through the maze of desks. One of the desk sergeants walked behind the elderly lady. Chuck nodded to him in thanks before pulling out a chair for her.

“Mrs. Botsova, what are you doing here? Did you drive over here?”

She shook her head and settled in, setting her purse down on the floor next to her. “Of course not. I haven’t driven in several years. Not that I couldn’t, of course, but there’s no point in doing it when I rarely go any farther than the corner grocery store.”

“How did you get here? Why are you here? Would you like something to drink?” Petrovic asked as he stood.

“I’d love some tea, and I have some information for you.” She smiled. “I took the train to Jamaica, then I rode the bus here.”

Chuck was impressed she made it so far on her own, not that she was infirm or anything. Just traveling in the city could be confusing for people half her age.

Petrovic returned with the tea and set it in front of her. “Why didn’t you call us?”

“I didn’t want to risk my phone being bugged, so I thought I’d come in person.” She tilted her head and gave Chuck a narrow-eyed stare. “I’m not crazy. Trust me, I’ve gotten the feeling someone was in my house while I was out getting my hair done.”

Chuck rested his ass on the edge of the desk and nodded. “I don’t doubt it. You’ve proven you’re a pretty sharp cookie, Mrs. Botsova, so if you think your place is bugged, we’ll call the guys out on the Island and have them sweep your house.”

“Thank you, Detective Davidson. I knew I could trust you.”

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Mrs. Botsova bent and picked up her purse. She pulled out some sheets of paper. "I called some people I know back in the old country."

Checking on Petrovic, Chuck saw his partner on the phone. He glanced back at Mrs. Botsova. The gleam in her faded blue eyes told him she was enjoying the whole intrigue of the situation.

"Where exactly is the old country?"

"I'm originally from Moscow, Detective Davidson. I came over in nineteen sixty-five with my husband. He got a job with the Port Authority." She handed him the papers.

He studied them and his jaw dropped. They were rap sheets with pictures of the men who had broken into Mrs. Botsova's house.

"What kind of people do you know?" He handed the papers to Petrovic, who had just gotten off the phone, and folded his arms over his chest as he met her gaze.

"Let's just say I know some very powerful people, Detective Davidson. I can't really talk about them, but they were able to get the names of the men you're looking for. While they were looking, they found some other interesting things. Things tying those gentlemen to a company here in the States." She pointed to the papers Petrovic shuffled through.

"You are a very scary woman, Mrs. Botsova. Did Fardanov know about your connections in Russia?" Chuck reached out and grabbed a notebook off his desk. He flipped it open and took out a pencil.

"Are you going to take notes, so you can dig up my past?" The elderly lady didn't seem overly concerned by the idea.

"I'm afraid I'm going to have to. You're getting a little deeper into this investigation than most normal people would. My

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instincts are saying you aren't just a slight nosy next door neighbor." He grinned at her.

Mrs. Botsova chuckled and sipped her tea. When she was done, she stared out the window for a moment before looking back at them. "You're right, Detective Davidson. My past before I came to America is filed away somewhere you don't have access to. My presence here is known to the people who need to know."

She frowned. "I'm afraid those men now know who I might be, which isn't good for me."

Chuck straightened. "Are you in danger? Do you need to go to a safe house? I'm sure we can arrange one."

"No. Don't worry about me. I have places I can go, but, before I go, I want to see Yuri's killers brought to justice." She stood. "Just make sure there's a patrol car outside my house. I do believe they'll come back to my place and Yuri's. They're looking for something. Also, watch over your own scientists, Detective Davidson. These men are professionals and dangerous. Probably the most dangerous you've ever come up against."

Something in Mrs. Botsova's expression told Chuck she was telling the truth. This woman had lived a life that made her tough deep inside. She didn't scare easily, so he had to take her advice seriously.

Petrovic picked up the phone again and called down to the front desk.

"One of our uniformed units will drive you back home, Mrs. Botsova. I don't think it's safe for you to take the bus or the train anywhere."

She lifted an eyebrow at him, and Chuck laughed.

"I'm sure you'd probably be able to take down a couple of gang members, but I'd prefer you not having to beat them up. It

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would ruin their egos to be shown up by an elderly lady.”

He hugged her and brushed a kiss over her fragile cheek. “Thank you very much for coming to us and for using your connections to help us out.”

Mrs. Botsova patted his face. “Yuri was like the son I was never able to have. I’m angry they took his life. That they chose to take away the valuable things he could have brought to the world. They have no right to do that, no matter what they think.”

“We’ll do everything in our power to get them and bring them to trial. Not only the ones who pulled the trigger, but the ones who ordered it pulled.”

Mrs. Botsova’s smile held a little sadness. “That’s all any of us can do, Detective Davidson.”

“I’d like you to join my family for dinner some Sunday. I think my mom would love you.” Chuck extended the invitation without thinking about it.

“Maybe after everything is done and before I leave. I’d love to meet your family and your lover. I’m sure he’s a wonderful man.”

Chuck blinked, speechless at her statement. She gave Petrovic a hug and left with one of the uniforms. After grabbing the papers again, he tried to read them, but his mind skipped back to what Mrs. Botsova said.

“How did she know?”

Petrovic sent him an inquiring glance. “Know what?”

“How did she know I was gay and that I had a boyfriend?” He tapped his fingers on his desk. “I never said anything to her about Herb.”

“Dude, she brought us the rap sheets of the men who killed Fardanov. She probably knows what you ate for breakfast this morning. I think she’s former KGB or something.” Petrovic leaned



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back in his chair and stretched. “Do you think she’s KGB? They protect their own, even if they aren’t viable anymore.”

“There’s a spy branch in Russia, just not outwardly KGB. It’s creepy to think she can call someone and get all this information when we couldn’t even find out any shit.”

Chuck dropped into his seat and rested his head on his desk.

“Okay. We have new leads, but neither of us is going to be any good if we don’t get some sleep and eat real food. Not the crap from the street vendors.” Petrovic looked at his watch. “Let’s call it a day and we’ll meet back here tomorrow morning at eight.”

“Do you really think Sommerson is going to let us quit for the day once he finds out about this?” Chuck waved a hand toward the pile of paper.

“He doesn’t have to know. Listen, Mrs. Botsova is covered. We’ll pick up Jessie and Herb at the lab. I’ll take Jessie to your parents’, and you go home with Herb. They’ll be okay and we can start fresh tomorrow. At this moment, I can’t think straight and I’m not sure where Russia is, much less where my house is. I haven’t seen it in so long.”

As much as Chuck knew he should be digging into those files, he also knew Petrovic was right. Their brains and bodies were exhausted and they could easily miss something important because they were too tired to see it.

“All right. We lock this file in my desk and meet back here tomorrow morning at eight to see why a group of Russian mobsters killed Fardanov for his invisibility serum.”

After locking the information away, they gathered the rest of their things and clocked out. They practically staggered into the elevator and braced themselves against the walls of the car while riding it down. Chuck pulled out his phone as they stepped outside.

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“Burke Pharmaceuticals. How may I direct your call?”

“May I talk to Dr. Pommerset? This is Detective Davidson calling.”

“Certainly, sir.”

Chuck tossed the keys to Petrovic as they reached the car. He climbed in and fastened his belt while waiting for Herb to answer.

“Oh, my God! You’ve got to get here as soon as you can.” Herb’s voice was breathless and excited.

“We’re actually on our way right now. Are you okay? Is Jessie okay?”

Petrovic started the car and peeled out of the parking lot, sirens wailing.

“What? Oh yes, we’re fine, but we’ve been doing more experiments. We made a monkey and a dog disappear like the mouse.”

“Wait. Everything is fine?”

Herb sighed in annoyance. “Haven’t you been listening to me? We’re fine, but I do really miss you and I think I must be getting horny because I keep thinking about you naked spread-eagle on my bed. I imagine what you’d sound like when I’m sucking your cock.”

Chuck bit back a groan as his cock stiffened. “Herb, focus on the experiments, though, trust me, we can help bring your fantasies to life later tonight.”

“Oh, good. Anyway, we’re figuring out the right dosages for each creature and getting bigger. We think by the end of the week, we’ll be able to do human trials.” Herb sounded ecstatic. “I can’t wait to find out what it feels like.”

“What it feels like?”

Why did Chuck have a sinking suspicion his boyfriend was

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going to offer himself up as the test subject?

“Yes. Does the subject know it’s invisible? Do they lose their sight? Or what?”

He could almost imagine Herb was rubbing his hands in glee.

“You aren’t doing it to yourself.” He laid down the law. “I forbid it.”

\* \* \*

Herb pulled the phone away from his ear and stared at it for a second. Jessie sent him a puzzled look. He waved at her to ignore him as he carried his cordless phone closer to the window.

“You didn’t just say that.”

“What? Say I forbid you from using yourself as a human guinea pig? Hell, yes, I said that. If you need a human to experiment on, there are poor college students you can hire. Fuck, kidnap a homeless man off the street. I don’t fucking care who you use. You’re just not going to use yourself.”

Herb clenched his hand, surprised by the anger welling in him. He never thought Chuck would be so autocratic. Didn’t he understand how important Herb’s research was?

“Aside from being illegal and just plain ethically wrong, I couldn’t trust those homeless men and college students were drug- or alcohol-free. There can’t be any contamination. It would skew the numbers and we’ve come too far to ruin it all.”

“You have no idea the effect that serum has on the animals you used it on. I don’t want anything happening to you, Herb. You’re so important to me that if something did happen, I’d probably lose my mind. Do you want to be responsible for me going to the mental ward?”

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As angry as he was at Chuck's orders, Herb's heart melted a little when Chuck explained why he didn't want Herb injecting the serum into himself. Of course, that didn't change Herb's mind. When it came to science, Herb couldn't afford to let emotion get in the way.

"No, I don't want to cause you to go crazy, but nothing will go wrong. The experiment will be tightly controlled, and the invisibility doesn't last longer than thirty minutes right now. Jessie will be with me the entire time, as will be Mr. McKinley and Mr. Burke." He giggled. "I still think there's something going on between the two of them. They can't be in a room together without giving off so many pheromones, I'd swear we'd all choke on them. I don't know why they just don't get it over with."

Chuck laughed. "Sometimes, it isn't that easy, Herb. For them, wanting each other isn't enough. They have to trust each other, and something tells me McKinley doesn't trust Burke, at least not with his heart."

"Why wouldn't he trust him? Mr. Burke seems nice for a guy with average intelligent."

Jessie squeaked, and Herb turned to see the aforementioned Mr. Burke standing just inside the door, arms crossed and eyebrows raised.

"Oh, uh...hi, Mr. Burke."

"No way. Did he walk in while you were disparaging his intelligence?" Chuck's laughter burst over the phone.

"Ummm...yes." He winced as Chuck's mirth got louder. "It's not that funny."

"Oh, honey, it is funny. You really need to start thinking before you speak. What if you hurt his feelings?"

Herb eyed his boss and the lift of Burke's lips in a sardonic

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smile told him he wasn't in trouble.

"I think his ego can take the truth." Herb grinned. "Are you coming to get me?"

"Yes. Petrovic and I are on our way to pick up you and Jessie. It's time to call it a day and start fresh in the morning." A voice rumbled in the background. "Petrovic said to tell Jessie he's dropping her off our parents and not to get any ideas."

"Why haven't they slept together yet?" Herb shook his head. "What is it with everyone around here? Why are we the only ones having sex? Heck, we haven't known each other that long and we've already had sex. I must be irresistible to have gotten you into bed already, considering how slowly the people around us move."

"Honey, you're easy, and I'm sexy as hell. That's an unbeatable combination. See you in a few."

Before he could protest the easy remark, Chuck hung up. Herb wrinkled his nose and set the phone on the desk. He'd make Chuck pay for that comment. Turning, he spied Burke still in the room. Only now he stood next to Jessie, talking to her softly while looking over some of their papers.

"Now you're finished discussing everyone's sex life, Dr. Pommerset, maybe you could come and explain the progress you've made on Dr. Fardanov's formula. Please remember to use little words since a person of my average intelligence couldn't possibly understand all those big scientific words."

He stuck his tongue out at Burke. It might not have been professional, but it expressed exactly how he felt about the man's statement. Herb looked at Jessie.

"Alexei said he's taking you to your parents' house and not to get any ideas. I guess he's still a little nervous about making a

move on you.” He shrugged. “What is it with you people? Honestly, like I said to Chuck, why are you all waiting to sleep with each other? It’s not like you can’t figure out McKinley wants you, Mr. Burke. And hell, Jessie, Alexei practically drools every time he’s around you. Is having sex without a solid commitment against your religious beliefs or something like that?”

Burke opened his mouth, but Herb pushed on, trying to work the puzzle out in his head.

“I guess I can understand you not having sex with Alexei until you were married, Jessie. While it’s an antiquated idea, it’s still very much in use during these modern times. Yet you told me you weren’t a virgin, so it couldn’t be that. Unfortunately for you, Mr. Burke, you and Mr. McKinley can’t get married in most states, so I’m not sure what you’re waiting for. I mean just grab him and kiss him. That should break down any barriers he might have to sleeping with you. I’ve noticed that kissing can cause all the blood to drain from your head and pool in your groin, and that tends to drive all the sexual urges for men.”

Burke reached out and covered Herb’s mouth with his hand. Herb froze, his eyes studying his boss. Burke shook his head and laughed.

“Christ, your mind and mouth go a mile a minute, don’t they? And you really don’t have any internal filter. It’s truly amazing someone hasn’t strangled you by now.” Burke removed his hand from over Herb’s mouth and stepped back. “There are other reasons why McKinley and I dance around each other, and it has nothing to do with our religious beliefs. Trust me.”

“And Alexei is the one who won’t move any faster. I wanted to have sex with him the first day I met him, but I think he’s afraid if we got together, it would make his working relationship with

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Chuck awkward.”

“If none of you would mind breaking up this little gossip fest, I’d also like to hear what Dr. Pommerset and Dr. Davidson have figured out.”

McKinley stepped into the lab, but Herb had the sneaky suspicion the security chief had been standing out in the hallway, listening to their conversation. His suspicions were confirmed when the man glared at Burke. Jessie scooted closer to Herb, her eyes wide as they watched the two big men face off.

“Eavesdropping in the hallway again, McKinley?” Burke propped his fists on his hips.

McKinley shrugged, utterly unfazed by Burke’s intimidating bulk. “Sometimes listening at keyholes is the only way to learn anything, especially when certain people won’t talk to you.”

Herb started to point out that the door was open and it didn’t have any keyholes anyway, but Jessie jabbed her elbow into his stomach and he closed his mouth.

“My father always said eavesdroppers always hear things they didn’t want to hear.”

Burke edged closer, and Herb found himself holding his breath. *Come on. Just do it. Just grab him and kiss him.* He silently encouraged Burke.

Whatever might have happened was interrupted when Herb’s desk phone buzzed. Fighting the urge to stomp, he went and picked it up.

“Yes?” He let his annoyance show in his voice.

“Detectives Davidson and Petrovic are here, sir. Should I send them up?”

“Yes. Thank you.”

By the time he set the phone down and turned around, Burke

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and McKinley were on opposites of the lab table. He almost pouted in frustration. God, he was going to have to hose those two men down if they didn't do something about their attraction soon.

"All right, using my small words, I'll try to explain what we've done so far."

When he finished up with all the technical talk, he glanced over to see Chuck and Petrovic standing around him as well. Alexei's gaze was firmly on Jessie while she drew out some formulas for Burke. Herb met Chuck's gaze and licked his lips, wanting nothing more than to fling himself into Chuck's arms and let the man fuck him on the nearest table. Some of his wishful thinking must have shown in his face because Chuck mouthed, Later, to him. He nodded, not happy about waiting, but also realizing it wasn't very professional to have sex in front of his boss and colleagues. Unless they were into that sort of thing.

Herb's cock stiffened at the thought of being on display for all of them to study. While the thought might excite him, he didn't think doing it for real was his cup of tea. He'd have to talk to Chuck about that, though. Herb didn't have very much experience with situations and things that might be a sexual trigger for him. He bit his lip to keep from groaning as he imagined all the fun he and Chuck could have while he learned.

"Here's what we've learned today."

Chuck's voice brought him back to the lab. He tugged his lab coat closed to cover the bulge in his pants. He stepped closer to his lover and breathed deeply of Chuck's familiar musky scent, which did nothing to ease his erection.

"Mrs. Botsova, Dr. Fardanov's neighbor out on Long Island, stopped by the precinct this afternoon. Seems she has connections with some people in Russia and was able to get us the information



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we needed on our perps.” Chuck looked at McKinley. “I’ll make sure you get a copy of the file. Oh, and don’t try anything with Mrs. Botsova. That lady is someone none of us should mess with.”

Petrovic grunted in agreement. “I think she’s ex-KGB, or even still working for them. It’s the perfect cover, isn’t it? No one suspects old people of being anything more than nosy.”

“You better not say that to your grandmother, Alexei,” Jessie teased.

“God, no. She’d beat me with her cane.”

They all laughed at the image of Petrovic cowering in front of some little blue-haired old lady. Herb leaned against Chuck some more and sighed silently as Chuck encircled his waist with a solid arm.

“So we’re looking at Russian mobsters for this murder?” McKinley braced his hip on the edge of the desk, right next to Burke.

“The trigger men are Russian mobsters, but we think the person behind the killing is American. We traced the tags from a vehicle seen outside Fardanov’s house to a Pteriran Corporation. We still haven’t found out much about it aside from the fact it’s based here in the States.”

“Pteriran? Damn bastard.” Burke stalked from the room with McKinley following close behind.

“Guess they know who owns Pteriran,” Petrovic muttered.

“Yeah, but we’ll worry about that tomorrow. I trust McKinley not to screw up the case for us, and he’ll keep Burke in line.” Bending, Chuck nuzzled behind Herb’s ear, drawing a shiver from him. “I think it’s time we call it quits for the night and go home.”

“Oh, can we please? I want to have sex with you several times tonight. It’s been like forever since we made love.” Herb tilted his

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head to give Chuck more access to his neck. “I have some new ideas I want to try out.”

Chuck’s laughter rumbled in his chest and vibrated against Herb’s skin. “Do I get to be the human guinea pig for your sexual fantasies?”

“Yes. You’re perfect for them. Big and strong. Nice fat cock.”

“And on that note, we’re leaving.” Petrovic broke in.

Herb peeked over Chuck’s shoulder to see Alexei hustling Jessie out of the room. After they left, he looked up at Chuck who was staring at him in amusement.

“What did I say?”

## CHAPTER 11

“Herb, if you don’t come up here and let me fuck you, I won’t be responsible for the damage done to your headboard.”

Chuck’s warning made Herb giggle, which vibrated around Chuck’s cock. In turn, Chuck growled, and Herb shivered at the animalistic noise. When they’d gotten home, Herb had talked Chuck into letting him tie Chuck’s hands to the headboard and have his way with him. Herb’s experiment on testing Chuck’s control was fast coming to an end.

He’d kissed and licked over every inch of Chuck’s amazingly hard body. He’d sucked on Chuck’s nipples, never realizing just how sensitive they were until Chuck practically came unglued. Then he moved down Chuck’s washboard stomach to follow the thin line of hair to where Chuck’s cock stood, hard and dripping

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pre-cum in a nest of dark curls.

After finally reaching his destination, Herb settled between Chuck's legs and proceeded to suck Chuck's prick like a lollipop...or a Creamsicle, which were Herb's favorites, although there wasn't anything cold about Chuck. His flesh was hot, throbbing, and salty, and Herb enjoyed teasing every inch of it.

Lube coated his fingers and Chuck's ass because Herb had decided he wanted to take Chuck that night. Then maybe later, Chuck could take him. Herb was up for anything. The fierce need he felt to have sex with Chuck puzzled him because it wasn't like they'd been apart for days or anything. It had only been a little over twenty-four hours since Chuck had left his bed. Yet Herb wanted to bury himself deep in Chuck's ass and he wanted his own ass to burn from Chuck taking him.

Physics alone said that was impossible, so he'd go with fucking his lover first and when Chuck revived, he'd beg the man to take him.

"Herb, you're thinking again. No one's getting fucked if you keep drifting off like that."

Blinking, he glanced up at Chuck who glared down at him, frustration evident in every muscle.

He popped off Chuck's cock and wiped his chin. "Oops. Sorry, just got thinking about how much I wanted to fuck you and have you fuck me, too. Then got thinking about how would that be possible to do at the same time, which, of course, it couldn't be. Not even a person who was double-jointed could do something like that. The only way I could fuck you and get fucked as well would be if there was a third person in bed with us."

A crack was the only warning he got. Chuck's hands were on him and he squeaked as Chuck rolled him over on his back, got a

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condom on his cock, and straddled his hips all in what seemed like one move, but had to have been a series of several blurred together by the fact Herb was stunned by the swiftness of Chuck's movements.

He shouted out helplessly as Chuck enveloped Herb's cock with his ass, surrounding him with heat and tightness. "Oh, my fucking God."

Chuck bared gritted teeth as he rode Herb hard and fast, slamming his ass down onto Herb's prick with determined speed. As hard as Chuck moved, he seemed to make sure Herb wasn't being hurt as well.

Herb's eyes rolled back in his head as Chuck clenched his inner muscles around Herb's prick.

"Chuck, I'm going to come soon."

"Then do it, sweetheart. I won't be far behind you."

Herb let go of any control he had and his climax shot through him, emptying his cum into the rubber. He grabbed Chuck's hips and thrust up when Chuck came down, and he nailed Chuck's gland.

"Holy fucking Christ," Chuck shouted, his hot cum coating Herb's chest and stomach.

Trembling, he reached up and wrapped his arms around Chuck's shoulders, bringing the man down to him. He pressed their lips together as their skin slid on sweat and cum.

After their hearts and breathing calmed, Chuck rolled off him and stood next to the bed. Herb glanced up at him, chuckling at the pieces of wood dangling from Chuck's wrists where he'd pulled them from the headboard.

"I guess we're going to have to buy you a metal one if you're going to insist on tying me up. Who knew you were so kinky, Dr.

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Pommerset?” Chuck winked, and swept him into his arms. “Let’s take a shower and rest for a little. Then it’s my turn fucking you.”

Herb could hardly wait.

\* \* \*

“I think you’re crazy. Didn’t Chuck tell you *not* to do this?” Jessie put her fists on her hips and glared at him. “I’m not getting in trouble with my big brother when he finds out you disobeyed his orders and experimented on yourself.”

“Fine. Then I’ll interject myself with the serum and videotape myself.” Herb didn’t pout, but his bottom lip might have stuck out a little. “I only asked you because I needed someone else to verify what happens to me.”

“Oh, for God’s sake, quit pouting. How old are you? Five?” Jessie shook her head and reached for the needle. “I’ll do this, but when Chuck has a conniption over this whole thing, I’m going to tell him you put me up to it. I won’t take the blame for this.”

“I’ll tell everyone it was my choice, not yours, and as your supervisor, I forced you to do this with me.” Herb let her take the needle he had filled with the serum. “I’m not sure how much we need for me to disappear. I doubled what we gave the dog.”

Jessie muttered under her breath the entire time she swabbed his arm and inserted the needle into his vein. “Chuck is going to fucking blow a casket when he finds out we did this.”

Herb looked at her, and they smiled at each other.

“I know, but just think about it. I’ll be the first person ever to become invisible. It’s not true invisibility, but still surveillance equipment won’t be able to see me. I could go all over this facility and the cameras couldn’t track me. I wonder what we’d have to

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change in the formula to make me invisible to the naked eye. Now that would be a trick and a half, wouldn't it? I'd have to wrap myself like the Invisible Man did in that old black-and-white movie."

His mind raced as he imagined the formula and rearranged chemicals, amounts, and added a few others. A quick prick jerked him away from the numbers and he looked down to see Jessie slide the needle into his arm. A rather chilly sensation raced up his arm as she depressed the plunger and the serum entered his vein.

Jessie emptied the syringe and pressed the cotton ball to his skin as she pulled the needle out. "There. It only took about ten minutes for the dog to disappear. I'm not sure how long it'll take for you. I guess we just wait and see."

The phone rang as Jessie cleaned up and Herb swept it up. He stood, moving toward the window, resting his head against the glass.

"Pommerset."

"Hey there, Herb. How's your day going?"

Chuck's voice came over the phone, and Herb flushed, guilt making his skin hot.

"Great. Jessie and I are doing some more work on Yuri's formula. Trying to get the dosage just right for the next set of trials. I'm hoping we'll eventually be able to find a way to make the human test subject invisible, not only to electronic equipment, but to the naked eye as well. That would be the ultimate goal, I think."

"So you found someone to try it out on?"

He should have anticipated Chuck's question. "Uh, yeah, we did. Very eager to help out."

"Herb..."

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The long, drawn out sound of his name warned him that Chuck was getting suspicious.

“Did I tell you how much I enjoyed last night? I think I’m going to be walking funny for several days. It’s almost like I can still feel you inside me. We do need to go shopping for a new headboard for my bed, though. And you’re right. It probably should be metal because I’d really like to do that again. Maybe next time you could tie me up and spank me.”

Jessie choked on her coffee, and Chuck cleared his throat, but Herb’s rambling didn’t seem to distract Chuck from his original worry.

“You didn’t inject yourself, did you? Especially after I told you not to do it.” Chuck didn’t sound happy at all.

“Who are you? You’re definitely not my father because I wouldn’t be sleeping with my dad. That would just be so wrong and gross. I’m an adult and make my own decisions. This was the best thing for us all. Nothing is going to go wrong, and your sister can help me if something does. Which won’t happen because I know what I’m doing.”

Herb whirled around and paced from one side of the lab to the other. “Don’t worry. Trust me. I wouldn’t do anything like get myself killed or sick. What kind of scientist do you take me for? I’m brilliant, Chuck. You need to trust me.”

“Herb, it isn’t that I don’t trust you. I know you’re brilliant, but I don’t want you to experiment on yourself. What happens if it doesn’t wear off? What if you turn yourself invisible to the naked eye and you don’t come back? What kind of life would you have? Being invisible isn’t all it’s cracked up to be.”

“I’m not doing this on a whim, Chuck. I’ve thought about it and it’s the next step in science. There’s no way to find out how



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well this works if we don't use a human test subject. I'd rather be the one it doesn't work on than some innocent person doing this for the money."

Silence reigned and he could almost hear Chuck thinking. As much as Herb wanted to beg Chuck to believe in him and understand he did this, not for fame or fortune, but for science, Herb wouldn't do it. Chuck had to support him without being asked.

"God, how can I agree to it when I love you so much and I don't want anything to happen to you?"

"You love me?"

"Yes, you silly geek. I love you and I can't help it. I'm worried you'll do something I can't fix, and that scares me."

Chuck's admission of love shocked Herb. He never believed anyone would fall in love with him. Geeky and socially inept, he tended to insult people without even trying. Yet on the other end of the phone was a gorgeous detective, who might not have any advanced degrees, but that didn't bother either of them. All that mattered was that Herb's oddness didn't bother Chuck. His lover accepted Herb's inability to censor his own tongue.

Herb sighed. "I love you, too."

"I know you do, sweetheart." Chuck paused. "I'm going to hang up now. Call me when your experiment is over and I trust you'll be okay. Oh, and tell my sister, she's not off the hook about this."

"Thank you, Chuck. I'll take you out to dinner after this."

He punched the end button and turned to see a stranger standing next to Jessie with a gun pressed to her side.

"What the hell are you doing here? You can't be in here." He started to dial security.

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"I suggest you put the phone down, Dr. Pommersset, and come with us."

Frowning, Herb worked out what the man said, even though he had a very thick accent. *Is he one of the bad guys? How the hell had he gotten in to the lab area?*

The man jabbed Jessie in the ribs, and she squeaked. Herb put the phone down, but not before hitting redial. The phone was set up to call the last number that had come in, so it would go directly to Chuck's phone. Hopefully, he wouldn't talk too loudly.

"You can't be here. Our experiments don't mean anything to you. Who do you work for?"

"My employer is interested in your invisibility formula, and from what I overheard, you injected yourself with it. I assume you've figured out how to make a person disappear." The man jerked on Jessie's arm. "Gather all your papers and come with me. We're going somewhere you can make much more of that formula."

"Why don't your scientists make it up? You have the formula already." Herb paused. "Maybe your scientists aren't as smart as Jessie and I. That could be possible. Not many people are as intelligent as I am. It's hard to find geniuses like me."

Jessie rolled her eyes at him, but he wasn't just rambling. He had to make sure they took as long as possible to gather things up. He wanted Chuck to know what was going on. He knocked off all the papers along with the phone from the desk. Crouching, he started gathering the papers while whispering.

"Chuck, if you can hear me, the Russian guy is here. He's going to take Jessie and me somewhere. I don't know if the serum is working or not. You'll have to talk to McKinley to check the tapes for me. Also, I'm going to hit the panic button. I hope he

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doesn't shoot either of us, but I can't let him take us out of the facility. If he does, I don't know, he might end up killing us like he did Yuri."

"Who the hell are you talking to?"

A second guy appeared, and Herb jumped as the guy grabbed his arm and yanked him up.

"I have a tendency to talk to myself when I'm nervous. Sorry. I didn't know you wanted me to be quiet. I have to warn you that it'll be a bit of trial for me. I've never really been good at staying quiet, especially when I have a gun pointed at me." Herb held up all the papers. "I have the papers. Shall we go?"

He started toward the door and stumbled, slamming his shoulder into Jessie who must have figured out what he was thinking. She stuck out her hands and hit the panic button. All the labs were equipped with buttons that warned of security issues, whether it was a breach like what was going on with them, or some sort of hazardous spill.

The alarm blared, and the Russians glared at them.

Herb shrugged. "Oops."

"Get moving now. You're our hostages now."

Jessie set her jaw and slid her arm through Herb's, pulling him out of the lab and into the hallway. "What do we do now?" she whispered in his ear.

"I'm not sure, but Chuck should know what's going on, if McKinley doesn't figure it out. More than likely, they're taking us to the Pteriran Corporation because they'll want us to show their scientists how to create it. They want to get a head start on the competition. Unfortunately, they don't have the top echelon of scientists. Probably won't pay to get the good ones."

He swung around to look at the two men following them. "How

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much did the Pteriran Corporation pay you to get this formula from Yuri and kill him?"

"What are you talking about?" One of the men frowned.

The other elbowed his partner. "Shut up, Ivan. They don't need to know anything."

"Anything? What? This isn't corporate espionage?" Herb froze in the hallway and swung around to face the two men. "What is this? Are you some sort of KGB spies or something? Why did you have to kill Yuri? All he did was figure out how to make people invisible. He didn't do anything to you. At least, I doubt he did. Yuri was a lover, not a fighter."

"And you're a fighter?" The man stepped into Herb's space. "Are you going to keep walking or do I have to make you?"

Herb held up his hands, smacking the guy right in the face with the papers. Stepping back, he dodged the man's hands as the guy reached for him. He ran into the other guy, knocking him off stride.

"Jessie, get the hell out of here. Run."

He thought Chuck's sister was going to argue, but she took a deep breath and took off, running like her life depended on it. Herb kept swinging his hands and stumbling into the guys, so they weren't able to go after her.

"God damn it."

The biggest of the Russian swung at him and nailed him in the chin. Herb went down, his last thought as the darkness settled around him. *Chuck's going to be pissed.*

\* \* \*

"Fucking hell, no," Chuck yelled as he slammed his hand down

on the desk.

Petrovic looked up from where he spoke on his phone with McKinley. Chuck glared at Petrovic.

“Tell me that bastard has those assholes. If he doesn’t, I’m going to tear his head off. He was supposed to keep them safe.”

His partner didn’t say anything, just listened to whatever McKinley was saying. Chuck grabbed his gun out of his desk and hooked it to his belt.

“Okay. We’re on our way.” Petrovic hung up, grabbed his own weapon, and raced after Chuck.

“What does he have to say for himself?”

“The building’s in lockdown. No one can go in or out. Jessie’s fine. McKinley’s men have her and they’re searching the entire facility floor by floor.”

“What the fuck happened?” Chuck tossed the keys to Petrovic. He wasn’t in any condition to drive safely. All he wanted was to get to the lab and find Herb. He’d take the bastards apart if they hurt Herb.

“McKinley should’ve changed all the security protocols after Fardanov’s death. They never should’ve gotten in there. Christ, Alexei, what am I going to do if they kill Herb?”

“Whoa. Wait a minute, Chuck. You’re getting way ahead of yourself. We know the Russians have him and, as much as I hate to say this, they’re probably out of the facility by now.”

Chuck didn’t want to hear that, but he knew Petrovic was right. It had been ten minutes since Chuck received Herb’s call and the panic button had been pushed. Plenty of time for the kidnappers to get away, especially if they used Herb’s security card.

“Now they want Herb for some reason. Most likely scenario, they want more of the serum and they can’t make it. Snatching

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Herb and Jessie makes sense to them. At this moment, killing Herb isn't a viable option."

"You're right. I'm just worried about Herb. He's a brilliant scientist and crazy smart, but that doesn't mean he knows how to take care of himself in a situation like this."

"Hey, man, he's done good so far. He got Jessie away from them and he managed to alert us that something was going down." Petrovic shrugged. "Seems to me your guy can think on his feet."

"Yet he inspires people to strangle him. What if he starts in on the men and they don't stop themselves?"

Petrovic bit his lip, and Chuck realized his friend wanted to laugh.

"I think if that were to happened, we'd more likely get Herb back than them killing him."

They pulled into the parking lot of Burke Pharmaceuticals. Chuck bailed from the car the moment Petrovic pulled to a stop. He rushed into the building and saw Jessie standing there. Tears rolled down her cheeks, proving to Chuck how scared she really was because his sister rarely cried over anything.

He wrapped his arms around her and held his little sister close. "It's okay, honey. We'll find the guys who did this."

"You have to find Herb, Chuck. He got me away from them. He acted like he tripped and then fell into them, giving me time to run. I didn't want to go, but he yelled at me, and I knew I had to or they'd have both of us." Jessie ran out of steam.

Chuck eased her back, letting Petrovic take her. "Don't worry, Jessie. Herb didn't want you to be involved in this."

"Chuck, he interjected himself with the serum. We don't know how long it lasts or what kind of effects it has on a person. We need to get him back before it wears off."

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“Had it taken effect yet?”

She nodded as McKinley joined them. Chuck clenched his hands, reminding himself McKinley would be of no use to him unconscious and bleeding. “What have you got for me?”

McKinley didn’t apologize. He did his job. “Burke is contacting Pteriran to see what the owner wants. He thinks this is a kidnap and ransom plot.”

Chuck looked at McKinley. “What do you think it is?”

“I think the fuckers have no clue what they stole and they came looking for someone to tell them what it was. I’m thinking it isn’t corporate espionage at all. My gut says this was a personal issue between Fardanov and the men who killed him.”

Narrowing his gaze, he studied the security chief. “What do you know that you haven’t told us?”

“It’s not that I withheld information. This just crossed my desk a few minutes before I got the panic alert from Dr. Pommerset.” McKinley handed Chuck several sheets of paper. “It’s Fardanov’s personal banking files.”

“We’ve already been through those. There wasn’t anything interesting that we saw.” Chuck glanced through them again. Something caught his eye and he took the time to look at them more closely. “Holy shit!”

“Right.”

“What?” Petrovic asked, having comforted Jessie and handed her off to some of the other officers.

“It seems that, while Mrs. Botsova might be ex-KGB, our Dr. Fardanov was being paid by our friends in the Chinese government.” He held out the papers for his partner to look at. “How in the world did you get these? I wouldn’t think a pharmaceutical company would have access to this type of files.

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God knows, we weren't given it. Fucking off-shore accounts."

McKinley shrugged. "They showed up in my email account. I was trying to figure out exactly what the file said when I heard the alert go off. I headed right to Dr. Pommerset's lab, figuring that's where the problem was."

"Unfortunately, you got there too late."

McKinley nodded. "I did, but we caught a lucky break. Dr. Pommerset was given one of our newest pagers."

"I had McKinley get them for all of our top level scientists. Sometimes we need them to explain things to us less intelligent board members." Burke strolled in, unruffled but pissed if the fire burning in his eyes meant anything. "I talked to Pteriran, and he says he didn't have anything to do with it."

"He didn't."

Everyone swung around and watched in stunned silence as Mrs. Botsova entered the building. Three men dressed in suits screaming "Official Government Agent" accompanied her.



## CHAPTER 12

Another elbow to Herb's side and he'd had enough. He dug in his heels and glared at the two men.

"I don't know what kind of kidnapping school you all trained at, but let me tell you something. Unless you're going to kill me, you might want to take it easy. There's no way I can help you with whatever you have planned if I'm bruised to hell and back."

He folded his arms over his chest. "You'd think you'd realize the better you treat me, the more inclined I might be to help you out. I don't know what you want, though it doesn't take a rocket scientist to figure it out. Thank God, I'm not one."

The bigger of the two Russians, whom Herb had mentally dubbed Terrible after Ivan the Terrible, grunted.

"Do you not understand English?" Herb shook his head.

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“Stupid question. Of course you understand English. You spoke to Jessie and me while you were kidnapping me. Why aren’t you talking to me? Is it against the kidnappers’ code or something?”

Great, the shorter Russian Herb had named after Peter the Great, tugged on Herb’s arm. Unfortunately, Herb didn’t have the weight or muscle to keep him from dragging him along the sidewalk. He struggled, but couldn’t free his arm from Great’s grip.

“You know getting a degree in astrophysics takes forever, but I think I could do that. Don’t you think it’d be cool to figure out how to send a man to the moon? Oh, wait, we already did that, didn’t we? And it probably takes an engineering degree as well. I already have two doctorates. I guess it wouldn’t be any more trouble to add another one. It’s not like I have any kind of life outside the lab anyway.”

He froze as a thought hit him. His sudden stop caused Great and Terrible to stop as well. He saw their jaws tense, yet because of the crowd of people around them, he knew they wouldn’t physically pick him up and carry him. Why wasn’t he pitching a fit and trying to get someone to help him? Any normal person would be in hysterics by now. Herb mentally shrugged. It wouldn’t help and could end up hurting some innocent by-standers.

Chuck would find him. Herb clung to that belief with everything he had in him. Oh, hell, yeah, he was scared spitless, but it wouldn’t pay to show it to the Russian twins. No point in letting them know they had an advantage over him. He just had to keep talking until Chuck showed up.

“I do have a life now. I met a great guy, and he loves me.”

Terrible’s upper lip curled in disgust, and Herb whirled on him.

“Don’t get all self-righteous about me being gay. Dude, we

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don't hurt anyone. You kill people, for Christ's sake. How is my liking guys worse than you ending someone's life? Judgmental, small-minded bigots shouldn't be allowed to live outside a compound. You infect others with that crap and your beliefs destroy innocent people. And you worry about us getting a hold of you and corrupting you?"

He poked Terrible in the chest, shouting at him. "Don't worry, big boy. You are *so* not my type. I'm not going to try and seduce you, especially not now that I have Chuck."

"Chuck?" Great spoke up, and Herb turned to look at him.

"Yes, Chuck. Have you heard of him? I'm sure you have actually, since he's the detective investigating Yuri Fardanov's murder. Why did you have to kill Yuri? That's not nice. I mean, really, he gave you what you wanted, didn't he? You just don't kill a man after he does that." Herb huffed. "Didn't your parents teach you any manners?"

"It was his fault," Terrible protested.

Herb swung back to him. "*His* fault? How in the world could getting killed be Yuri's fault? Come on, guys, and help me here. I mean, seriously, when you kill me, are you going to say it was my fault? That you didn't want to kill me, but you had to because of something I did?"

"What he means is that Fardanov didn't give us everything we wanted, even after we asked for it nicely." Great grabbed Herb's arm again and yanked.

Being off-balance, all Herb could do was go with them. He gritted his teeth and fought the urge to kick one of them in the shins. That was the problem with being a geek and not a jock. With enough time and instructions, he could probably diffuse a bomb or assemble one if need be, but he didn't have the strength to free

himself from the two goons.

He just wasn't hero material. Saving Chuck from technology didn't count because his lover wasn't in danger from his cell phone, just annoyed by it. Herb let Great and Terrible continue to escort him down the sidewalk for a few minutes while he contemplated why he felt bad about not being a hero. It didn't matter. He doubted Chuck cared one way or the other if Herb could leap tall buildings in a single bound or could bend steel with his mind. Well, Herb had figured out a formula to weaken a steel bar enough for it to bend, so technically he had done it.

It was time to stop feeling sorry for himself and try to work out the problem of getting free. He didn't have to be strong. He just had to be smart about it.

"Where are you taking me?"

"Somewhere else."

"Oh, really? I couldn't figure it out on my own. Hell, a five-year-old could've gotten that." Herb shook his head and stumbled slightly as his vision blurred. "Ummm...guys, I don't feel so good."

"God, do you ever stop talking?" Terrible complained. "You haven't shut up since we left the lab."

"If you want me to be quiet, you'll have to gag me. I don't plan on stopping just because you're annoyed. I don't think you have any right to complain. You're the ones who took me. If it bothers you that much, you can leave me here and I'll find my way home." His stomach roiled and he doubled over, retching. "Christ, I really don't feel good."

"Damn it. We don't have time for this. Quit stalling. We have to be at the hotel in time."

"In time for what? And I'm not stalling. Wow...you guys are

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blurry all of a sudden.”

Terrible and Great pushed him out of the flow of pedestrian traffic. He braced his body up against the brick wall of the alley. Sweat broke out on his forehead and he shivered.

“Maybe injecting myself with the serum wasn’t the smartest move I ever made,” he muttered as his stomach rebelled and he threw up what little breakfast he’d had.

“Wait. You used yourself as a test subject?” Terrible dodged Herb’s projectile vomit to latch onto his shoulder. He shook Herb slightly. “Why would you do that?”

Herb shot him a puzzled glance. “Seriously? Because it was the next step in the project. We’d done all the experiments we could on animals. It was time to see how it would work on humans. Until I can see the footage from the lab, I won’t know if it actually worked on me or not.”

“Are you crazy? Look at you. You’re sick now. I bet it has to do with the formula and not with your nerves because we kidnapped you.” Great frowned. “Pick him up. We’ll have to carry him to the hotel.”

“If you put me in a cab and send me back to the lab, I could have someone there check me out. Make sure I’m not dying or anything like that.”

It was a long shot, but he had to try. God, his head pounded and every inch of his skin burned like fire ants were biting him. He whimpered, not liking how he felt. Chuck was right, and did it suck to know that. *Just give me a chance to tell Chuck that.*

“I’m sorry. We’ve been paid to collect you and bring you to the hotel. We’ve already taken their money. I don’t want to know what will happen to us if we don’t bring you.” Great gestured to Terrible. “Now pick him up.”

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Terrible grimaced, and Herb laughed weakly.

"I promise to throw up over your shoulder if I have to. I wouldn't want to get your suit dirty." Herb sighed softly as Terrible swept him into his arms. "For being killers, you're rather nice."

"We didn't kill Fardanov. If he hadn't run, he would still be alive."

Herb's disbelieving snort seemed to amuse them. Great chuckled.

"You don't believe us?"

"Well, duh. You've kidnapped me and are dragging me to a meeting in a hotel that I don't want to be at. Excuse me if I don't believe you're not killers." He rested his head on Terrible's shoulder, hating the fact he couldn't continue being tough and obnoxious. "Though the way I feel right now, I might beg you to kill me."

"Idiot," Great murmured. "Your boyfriend must not love you much if he allows you to do this to yourself."

"Who was I supposed to experiment on?" Herb peered through half-closed eyes at the shorter Russian. "We needed to know how it affects humans. They're the ones who'll be using the formula."

"You offer a homeless man money, or have someone kidnap him for you. There are always people on the fringes no one will miss if something goes wrong." Terrible didn't seem upset by the thought of kidnapping someone and experimenting on them against their will.

"Oh, my God, have you been talking to Chuck because he said basically the same thing? Though he said offer them money instead of kidnapping them. Do you have something against homeless people? Because some of them are homeless because of other

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reasons, not because they want to be on the streets, you know. It isn't nice to discriminate against them simply because they don't have a place to live. That's not very nice. I should be helping them, not trying to kill them."

"Do you think this formula will kill you?" Great was quick to pick up on that comment, ignoring everything else Herb said.

"Are you worried you won't get the chance to kill me first?" Herb closed his eyes and swallowed. "I just want to lie down for a moment. Please. Everything is swirling around me like I'm on that Teacup Ride at Disney World."

Terrible grunted. "I hate that ride."

"Wonderful. Did you stop at Disney on your way up here to ruin my life?"

"No. My grandmother took me there the last time I visited her."

Herb didn't have the strength to keep his head up. He let it drop on Terrible's shoulder and prayed they reached the hotel soon because he really needed the world to stop moving for a moment. His heart raced and he wondered if that was what a heart attack felt like.

"Now I have this image of a senior citizen assassin running around Florida hitting all the old people's resorts."

"My grandmother doesn't live in Florida. She lives on Long Island. She was Fardanov's neighbor."

If his head didn't hurt so much, Herb would have looked at Terrible. "Your grandmother is Mrs. Botsova?"

"Yah."

"It doesn't make sense. Why would she be giving Chuck all this information on you if she already knew who you were? Are you on opposite sides or something?" Herb would have curled into a fetal position if Terrible weren't carrying him in a rather gentle

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way.

“No. We are on the same side for the most part. None of us want the Chinese to get the formula. So we have been working with the FBI and CIA.” Great met Herb’s stunned gaze. “You see, the Chinese killed Fardanov. We tried to keep him safe, but he ran from us, which is why he ended up dead.”

Herb might have been one of the most intelligent men in the world, but all the espionage crap made his head hurt, and that said a lot, considering his head felt like it was going to explode.

\* \* \*

Chuck stalked toward the elderly lady, completely ignoring the agents who tried to stop him. As he loomed over Mrs. Botsova, he clenched his hands.

“I’ve had it with you popping in and out like you’re our fucking fairy godmother. You give us all this information, yet it’s nothing we can use to get a hold of those two Russians. Now they have Herb, and if they hurt one hair on his head, I swear to God, I will rip you apart, little old lady or not.”

She met his glare with a cool stare, not intimidated by him at all. Chuck didn’t give a flying fuck if she was scared of him or not. All he cared about was finding Herb before those men did anything to him.

“Davidson, we’re activating Herb’s pager. We should be able to follow the signal.” McKinley grabbed Chuck and dragged him away from Mrs. Botsova.

“We have a problem.”

Burke’s dark expression worried Chuck.

“What’s the problem?”



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“It would seem Dr. Pommerset left his pager in his lab.”

Jessie spoke up. “He keeps it in the pocket of the coat he wears to work. He never saw the point of wearing it while he was at work. I guess he figured you’d be able to find him in the building.”

“Just great.” Chuck shoved one of his hands through his hair and shook his head. “How do we find him? They’ve had him for over two hours now, and could’ve taken him anywhere. Plus he injected himself with the serum, and we have no idea how it’ll effect him.”

“I’ll put a call into my grandson.” Mrs. Botsova held out her hand and one of the federal agents set a phone in it.

“What does your grandson have to do with this? It’s really not the best time for family bonding,” Petrovic pointed out.

After tugging free of McKinley, Chuck paced. He could almost hear time ticking. Each passing second meant Herb and his kidnappers got farther away, making it impossible for Chuck rescue him.

His sister stepped in front of him, wrapped her arms around his waist and held on. He encircled her body and buried his face in her hair. He was grateful to Herb for getting his sister out of the situation, but it would have been better if they hadn’t been in the predicament to begin with.

“What will I do if they hurt him, Jessie? I can’t lose him, not when I just found him.” Chuck bit his lip to stop the sob from breaking free.

“Stop it, Chuck. You’re the best detective the city has. You have the resources of Burke Pharmaceuticals behind you. You’ll find Herb, and he’ll be fine.” Jessie stepped back and poked him in the chest. “You just have to believe Herb won’t do anything to get himself into any more trouble.”

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“He’s trusting you to come and get him, Davidson.” McKinley glanced up from where he stood, studying the security footage.

“That’s right.” Mrs. Botsova had finished her phone call and returned to the crowd. “Dr. Pommerset seems determined you’ll be coming for him, Detective Davidson. I suggest you don’t make him wait any longer than he has already.”

Anger welled up in him as he whirled on her. “Are you telling me you know where they took him? And if you do, why didn’t you say something when you first got here?”

“Because I wasn’t sure they had taken him. I wasn’t about to expose them until I was sure.” She folded her arms over her chest and met him, glare for glare.

“You fucking gave us their names and pictures, but you weren’t going to give us where they were taking Herb, until you made sure they did it.”

“Yes. I okay’d it with my superiors and theirs. Those boys didn’t kill Yuri. They were trying to keep him safe from the people who did.” She shook her head, disappointment evident in her face. “They didn’t do a very good job. Somehow, Yuri got away from them and he wound up dead.”

“Fine. Tell me where Herb is and then you’ll tell me everything about all of this shit. I’m tired of being yanked around by strings I didn’t even know existed. And again, I’m going to stress this, if there’s anything wrong with Herb, I’m going to take them and you apart. I don’t care about you being female or anything like that.”

Mrs. Botsova pursed her lips, but didn’t comment on his threat. “Follow us.”

Turning, she gestured for the agents to go with her. Chuck and Petrovic raced after them, with Jessie close behind. Chuck wasn’t going to force her to stay behind. When they got to wherever they

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were going, if it looked dangerous, he'd leave her in the car.

"Let the others know we've got a lead on Herb's location. We're going there now," Chuck ordered Petrovic as they jumped in the car and sped off after Mrs. Botsova and her escort.

Chuck heard Petrovic talking on the radio, but he kept his attention on the sedan in front of him. Obviously, they had walked into the middle of an international case, yet Chuck didn't care about any of that shit. He wanted Herb in his arms and he figured it would be several weeks before he let the scientist out of his sight after this.

It was almost another twenty minutes before they pulled up in front of a nondescript hotel. He'd barely turned the car off and he was out of it. Mrs. Botsova met him on the sidewalk. All the sweetness she'd shown when they first met under the cover of a nosy old neighbor lady had disappeared. She held a gun at her side, making Chuck pause to pull his out from its holster.

"I thought you said he was safe," he practically yelled at her.

"I said he'd be safe as long as he was with my grandson and his colleague, but never doubt there are other people searching for them as well."

Chuck closed his eyes and drew in a deep breath, trying to calm his pulse. He'd shoot his way through a platoon of bad guys to get to Herb, and if Mrs. Botsova's grandson happened to be in the way, tough shit. He didn't appreciate the way the woman had kept everything secret. Those lies and evasions ended up getting Herb involved in a way Chuck hated.

"Okay, here's what we're going to do." Mrs. Botsova gestured to the three agents. "You gentlemen head up the stairs to the fifth floor. Make sure no one is hanging out."

They nodded and marched off. Chuck's eyebrows shot up when

she looked at him.

“Are you going to tell me what to do?”

She shook her head. “I know better. You can come with me. Your partner should stay down here with your sister. I wouldn’t put it past the Chinese to come after her, if they can’t get to your boyfriend.”

“Oh, it’s the Chinese who are doing this? Are they the ones who killed Fardanov?”

Mrs. Botsova nodded. “Yes. My grandson and his partner took Yuri for his own good. We knew he’d been on the Chinese payroll for a year or so, but he wasn’t producing like they wanted. My grandson’s employers and mine were trying to insure he didn’t die.”

“Didn’t work out quite as good as you hoped, huh?” He grinned evilly at her.

“Maybe you should think twice about taunting me. I know where your boyfriend is and you don’t.”

“Ah, but I’ll take this hotel apart, room by room, and brick by brick, until I find him. Also, I’ll make so much noise and trouble for you that you’ll give Herb to me, just to shut me up.”

Mrs. Botsova studied him. “I must say Dr. Pommerset has frustrated those two. I think it has something to do with the fact he really hasn’t shut up since they took him. That boy can talk.”

Chuck grinned. “Herb babbles and it’s cute, but nerve-racking at times. Being caught in a room with him probably isn’t fun for them. Herb’s pissed and he’ll rip them to shreds just with his words.”

“He would, but I’m afraid Dr. Pommerset is ill. Has been for thirty minutes or so. My grandson believes it has to do with the serum he injected himself with.”

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Without thinking, Chuck reached out and grabbed the elderly woman by the shoulder and spun her around. He closed his eyes and gritted his teeth, waiting until he was calm enough to talk without shouting at her.

“You knew he was ill and you still wasted my time down here, chatting about shit I don’t even care about. You’ll take me up to his room right now. No worrying about the Chinese or any other spies that might decide to pop up. I’ll kill them if they try to keep me away from Herb any longer.” He shook her slightly. “Do you understand me?”

“Yes, Detective Davidson. You should be happy those agents aren’t around. They wouldn’t like how you’re handling me right now.”

Chuck snorted. “Listen, lady, I was taught respect for my elders, but you’re pissing me off. I don’t care about national security or any of that shit. All I care about is the man up in that hotel room. I will go through hell for him. Don’t get in my way, ma’am, or you’ll be a casualty.”

He pushed past her and went right to the elevator. He punched the up button and tapped his gun against his leg, impatiently waiting for the car to reach the ground floor. He only acknowledged Mrs. Botsova when they were in the elevator riding up to the fifth floor.

“What room are they in?”

She sniffed, but consented to answer, “Five-fourteen.”

“Right. When we get there, you’ll tell them everything’s okay and to open the damn door. If you don’t, and they don’t get the door open fast enough to make me happy, I’ll shoot out the lock and open the door my way.”

Huffing, she stalked down the hallway and pounded on the

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door. “Open up, Ivan. It’s me and your sick friend’s boyfriend.”

The door flung open and one of the Russians looked out. “Oh, thank God, Oma. He’s been sick since we got here. I don’t know how to make him better.”

“It doesn’t matter, jackass. As long as he doesn’t get shot by the Chinese, he’ll be fine.”

Chuck didn’t listen to any more of that conversation. He shoved his way into the room, spying the shorter Russian standing next to one of the beds. No Herb, and Chuck wasn’t happy about that.

“Herb? Where the fuck are you?”

A noise came from behind him and the Russian pointed in that direction. Turning, Chuck noticed another door propped open and he strolled toward it.

“You better not be hiding from me, Herb. After I hug the stuffing out of you, I’m going to turn you over my knee for doing this to yourself. I told you not to inject that shit into your body, but you had to do it, for science’s sake.” Chuck pushed the door further open. “Fuck science, Herb. I love you and you need to take my feelings into consideration.”

He looked and saw Herb kneeling next to the toilet, head hanging and arms wrapped around his stomach. Crouching, Chuck stroked his hand over Herb’s sweat-drenched curls.

“Herb?”

“Uh,” Herb mumbled and rolled his head to one side, peering up at Chuck with blurry eyes. “Chuck?”

“Yes, honey, I’m here. I’ll take you to the hospital. You need to see a doctor.”

Herb started to shake his head, but Chuck interrupted him.

“I love you, Herb, and you’re going to listen to me this time.”

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“I love you, too,” Herb professed before promptly puking all over Chuck’s shoes.

## CHAPTER 13

Herb winced as he opened his eyes and bright light burned into them. “Oh, whoa...did someone get the number of the bus that ran me over?”

“No bus, sweetheart. Just your own need for scientific immortality.”

He frowned and blinked the tears out of his eyes. “Immortality didn’t make me do it. We need to know all the possibilities this serum can have.”

“Hmm...not buying it, honey. But we’ll discuss it later when you’re better and can yell at me.”

A rough hand cradled his face and he stared up at Chuck. The expression on his lover’s face cut into Herb’s chest. Chuck’s dark eyes were haunted and exhausted. Herb tried to lift his hand, but he



didn't have the strength. Chuck entwined their fingers and brushed a kiss over Herb's knuckles.

"I'm sorry."

Chuck sighed. "Oh, I know, baby. You didn't know you were going to be sick. Also, you didn't know the Russians were going to kidnap you to keep you safe."

"Keep me safe? I thought they were the bad guys. How long have I been out? Where am I?" Herb struggled to sit up.

"Wait. Let me help you." Chuck wrapped his arm around Herb's shoulders and supported him while stuffing pillows behind Herb's back. "There. Do you want something to drink? I should probably call the doctor."

Before Herb could protest, Chuck hit the call button to bring a nurse. While they waited, he studied Chuck. "How long have I been here?"

"Just a day. You were so sick that they sedated you and started an IV drip to rehydrate you." Chuck settled in the chair next to the bed. "The doctors weren't sure what was wrong with you, aside from being nauseous enough to throw up everything you could."

"I threw up on your shoes." Herb blushed, wanting to cover his eyes in embarrassment. "I'm sorry. I'll buy you a new pair. God, I hope they weren't like your favorite shoes or anything. This is embarrassing, Chuck. I can't believe I did that. Wait. Did the experiment work?"

Laughing, Chuck stepped out of the way as the doctor and nurse arrived. Herb answered all their questions, and the doctor told him he would be staying in the hospital one more night, just to make sure the serum was out of his system.

After the doctor left, Herb was tired and slumped back against the pillows. His hands shook and all he really wanted to do was go

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to sleep. Chuck dropped down the railing and climbed into the bed with Herb. They snuggled and Herb rested his head on Chuck's chest.

"Tell me. Did the experiment work? Did I disappear from the cameras or do we have to tweak the formula some more to get it to work? I think there might have been too much of the base chemical. That probably was what my body rejected." He trailed his fingers over Chuck's shirt, fiddling with buttons and the fabric while he thought. "Maybe if I use a different base, I could get it right so no one gets sick."

"It won't be you," Chuck stated. "I'm not going through all that shit again because you have the urge to be the man who discovered invisibility."

"No one can discover invisibility. It's not a discoverable thing. Someone has to be the guinea pig, Chuck."

Chuck snorted. "Yeah, but it won't be you. I'm not arguing with you about this, Herb. Burke won't let you do this to yourself again. Neither will Jessie. I think you turned her hair grey with worry."

Herb closed his eyes, but didn't protest. No point in fighting with Chuck about it. Not while he was in the hospital. He had to argue from a position of strength and lying in the bed with an IV in his arm and his stomach aching from throwing up a lung wasn't it.

"How is Jessie? Is she okay? And the Russians? They seemed like nice enough guys, though they told me they didn't kill Yuri. That the Chinese did, but I'm not sure I believed them. I mean, anyone would lie to keep me from panicking, right? Terrible and Great were nice to me. They didn't really hurt me like most bad guys would, right?"

"Terrible and Great? Who are they?" Chuck sounded puzzled.

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“The Russians. I didn’t know their names, so I called them Ivan the Terrible and Peter the Great.”

Chuck’s body shook, and Herb glanced up to meet Chuck’s amused gaze.

“What’s so funny?”

“Their names really are Ivan and Peter. Ivan is Mrs. Botsova’s grandson and works for the Russian intelligence agency along with Peter. They were in the United States because they’d found out Fardanov was working with the Chinese. The Chinese wanted him to invent an invisibility formula, not just to make people undetectable from surveillance equipment, but really invisible like that fifties movie.”

Herb shook his head. “Why would they want that? It’s not very practical.”

“They wanted to be able to spy on people and steal things without being seen. So Peter and Ivan took Fardanov to keep him safe. Apparently, Fardanov got greedy and was blackmailing the Chinese for more money.”

“Even I know that’s not a good idea. What was he thinking? No evil country will let you get away with blackmailing them. It wasn’t like they’d get into trouble if he told someone about working for them. Heck, Yuri would have gotten himself in trouble for spying, working with a foreign country, and lose his job.”

Herb rubbed his cheek over Chuck’s chest. “I don’t understand why someone would chose to corrupt his integrity like that. Science is above country and any other loyalty. You do the experiment to further the world’s knowledge, not to give anyone an edge over anyone else. I’d never accept money from people I thought were interested in using it to help themselves, not for furthering the collective intelligence of the world.”

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Chuck smoothed his hand down Herb's bare back, and Herb realized he wore a hospital gown instead of real clothes.

"Where are my clothes? Why am I in this flimsy gown? Crap, can people see my butt?" He struggled to glance behind him and see if his backside hung out from the gown. "How could you let me hang out like that?"

"For one thing, you're wearing underwear, and no matter how awesome your ass is, no one except me is checking you out." Chuck pressed a kiss to the top of Herb's head. "Don't worry. I have clothes for you, but I had to wait until you woke up before I gave them to you. On a different topic, I'm glad you have certain morals, even if they are only toward science."

"Of course, I have morals, Chuck." He shook his head, surprised Chuck would doubt he had morals. "Terrible and Great took Yuri into custody to keep him safe. He escaped."

"And the Chinese killed him. For some reason, Mrs. Botsova knew this, but she made sure we focused on the wrong guys while the agency she works with looked for the men who really killed Fardanov." Chuck rolled his eyes. "Maybe she didn't think anything would happen to you, or maybe she thought the terrible twosome would be enough to keep you from being killed."

"You don't believe that," Herb accused. "You think she used me as bait to find the Chinese agents who killed Yuri. Did you yell at her?"

Chuck rolled him onto his back and gazed down into Herb's eyes. "I didn't really yell at her. I calmly told her I would do whatever I had to do to find you. Trust me, nothing was going to keep me from saving you. I can't imagine my life without you anymore, Herbert Pommerset. No matter where you are and no matter what kind of idiotic adventure you get yourself in, I'll

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always find you.”

Herb might babble, but at that moment, words deserted him. He slid the non-IV hand around the back of Chuck’s head and brought him closer so they could kiss. As Chuck’s tongue swept into Herb’s mouth, Herb hummed softly.

For the first time in his entire life, there was a person out in the world who loved him and only him. Chuck didn’t care that he babbled constantly about science and things Chuck didn’t understand. He let Herb talk because he knew it made Herb happy.

Breaking apart, they rested their foreheads together, and Herb whispered, “I love you, Chuck Davidson.”

Chuck settled back down and brought Herb close to him. As Herb allowed his exhaustion to overwhelm him, he heard Chuck say, “I love you, my little geek.”

\* \* \*

“Oh, Chuck! Please, don’t tease me anymore.”

Herb’s head whipped from side to side, but he couldn’t move. The silk scarves Chuck had used to tie Herb’s wrists to his headboard held as Herb tugged on them.

“Paybacks are hell, huh?”

Chuck settled back between Herb’s legs, licking and sucking. He’d been playing with Herb for the past thirty minutes and he figured his lover was ready to explode, but Chuck wanted to have a little more fun before he let Herb come.

“You’re mean. I’ve been sick, and you shouldn’t treat me like this. What if all the excitement makes me relapse? You’d feel so guilty for making me sick again.”

Chuck snorted softly. He wouldn’t have initiated their love

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making if Herb hadn't gotten the all-clear from the doctors. It'd been two weeks since Herb's experiment and it had taken a while for the serum to make its way out of Herb's body. Chuck had been good and kept his hands to himself, for the most part.

Herb and Jessie were still trying to figure out the right ratio of chemicals to put together to keep humans from getting sick from the serum. It did appear to work, though. The hotel security cameras showed Ivan and Peter arriving, and while Ivan looked like he carried something—or someone—nothing appeared on the screen. It was weird to watch, yet sort of thrilling to know that the serum worked. Which was great, but there wasn't any way it could be used. Not really easy to sneak up and steal secrets when the spy was doubled over, puking his guts out.

Slipping his hands under Herb's ass, Chuck lifted it so he licked down over the soft skin behind Herb's balls to where the man's puckered opening called to him.

"Holy Mother of God!" Herb shouted as Chuck swiped his tongue over his hole.

Chuck eased one hand up over Herb's hips, apply a little pressure to keep the man from jerking around. He didn't need to injure himself or Herb while doing this. The way Herb writhed and moaned as he rimmed him told Chuck he would have to use his tongue more often.

"Chuck, please, just fuck me already. I need you in me."

Herb begged and pleaded, but Chuck didn't let up. He wanted Herb to be incoherent before he fucked him. Chuck was experimenting to see if he could make Herb speechless with pleasure. He filled Herb's hole with his tongue, stroking around the ring of nerves, getting Herb to relax enough for Chuck to shove his cock inside soon.

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Chuck wrapped his free hand around Herb's cock and pumped in time with his tongue. Herb's pre-cum eased some of the friction, but Chuck didn't think Herb noticed. Glancing up from between Herb's legs, Chuck saw Herb had his eyes closed and was mouthing something. Even though his voice seemed to have deserted him, Herb couldn't stop his mouth from moving.

Herb nudged Chuck's side with his toes right before his cock erupted, spilling white ropes of cum all over Chuck's hand and Herb's stomach. Chuck didn't let up, continuing to milk every drop out of Herb. Only when Herb dropped back onto the mattress, limp all over, did Chuck ease back.

He wiped his hand on Herb's chest, earning an annoyed look from Herb. Chuck grinned while he rolled on the condom. He squirted lube in the palm of his hand and coated the latex with it. Just the touch of his own hand almost put him over the edge. Chuck bit his lip to keep from coming before he got inside Herb.

"Are you ready, honey?"

Herb grunted, and Chuck took that as consent. He positioned the head of his shaft at Herb's opening and pushed in, an inch at a time. As much as he wanted to slam in, he didn't want to hurt Herb, so Chuck gripped his control tightly. After he was buried balls deep, he froze, studying Herb's face for any sign of discomfort or pain.

Herb sighed and clenched his inner muscles. When Chuck still didn't move, Herb peered through half-closed eyes.

"What are you waiting for? You have to be in pain from all the time you took getting me off. I appreciate having all that attention focused on me, but I'm good now. You can come any time."

Those words hit Chuck and he started slamming in and out of Herb's ass, riding him hard and fast. No finesse or gentleness. Just

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pure need. Instead of tugging to free his wrists, Herb wrapped his hands around Chuck's headboard and moved in counter-point to Chuck's thrusts.

"Shit. Herb. I'm..."

Chuck lost the ability to form words as his climax hit him, shooting through him and blurring his vision as it felt like he poured his very soul into Herb. His arms trembled as he crashed forward, almost squashing Herb under him. When the last tremor left him, he rolled over to one side, making sure the condom didn't slide off.

"Wow." Herb blinked at him, and he nodded.

"Couldn't have said it any better myself."

He heaved his body off the bed and stumbled into the bathroom where he disposed of the rubber and washed up. After wetting a washcloth, he headed back into the bedroom. His cell phone rang just as he finished untying his lover. Herb took the cloth and waved to the phone. It wasn't a familiar ring tone, but he assumed Jessie had been playing with it.

"Davidson."

"Hey, brother, how's it going?"

Chuck sat on the edge of the bed. John wasn't supposed to be in-country yet. Had something gone wrong? "Are you okay, John?"

A heavy exhalation told Chuck something was bothering John, but whether he could talk about it or not, Chuck didn't know.

"Yeah. For the most part. I'll be back stateside in two weeks. I'll let you know when I'm on my way up."

"Cool. My boyfriend's moving in, but the guest bedroom is still yours."

"Really? Things are that serious?" John sounded happy.



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“Really? I am?” Herb sounded surprised.

“Yeah.” He nodded at Herb. “We’ll talk about what’s bothering you when you get here.”

“It’s about my future, Chuck. That’s all I can say right now.”

“I understand.” And he really did.

He didn’t know what had happened to make John question his future in the military, considering when John joined, he’d planned on being a lifer.

“This last tour’s been hard, and I’ve been thinking about some things.” John hesitated before continuing, “And someone.”

Ah, the plot thickened. Herb snuggled close to Chuck, and Chuck rested his hand on his lover’s hip.

“Why don’t you wait until you get home before you go any further? I don’t want you to get into trouble.”

“Good idea. I have to go anyway. Take care, Chuck, and I’ll call you in a week or two.”

“You, too, John.”

He hung up and set his phone on the stand next to his bed. Herb ran his hand over Chuck’s back. “Your youngest brother?”

Chuck nodded. “Yeah. Something’s up with him, and I hate not being able to help him out right now.”

Herb kissed his shoulder. “You’ll be able to try and fix the problem when he gets home. Now what’s this about me moving in with you?”

After climbing back in bed, he gathered Herb into his arms. “I love you, Herb, but you have this nasty habit of getting into trouble. I want you living with me, so I can keep an eye on you. Besides, I hate spending time apart. I want to be able to wake up with you in the morning and go to sleep with you at night. I don’t like having to live between two places.”

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Herb blinked up at him. "Okay."

"Okay? That's all you have to say is okay? No analyzing the situation? Discussing all the pros and cons?" Surprised, he stared at Herb, not used to the man not talking something to death.

"You're right. Besides wanting to spend as much time as possible with you, it's more practical for us to share a house. Will I be able to move in this weekend? My landlord would probably be willing to let me out of my lease early. I don't have much stuff to bring with me. Just books and things like that."

Having seen Herb's bookshelves, Chuck knew it would be an all-day job moving those, but he'd call in re-enforcements. His family was thrilled he finally had a boyfriend; they'd be more than willing to help them out.

"Don't worry, honey. I think we can move everything you want without a problem."

They settled together under the covers, and Chuck smoothed his hand up and down Herb's back. Who would have guessed a cell phone and Chuck's basic dislike for technology would bring a wonderfully sexy geek into his life? If pressed, Chuck would admit sometimes technology had its place in the world.

## CHAPTER 14

Chuck glared at his reflection. How the hell had he let Herb talk him into doing this? He yanked on the tie and frowned. *Oh, right.* Herb gave him an incredible blowjob and struck when Chuck was at his weakest.

“Are you ready?” John strolled in the bedroom, grinning at Chuck’s disgruntled expression. “Your boyfriend’s wearing a rut in the living room floor. It’s like you’re going to prom or something.”

“Worse. A class reunion. I can’t believe I let him talk me into this,” Chuck muttered as he grabbed his wallet, keys, and phone off the dresser.

“Seriously? A class reunion? Herb wants to show off his successful, sexy boyfriend?”

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“There’s something wrong with my baby brother calling me sexy. You’re right, though. I guess Herb wants to show all those bullies he found a guy and became successful. Like that was ever in question.” He shrugged.

“You’d do anything for him, so I’m not completely shocked he got you to agree to go with him.” John slapped him on the shoulder. “You know the entire family is thrilled to see you in love.”

Chuck grunted and met John’s amused gaze. “What about you? Are you in love?”

John sat on the edge of the bed and stared down at the floor. “Yeah. I think I am.”

“A fellow soldier?”

“No. He works at a diner just off-base in Georgia. We’re not dating or anything. I just eat at the diner all the time and we chat when I’m not deployed. Maybe flirt a little, but I don’t want him to get in trouble with the jerks around the town he lives in. This last deployment, I couldn’t get him out of my mind, which is why I told you I’d been thinking about my future.” John braced his elbows on his knees.

Chuck sat next to John and rested his hand on his brother’s shoulder. “I’m glad you found someone to care about.”

John’s harsh laugh echoed through the room. “I don’t know if he’d even go out with me. How can I be in love with someone without having spent any real time with him? I can’t be out, Chuck, not in my unit.”

As much as Chuck wanted to protest, he understood what John talked about.

“I know all the surveys and media hype says most soldiers don’t care if the person fighting next to them is gay or not, but in

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my unit, I think most of them will care. I don't want that, but I won't hide him, not if he ends up being the one."

They heard Herb clattering down the hall. Chuck bumped his brother's shoulder.

"We'll talk about this tomorrow, okay? Make sure you're thinking with the right head, even if you haven't slept with this guy yet." Chuck pushed to his feet. "You're not foolish or impulsive, John. Before you decide, maybe you should go and talk to this guy. See if he's even close to feeling the same as you. Might not be worth ruining your career over."

"Aren't you ready yet? Gosh, you're worse than any girl I know. I would've thought you'd be dressed and we could leave by now." Herb huffed and pouted.

John stood and walked past Herb, patting his butt as he went by. "Don't worry. You can make the grand entrance on Chuck's arm and everyone will still be awed by your brilliance."

Herb stuck his tongue out at John before Chuck swept the slender man into his arms.

"Stop bickering, you two. Sometimes I think you're the two brothers. Let's go. I was talking to John about stuff." Chuck kept his arm around Herb's waist as they wandered out of the house. "Remember, you can't say a word about the serum or anything relating to what happened to you."

"I doubt anyone would believe me anyway. When do we have to go talk to the secret covert agency Mrs. Botsova works for?" Herb snuggled close until they got to the car.

Chuck waited until they were on the road before he answered. "Tomorrow afternoon. We'll meet up with them and the NSA agents at the lab. They'll take all your research and extra formula. You'll tell them everything you know and we can wash our hands

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of the situation, though you're going to have a protective detail for a while. Until they're sure the Chinese will leave you alone."

Herb wrinkled his nose in disgust. "That's going to totally suck. How are we going to have sex at lunch or anything like that if I'm being followed by agents? I can see our love life taking a hit from this."

"Honey, when you're with me, the agents aren't going to be around. God knows, most of them don't want to watch or listen to us have sex." He reached out and entwined their fingers. "Trust me. Our sex life will be just fine."

Herb bounced. "Oh, good. I'd hate to go without you naked at any point in the day. So, I can't wait to introduce you to the people who made fun of me in school."

"You do know they don't matter? What they thought back in high school and what they think now doesn't matter. All that's important is how you feel about yourself and that I love you. Everything else is window dressing." Chuck stopped at a light and glanced over at Herb. "I do love you, and I always will. Nothing they say or do will make me change my mind."

"It probably seems silly that I want to do this. I want to rub their noses in my success a little." Herb ducked his head. "We can just forget about going if you want."

"No. This class reunion is important to you, so we'll go. We'll show them what a stud you caught, and how you've become so much more than a geek."

Herb laughed. "I don't know about being more than a geek, but I certainly can say you're quite the stud."

Chuck joined in the laughter and they continued to chat and tease as they headed to the event. Chuck hoped the night turned out to be everything Herb wanted it to be. It was the first of many such

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nights they would spend together as they melded their lives and futures. The strength of their love was the foundation on which they'd build.

## T. A. CHASE

T. A. Chase lives a life without boundaries. Being fascinated by life and how different we all are, she writes about the things that make us unique. She finds beauty in all kinds of love and enjoys sharing those insights. She lives in the Midwest with his partner of fourteen years. When she isn't writing, she's watching movies, reading and living life to the fullest.

\* \* \*

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