



Catered to

You

FREESIA WOODLEY

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A Beau Ties Novel

Freesia Woodley

About This Book

Blurb:

Falling in love with his best friend was never part of the plan.

On a bachelorette trip to Vegas, Yuuki Nakatani learns that his longtime boyfriend is getting married—but not to him. Angry and hurt, Yuuki turns to his best friend Raegan for comfort.

Raegan's fake wedding revenge plot sounds perfect until it stirs up feelings Yuuki hadn't felt before.

It was a simple plan. Take some pictures, send them to Yuuki's bastard ex, and call it a day.

What Raegan Dietrich did not expect was that during the pretend ceremony he would realize he was in love with his best friend. When their photos accidentally end up online, they are challenged to live out their farce.

Pretending to live as a married couple brings their feelings to the forefront and makes a mess of their carefully laid plans. The best marriages are based on a strong foundation of friendship. But is their friendship strong enough to survive love?

A friends to lovers kinky romance with wax play, shibari, and of course, a HEA.

Content Warnings:

Abusive behavior from family and former romantic partner.

Stalking. Attempted murder.

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This book contains sexually explicit material which is only suitable for mature audiences.

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For my husband and children always.

For Rebekah who championed this couple from Yuuki's first
appearance in Marry Me, Daddy.

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Chapter 1

Yuuki

Macarons. It had to be fucking macarons. Yuuki Nakatani piped out perfect, silver dollar-sized circles onto a baking sheet with a bitter glare. He'd put off making the accursed little cookies as long as he could, but now it was two days before the Carmichael-Kim wedding and the damn things had to be made. The lilac-colored cookies were going to ring each layer of the three-tier cake while being interspersed with pink icing roses. Together, the cookies and roses would look amazing with the cascading lilac and pink airbrushing he'd already completed.

Not to toot his own horn but every cake Yuuki made was exceptional. He prided himself on delivering unique cake art for every project he was assigned. Which was no easy feat considering the constraints that the less adventurous clients asked for. His boss, Arturo, the owner of Sugar and Spice Bakery, didn't give two shits about the art of cake decorating. He didn't care about the time and effort it took to make these astounding pastries that had customers beating their door down. No, Arturo only cared about the money he made, and the way he treated his employees reflected that.

Case in point. Poor Dallas, Yuuki's co-worker and friend, was having to redo an entire cake all because the customer claimed it was the wrong color green. Yuuki couldn't make out the difference between the color of the cake and what the woman had shown them on her cell phone. Regardless, Arturo had stated the customer was always right, and now Dallas was stuck here working on a cake when he was supposed to have left twenty minutes ago.

Yuuki was pissed at Arturo on Dallas's behalf. Tonight was the rehearsal dinner for Dallas's best friend, Clarissa's wedding and now he was late. Yuuki would've offered to do the cake for Dallas, but he was behind on his orders. Arturo needed to hire a third decorator, or he was soon going to find himself with none.

Yuuki finished piping out the macarons and set aside his piping bag. He picked up the cookie tray and dropped it on the table several times to force out any air bubbles. With that done, he took the tray and put it with the ones he had already completed on a cooling rack.

"You finally finished the macarons?" Dallas teased, never taking his eyes off his work.

"At least the piping portion. I still have to bake them and fill them." Yuuki feigned collapsing, which got a laugh from Dallas.

"The cake is going to look amazing. Clarissa is going to flip when she sees it," Dallas commented as he completed the shell border on the cake he was working on. "There. That's done. If

that witch isn't happy now, then I'm smashing this into her snooty-ass face."

Yuuki chuckled at Dallas's threat. "I would pay good money to see that. Could you imagine the look on her and Arturo's faces? You'd give him a heart attack." Yuuki gathered up the items he would need to do the last dozen icing roses.

"Don't give me any ideas. That man seriously makes me homicidal." Dallas walked the cake he had finished to the walk-in fridge to chill until the customer came back for it. He returned a moment later, carrying two boxes that Yuuki knew contained his delectable cupcakes just as Yuuki started on his first frosted rose.

"So have you found a new place yet?" Yuuki asked as Dallas cleaned up his station.

Dallas's landlord had informed him almost three weeks ago that he had to be out of the house within the month because he had sold the property to a developer. Dallas had been doing his best to find a new place, but it was proving to be difficult since the rent in Raleigh had skyrocketed as the area grew. Yuuki was thankful his rent hadn't gone up since he had been living there for what felt like forever.

"Not yet. I need to find something soon or I'm going to be living in my car." Dallas sighed as his lips curled down into a dejected frown.

You need a Daddy, sweetie, Yuuki thought as his heart went out to Dallas. Dallas put up a good front, but Yuuki could see through to the wounded soul who needed love and guidance.

Dallas needed someone to take care of him. In short, he needed a Daddy, but Yuuki had to keep those thoughts to himself since he didn't know if Dallas was into any kind of kink. All he could do was be there for his friend.

“You can always come to stay with Rae and me. You could have my bed and I'll just share his.” Yuuki finished the first flower and put it on a parchment paper-lined cookie tray.

“I appreciate that, Yuu, and that you guys will help me move wherever I end up. I'm kind of jealous you have such an awesome boyfriend.” Dallas smirked as he finished cleaning his station.

“He's not my boyfriend, Dallas. You know this. We're just really close best friends.” Yuuki rolled his hazelnut brown eyes, feeling annoyed.

He never understood why everyone made these comments about him and his best friend and roommate, Raegan. Couldn't two queer men share a friendship without everyone assuming they were romantically involved?

“Well, the way y'all act together could fool me, but if you say so.” Dallas gathered his belongings to prepare for his departure. “So, you guys all ready to go to Sin City in a few weeks?”

“Pretty much. May and her fiancée took care of the flights and hotel, so there isn't much for Rae and me to do other than to show up.” Yuuki finished another rose, satisfied with his progress.

“I still can’t believe your college friend is marrying *the* Blanche Bordeaux, The Baroness of Baking. I watch her show on the Food Network,” Dallas gushed as he finished gathering his items.

“I do, too. Imagine my surprise when I saw May on the show, and then she’s calling me to invite Rae and me to the bachelorette getaway.” Yuuki shook his head with a chuckle.

From the moment Yuuki had met May Smith on his first day of culinary school, he had known she was going to do something astounding with her life. Her personality was so big and vibrant that he would’ve been a special type of heartless bastard to not take an instant liking to her. She was the most talented and luckiest person Yuuki had ever met. Any contest she entered, she dominated and always won. She, Yuuki, and Raegan had been joined at the hip through school, and when they had needed to choose an apprenticeship, they had all gotten accepted to work at Walt Disney World.

After finishing school, May had gone off to California having accepted a job working for the Food Network, while Yuuki had gone with Raegan to Raleigh. They had kept in touch, but May had never shared she was Blanche’s sous chef, let alone they were dating. He could understand why she hadn’t shared the dating part. Dating a celebrity wasn’t a simple thing to do. Even more so when it was a same-sex relationship. The media storm that had ensued after Blanche had announced their engagement was proof of that. All that hoopla aside, Yuuki was so proud and happy for his dear friend.

“I’m crazy jealous that you’re going to be at a celebrity bachelorette party. You have to take a million pictures if they allow it. If not, commit everything to memory so, when you get back, I can live vicariously through you.” Dallas’s eyes became dreamy, making Yuuki chuckle.

“I’ll see what I can do. Now, you had better get out the door because you’re well past the point of being fashionably late.” Yuuki gestured toward the door with his piping bag.

“Shit, you’re right. Bye, Yuu. I’ll see you Monday.” Dallas bolted for the door.

Yuuki shook his head with a fond grin and went back to piping his roses. He was nearly done, and then he would have to get the macarons in the oven to bake. He hummed to himself as he continued to work until the door to Arturo’s office opened. The older man looked unhappy.

Greeeeeat. What now? Yuuki rolled his eyes and continued to add details to the cake.

“Where the hell is Dallas?” Arturo lumbered across the kitchen to where Yuuki was working.

At one time, Arturo must have been a decent-looking man. With his dark tan skin, rich brown eyes, and jet-black hair, he had that classic Hollywood Latin lover look about him. To Arturo’s detriment those looks had faded and his hair was almost non-existent. Add the fact that he was overweight with jowls a Saint Bernard would be jealous of and you had the beast that was staring Yuuki down like he was something on the bottom of a shoe. For the millionth time that day, Yuuki

wondered why he stuck around this place with a boss like Arturo.

“He went to his friend’s rehearsal dinner. It’s been on the calendar for well over a month.” Yuuki didn’t take his eyes off his work. It annoyed him Arturo couldn’t bother to keep up with his own business schedule.

“I don’t remember authorizing that. Did he at least finish that cake he screwed up before he left?” Arturo came to a stop right next to Yuuki’s workstation and the powerful smell of Arturo’s hyper-masculine cologne made Yuuki want to gag. The man wore way too much of the musky fragrance, and Yuuki always found it hard to breathe around him.

“Well, you did, and like I said, it has been on the calendar for over a month now.” Yuuki gestured to the huge whiteboard on the wall that had the bakery’s schedule on it with his piping bag. “And yes, he finished the overly picky woman’s cake that he should not have had to redo in the first place.”

Yuuki knew he shouldn’t be baiting his boss, but he wasn’t going to keep quiet on this subject. Arturo was a pretentious ass who acted like Dallas and Yuuki should be grateful to attend to his every whim. Yeah, Yuuki wasn’t down with that in the slightest.

“I don’t care for your tone, Yuuki. You need to show me more respect. I could fire and replace you with ease.” Arturo glared at Yuuki with his arms crossed over his chest.

At five four and lean like a swimmer, Yuuki was tiny compared to Arturo. Most people would expect him to cower

in the face of the larger man, but Yuuki wasn't threatened in the least. He wasn't going to be pushed around by Arturo's bullying ways. He and Dallas were a talented pair that made an amazing team. Arturo couldn't find someone with his skills and synergy with Dallas if he tried. That might make Yuuki seem cocky but he saw it as confidence.

“If you say so. How goes the hunt for a baking assistant?” Yuuki changed the subject, letting Arturo know his threats didn't bother Yuuki at all.

Arturo stood there, continuing to stare at Yuuki and doing his best to exude authority. Ignoring his boss, Yuuki continued with his work. He had so much left to do before he could leave, and he just didn't have time to listen to Arturo throw his weight around. Arturo must have realized that Yuuki wasn't going to kowtow to him, and an annoyed growl rumbled in his chest.

“I've reached out to several culinary schools and culinary programs, letting them know we would like to accept interns. I haven't had any takers yet.” Arturo sounded perplexed to why they didn't have applicants beating down their door.

If you offered to pay them, we would probably have our pick of interns, Yuuki thought with a mental eye roll at his cheapskate boss.

“Well, I'm sure someone truly desperate will apply soon.” Yuuki completed his last rose and set it with the others. “If you'll excuse me. I need to get these in the cooler and start baking my macarons.”

Without waiting for a reply, Yuuki picked up the tray of confections and walked toward the walk-in refrigerator. He heard Arturo mutter something about his sass mouth, as well as what he assumed was a slur, but it was so garbled by his jowls that Yuuki couldn't make it out. Yuuki brushed it off. He had been called a lot of horrible things throughout his life and had learned to let those hurtful words roll off his back.

Yuuki had dreamed of having his own bakery once upon a time. Sadly, that dream had gone by the wayside. If that dream had come true, though, Yuuki would never have done things the way Arturo did. His bakery would be a place where dreams were inspired and encouraged. Hard work would be rewarded, and every member of the staff would feel valued.

“Oh.” Yuuki sighed. “If only. If only.”

Chapter 2

Yuuki

Yuuki entered the refrigerator and slid his tray onto a rack. He moved to exit the fridge when he felt his phone vibrating in his pocket. He reached for it and checked the screen, his stomach dropping when he saw it was Kenichiro, his long-distance boyfriend. Ken was supposed to be coming from Los Angeles to Raleigh for business the following Friday. If he was calling now, that meant that the plans had changed. Again. Yuuki sighed and answered the call.

“Hello, Ken,” Yuuki greeted, shifting into speaking Japanese.

“Hello, Yuuki-tan. How are you today? Well, I hope,” Ken replied in a sickeningly sweet tone.

“Can we make this quick, Ken? I’m at work.” Yuuki was already feeling weary of the conversation they were about to have.

Yuuki had long since learned that when Ken laid it on thick, as he was doing now, their conversation wasn’t going to end well. He was also upset about being called Yuuki-tan. It was very condescending and hurtful, given that “Tan” was a suffix

normally reserved for children in Japanese. They may have had a ten-year age gap, but that didn't mean Yuuki was a kid. He had asked Ken to not use it several times, and yet he continued to do so with the excuse that he forgot Yuuki had asked him to stop. Yuuki found it disrespectful that Ken couldn't prioritize Yuuki's preference just as he didn't seem to prioritize Yuuki himself.

“Oh, my sweet Yuuki-tan is cranky today.” Ken chuckled in amusement, and that got Yuuki's hackles up.

“Ken,” Yuuki growled, his impatience wearing thin.

“Yes, yes. So impatient.” Ken's flippant tone showed that he didn't care that he was wasting Yuuki's time. “Sadly, I am calling to let you know I won't be coming to Raleigh next week. Some things came up at work and I can't leave right now. I'm sorry, Yuuki-tan. I'll make it up to you next time.”

Ken's words sounded hollow in Yuuki's ears because he had heard them so many times. Next time. It was always next time. As if Yuuki sat at home like some feudal era courtesan, waiting with bated breath for the conquering warlord to return.

“You say that every time, Ken. When is the next time going to be now? A month from now? Three? Maybe a year?” Yuuki demanded, his anger rising.

“Yuuki-tan, you know my job is very important, and I can't just pick up and leave whenever you need attention. If you would just move back to LA, then we could see each other every day. I could get a lovely apartment for us to live in, and you could stay at home instead of working in some dingy

bakery.” Ken’s words were full of undisguised disdain when he spoke of Yuuki’s chosen vocation.

“We’ve talked about this, Ken. I don’t want to be a kept man. I like my job, and I am pretty fucking amazing at it. As to moving, why should I be the one to move? You could easily get a transfer to the office here. Hell, you could probably get a promotion along with it,” Yuuki countered, geared up and ready to have this fight yet again.

It was an old fight they had been having ever since they met three years ago at a social event Yuuki’s father had held at his home in LA while Yuuki had been there visiting.

“You know that’s impossible. I have to be here for my family as I’m the eldest son. I’m sure your father would love to have you living here where they could see you more often.” Ken’s voice took on that tone people got when they explained things to a small child, which grated on Yuuki’s nerves.

“You know that’s a damn lie. My father barely tolerates me, and the only reason I even have anything to do with him is because of my mother.” Yuuki felt his temper flare at Ken for bringing his family into this.

There was no love lost between Yuuki and his father, Yuusei. The man was an arrogant, narrow-minded bastard, who neglected his wife and son. He spent all his time at work and schmoozing clients. He only ever acknowledged that he had a family when it was convenient for him. Memories of how his father paraded him around, pretending to be a doting

father in front of his clients, only to turn around and berate him at home, made Yuuki's stomach twist.

While his treatment of Yuuki was terrible, his behavior toward Yuuki's mother, Nomi, was downright monstrous. Yuuki remembered how his mother tried to shield him from his father's mistreatment of her, but there were many nights his father had awoken him shouting many vulgarities at his mother. Those nights, she would come to Yuuki's room and sleep on the floor. So yeah, Yuuki wasn't inclined to move back to LA to be anywhere near his father.

"Oh, Yuuki-tan, you're so overly dramatic." Ken sighed in aggravation, as if Yuuki were a petulant child throwing a tantrum.

Yuuki'd had his fill of arguing with Ken, and he didn't have time to be wasting. His orders would not complete themselves.

"Ken, can we pick this up later? I have to get back to work." Yuuki felt emotionally exhausted and wanted the call to end.

"I suppose so," Ken said with a put-upon air to his words. "I will talk to you soon, Yuuki-tan. I love you."

"Love you," Yuuki responded out of habit, and the call ended.

Yuuki leaned back against the baking rack and hung his head. Why was it that every time he spoke to Ken recently, he felt like shit afterward? They were lovers. Yuuki should feel elated and cherished after they spoke. He should feel loved, but instead, he felt like an inconvenience. Like something that

Ken only kept around for when he needed him. Maybe they had been apart too long? Maybe Yuuki should see about going to LA for a little while to try working things out?

Or maybe you should just break up? He had been hearing that voice a lot, and he was thinking it was right. Things with Ken had never been perfect because of the distance, but they had been getting significantly worse as of late. Yuuki gave himself a shake and moved away from the baking rack. Now wasn't the time to be contemplating the status of his relationship. He had work to do.

Yuki hadn't taken one step when his phone pinged with a message, pulling a frustrated growl from him. He should ignore it. Whatever it was he was certain it could wait, and he needed to get back to work. Instead, he did the exact opposite and checked his screen. A smile curled the corners of his lips when he saw the message was from Raegan.

Rae-kun: Hey, Sugar. I hope your day is going well. I know you're at work so answer whenever, but what would you like for dinner? Enchiladas okay? We have this beef we need to use before it goes bad. Love you.

Yuuki chuckled at the way Raegan rambled in texts and how, even at home, he couldn't turn off being a chef. Raegan lived for food and cooking. Which was why he was the head chef for the catering part of the restaurant he worked at. Yuuki felt his mood lighten as he typed out a quick reply.

Me: Enchiladas are fine. I'll snag some marble brownies on my way out. See you soon. Love you, too.

Raegan replied with a dozen drooling emojis, which made Yuuki snicker. Raegan was the living embodiment of the phrase “*the way to a man’s heart is through his stomach*”.

“All right, back to work.” Yuuki pocketed his phone, feeling lighter. He reached up and adjusted the rainbow bandana he wore over his jet-black hair and went back into the prep kitchen with a little skip in his step. Raegan always had that effect on him, and Yuuki was glad to have such an amazing best friend.

Chapter 3

Raegan

Raegan Dietrich was ready to rip someone's head off. When he had arrived at La Villa, the restaurant and caterer he worked for, he had been excited for the day ahead. The Carmichael-Kim wedding was the next day, and he had a ton of work to do to pull off the Korean/Southern barbeque dishes he had come up with for the happy couple. He loved events where he got to flex his creative culinary muscles instead of doing the same old things the restaurant had on its normal catering menu. He was also proud that, yesterday, he had finished his prep tray for the dishes he was working on that day.

So when he had gone to pull his tray and found that someone had made off with his flank steaks and wonton wrappers, it sent him into a rage. As he stomped through the kitchen, Raegan had a pretty good idea of who had swiped his ingredients, but he needed to be sure. He stormed up to Chris, one of the other chefs who worked at La Villa, who had just walked in and pinned him with a fiery glare.

“Do you know what happened to my flank steaks and wonton wrappers?” Raegan’s tone was curt as he crossed his arms over his broad chest and waited.

“Well, hello to you, too. How are you doing today, Rae?” Chris rolled his eyes as he walked past Raegan toward the walk-in refrigerator. Chris wasn’t in the least bit intimidated by Raegan, even though Raegan was a lot bulkier than he was and was used to his gruff attitude in the kitchen. Raegan liked Chris wasn’t easily flustered. It was part of what made him such an excellent chef.

“Hi, Chris. I’d be doing better if someone could tell me where my damn ingredients have gotten off to. I need to get started now if I want this food ready for its event.” Raegan fell in step behind Chris, seething with anger.

“How in the hell am I supposed to know, Raegan? It’s not my job to keep track of your prep,” Chris bit out. They reached the fridge, and Chris opened the door. His aggravation with Raegan’s badgering was clear as he stomped into the cool space.

“You were working last night. Did you see anyone during service last night with some flank steaks or wonton wrappers?” Raegan’s stormy gray eyes glared a hole into the back of Chris’s head as they both entered the fridge.

“I’m not getting caught up in this feud you’ve got going on with Fettuccine.” Chris pulled ingredients off the shelves that he would need for the dishes he was in charge of.

Raegan should have known. Alfredo Dimaggio, otherwise known as Fettuccine, had been a thorn in Raegan's side from the moment he was hired. Alfredo had started at La Villa shortly before Ted, the owner and the head chef, had started the catering side of the restaurant. Both Alfredo and Raegan had been line chefs at the restaurant and had applied to be the head chef of the catering side. Raegan had gotten the position, and ever since then, Alfredo had done everything he could to sabotage him.

Unfortunately for Raegan, Alfredo wasn't a complete idiot. He didn't do anything that would jeopardize the restaurant and get his ass fired if he got caught. No, Fettuccine liked to pull "pranks", as he called them, and this was just the most recent one in a long string.

"It's only a feud if I retaliate. Which I never do. Could you at least point me in the right direction of where he moved my ingredients?" Raegan pinched the bridge of his nose in frustration.

Chris heaved a heavy sigh and pointed to the back right corner of the fridge.

"Thanks." Raegan scanned every shelf until he found his steaks still in their marinating containers with the wontons set on top of them on the bottom shelf shoved all the way in the back. He retrieved his items and followed Chris out of the refrigerator.

Raegan was seething that Alfredo would hide his food like a damn five-year-old. He had to be stopped, but Raegan knew

that wasn't likely to happen. After Alfredo had lost what he thought was his promotion, he had taken to sucking up to Ted as if his life depended on it. Ted, being the egomaniac he was, ate up all the ass-kissing like candy. Now, every time Raegan made a complaint, Ted would just tell him to stop bitching and get back to work.

You should just quit this place and go open your own business, a little voice in Raegan's head said as he walked to his station and started setting it up. That voice had been getting louder with every stupid prank that Alfredo had pulled. It had always been Raegan's dream to open his own catering business that specialized in fusion cuisine. Raleigh had a pretty diverse population thanks to all the big tech home offices in the area, and Raegan loved giving traditional ethnic foods a little Southern twist. Just like he was doing for the wedding tomorrow. That was, if he got back on track after having wasted so much time looking for his ingredients.

As he continued his set up, Raegan glanced over at Chris's station, where he was also prepping, and a pang of guilt shot through his chest. Chris didn't deserve any of the attitude Raegan had given him. He should apologize.

"Hey, Chris." The other man looked up at him with a frown. "Sorry for being an ass."

"It's all good, man. Fettuccine needs to stop behaving like a child, but next time, if you're a dick, you'll get no help from me," Chris replied in a lighter tone, letting Raegan know they were good.

“Cool, man.” Raegan finished his setup and grabbed several cloves of garlic to mince. “You haven’t seen Betha, have you?”

“I saw her car. Maybe she’s with Ted? She told me he’s supposed to sign off on some paperwork for her internship.”

Raegan set the garlic down on his cutting board and started for Ted’s office. He prayed Betha wasn’t alone with Ted again. From the day the poor girl had started, Ted had been sexually harassing her, and when she rebuffed his advances, he turned to straight-up tormenting her. He gave her all the shit jobs that nobody wanted or set her up for a task that was beyond her skill set. Betha was supposed to be helping with pastries and desserts. Most days, though, she was *a glorified carrot peeler*. Her words, not his. Raegan had a soft spot for the little blonde, as she reminded him of his younger sister. So, if she was in any trouble, he was going to come to her rescue.

Raegan stepped into the hall, and just as he was walking past the ladies’ room, he heard what sounded like someone crying. He stopped and pushed the door open slightly. When he did the sound got louder, and Raegan couldn’t suppress the growl that reverberated in his throat. He pushed the door open and strode right into the room, beelining for the stall on the end, where the sound was the loudest.

“Betha? You in there, darlin?” Raegan asked, stopping in front of the stall door.

The sobbing stopped, and the stall door opened a crack, revealing a puffy-eyed Betha.

I'm going to kill Ted, Raegan thought as he put on a kind smile to mask his inner rage.

“Hey, darlin. You wanna come on out here and tell me what happened?” Raegan took a step back to allow Betha to open the door.

“Okay.” Betha sniffled as she pushed the door open and stepped out of the stall.

Poor thing looks like someone just killed her dog. Raegan stepped closer, doing his best to be as non-threatening as possible. Betha was feeling vulnerable at the moment, so he needed to tread lightly so that he didn't make things worse.

“Come on. Wash your face, and then we'll slip out back to talk.” Raegan placed his large hand on her small shoulder and guided her over to the sink.

Raegan stood sentry a respectful distance behind Betha until she finished washing her face. He snagged a couple of paper towels from the dispenser and handed them to her.

“Thanks.” She gave him a crooked, yet grateful smile as she accepted them.

“You're welcome,” he said as she finished drying her face. “You ready to go?”

Betha gave him a silent nod and turned toward the bathroom door. They left the ladies' room without a word and went to the emergency exit. Raegan pushed the door open and ushered Betha out. He propped the door open with a loose brick and stepped outside. Betha leaned against the building wall, still

looking quite forlorn. Raegan joined her, and they stood there in silence for several long minutes. Raegan had work he needed to get to, but it would have to wait. He needed to make sure that Betha was okay before he could focus on anything else.

“He says he’s going to fire me,” Betha finally said after another minute had passed.

Startled by her words, Raegan came away from the wall to better see Betha’s face and offer support.

“He said what now?” Raegan asked, wishing that he had misheard her.

Ted was going to fire Betha? Could he do that? She needed this internship in order to graduate from culinary school. If Ted were to fire her, it would mess everything up for Betha. Ted had to know that. So why was he saying such a thing?

“He said if I don’t go on a date with him, he’s going to fire me. He said he would call the school and tell them what a terrible chef I was and make sure I never graduated.” Betha’s words became garbled at the end as she tried to swallow down a fresh sob.

“Son of a bitch,” Raegan growled as he balled his hands into fists at his side.

Murder was too good for Ted. No, he should take the bastard down to his parent’s hog farm, torture him a bit, and then feed him to the pigs. It was still better than he deserved.

The bastard was going to ruin a girl's future all for what? A fucking date? That was low, even for Ted.

“What am I going to do, Raegan? I have to graduate. I'm the first person in my family who has actually gone to college. My parents could barely scrape together my tuition. I can't get kicked out. They'll be so disappointed.” Betha whimpered as she buried her face in her hands and started crying again.

Raegan's heart broke for her. She was a sweet, sheltered, twenty-year-old country girl. She wasn't equipped to deal with assholes like Ted. Raegan needed to help her. He would never forgive himself if he didn't do something, but what could he do? Raegan pulled his bisexual pride bandana off his head in frustration and ran his fingers over his buzzed, short, dark auburn hair as he puzzled over their predicament. He jumped when his phone dinged in his pocket with a notification. He pulled it out and found it was a message from Yuuki.

Yuuki! That was it. That was how he was going to help Betha, and he would help his best friend at the same time. He slid his phone back into his pocket and turned to Betha.

“I have an idea.” Raegan smiled victoriously, and he vibrated with excited energy.

Betha uncovered her face and looked at him, her eyes shining with hope.

“What if I call the school and tell them what's going on? I'm sure if I explain things, they'll understand you can't stay here.”

“But what do I do about my internship? I have to complete an internship somewhere, and by now, I’m sure all the ones the school has an in with are full.” A tiny glimmer of hope danced in Betha’s teary eyes.

“I’ve got that covered. I know a bakery that’s looking for an intern. We can see about you working there and clear it with the school.” Raegan placed a reassuring hand on Betha’s shoulder and gave it a gentle squeeze.

“What do we do about Ted and my job here? I can’t exactly avoid him while I’m working,” Betha pointed out, her voice stronger than it had been.

“That’s true.” Raegan agreed, irked by that small wrinkle in his plan.

Raegan could only do so much to run interference. He could ask to have Betha help with the catering jobs, but he doubted Ted would go for that. He would want Betha where he could continue to torment her. She could call out for all her shifts until they had settled everything with their plan, but that would just get her fired faster. Then again, Betha could just quit. That would solve the Ted problem but may not look too good with the school. Fuck, this was a no-win situation.

“From the way you’re scowling, it doesn’t seem like we have a good answer to that problem.” Betha visibly drooped.

“Yeah. There’s only so much I can do to help here. It really all comes down to what you think is going to be best. Do you tough it out until we can get our plan sorted? Do you call out and get fired faster, or do you just quit? None of those options

really benefit you.” It disappointed Raegan that he didn’t have the magic answer.

“I’ll have to think about that. I don’t want to do anything that’s going to mess up me getting to graduate, but I don’t think I can keep working here much longer.” Betha’s tone was resigned.

“I’m sorry, Betha,” Raegan said, letting his hand fall away from her shoulder.

It was so frustrating that he couldn’t do more for her.

“Don’t be sorry. You may not be able to fix things for me, but I really appreciate that you’re trying to help.” Betha gave him an appreciative smile.

“You’re welcome. I’ll text you the information about that bakery I mentioned later. Right now, I have to go back in and get to work. I’m working on that fusion menu today.”

“Oh, cool. Do you need any help since I took up so much of your time?” Betha asked with a hint of guilt in her voice.

“I would appreciate that. I can put you on wonton duty.” Raegan gave her an encouraging wink as he moved to return inside.

“Great, and, um... if you want to... You can say no, but, um... maybe we could get a coffee later?” Betha tripped over her words.

Raegan paused mid-step, turning his gaze on Betha, feeling confused and a bit panicked. Was she asking him out on a date? Had he inadvertently sent her some kind of signal that he

was interested in her? Raegan had to admit she was cute, but they were ill-suited. Betha was all purity rings and little white chapels. While Raegan's tastes were anchored in Kinkyville.

"Betha, I'm sorry if I gave you the impression that I was interested..."

"Oh, my gosh. No. I'm so sorry that came out wrong. I just wanted to take you out as a thank you for being so kind. Oh, geez." Betha sounded mortified.

Oh, thank fuck, Raegan thought with a mental sigh of relief. He hadn't looked forward to having to turn Betha down.

"I know you're gay and live with your boyfriend. I'm no home-wrecker, and I mean you're attractive, but I'm into more clean-cut guys."

"Wait. Boyfriend? I don't have a boyfriend." Raegan wondered where she had gotten the idea he had a boyfriend. Raegan didn't talk about his personal life at work often, and he hadn't even been on a date in the past seven months.

"So, the Asian man you live with isn't your boyfriend?" Betha looked perplexed.

Oh, for fuck's sake. This again. Raegan pinched the bridge of his nose.

"No, that's my best friend, Yuuki. Who told you he was my boyfriend?" Irritation crept into Reagan's voice.

This wasn't the first time this subject had come up, and Raegan wanted to understand why it continued to happen. He didn't take too kindly to being talked about behind his back.

“Well, Alfredo had said some...things. Then I saw...you said his name is Yuuki? I saw him kiss you on the cheek that one time he came to the restaurant. So I just assumed that what Alfredo said was true. So you’re not gay then?” Betha cocked her head questioningly. Her discomfort was obvious by the way she shuffled her feet.

“I should have known. It’s always Alfredo.” Raegan’s hands came up to massage his temples. “To answer your question. No, I’m not gay. I’m bi. Not that it’s anybody’s business what my sexuality is.”

“Oh, okay. I’m really sorry, Raegan. I didn’t mean to offend you or be nosy. I shouldn’t have said anything, and I shouldn’t have assumed. I’m just not used to being around gay people. Men in my little town aren’t as... friendly as I have seen men be here in Raleigh. I would understand if you don’t want to help me anymore. I was super rude.” Betha hung her head.

Raegan was disappointed Betha would believe the rumor mill, especially since it was Alfredo who had said something, but he would cut her a little slack. He imagined that in her small town they didn’t have many, if any, out queer people. By her own admission, she had acknowledged that she wasn’t familiar with the etiquette that went with sexual orientation. He would have to educate her so she didn’t get into trouble later.

“I forgive you, Betha, but just as an FYI, don’t ever assume what you hear in rumors is true. Also, it’s in poor taste to ask someone about their orientation because it can end up causing

them harm. If a person wants you to know what their sexuality is, they will tell you.”

“I’m really sorry, Raegan. I’ll try and do better. Please don’t be mad.” Betha sounded like she was on the verge of tears again.

“I’m not mad at you.” Raegan suppressed an exasperated sigh as he reached out and laid a comforting hand on Betha’s biceps. “You didn’t know any better, but now you do. So don’t do it again.”

“Okay.” Betha sniffled.

“Darlin, I’m really not mad, and you didn’t necessarily do anything wrong, so don’t beat yourself up, okay? We’re still good.” Raegan gave her arm a reassuring squeeze.

Betha looked up at him and gave him another crooked smile. He could see in her eyes that she felt bad for what she had done but was happy that things between them were still solid.

“Great. Now we really need to get to work. I don’t like the idea of having to play catch up all day.” Raegan headed back inside, Betha following right on his heels.

Once I’ve got Betha safely out of here, I need to think about leaving myself. This place is getting to be way too toxic, he thought as he entered the restaurant and steeled himself for a long shift.

Chapter 4

Yuuki

“I’m home.” Yuuki called out in Japanese as he entered his and Raegan’s two-bedroom apartment.

“Welcome back,” Raegan replied in Japanese as Yuuki removed his shoes, lining them up next to Raegan’s, and then slipped on his blue house slippers.

He hung his baking kit up in the hall closet and walked past it into his room. He changed out of his work clothes into a pair of green plaid pajama bottoms and his favorite oversized gray t-shirt with the Bat symbol on it he had stolen from Rae. A relieved sigh escaped him as he left his room and walked down the short hallway that opened into the kitchen.

An amused smile turned up his lips when he found Raegan there, shaking his hips to the song playing on his phone as he worked at the stove. For being a six-foot bear of a man, with his massive arms and broad chest, Raegan was quite graceful as he danced around their decent-sized kitchen. Moving on tiptoe, Yuuki snuck up behind Raegan and pressed his front to Raegan’s back in a hug. His arms didn’t quite meet as they came around Raegan’s plush middle.

“What are you cooking?” Yuuki peeked around Raegan’s side to see what he was doing.

“Chicken tikka masala.” Raegan set his wooden spoon on the spoon rest and turned around in Yuuki’s hold. He dropped his head and placed a kiss on top of Yuuki’s head as he returned his embrace. “How was your day, Sugar?”

Yuuki’s chest warmed at hearing Raegan’s use of his pet name, and he snuggled happily against his chest. When Raegan had first called him Sugar, he had thought he was poking fun at him for being in the baking program at culinary school. Once he had explained it was a southern term of endearment, Yuuki had found he rather liked the name.

“Can’t complain. I finished the cake for Dallas’s friend. Not to brag but this may be one of the best cakes I’ve made. Do you want to see a picture?” Yuuki released his hold on Raegan and retrieved his phone from his pocket.

“You know I do.” Raegan moved behind Yuuki and wrapped his arms around Yuuki’s shoulders.

Yuuki opened his phone and chuckled when Raegan groaned at his background image.

“I really wish you would change that picture. I look awful without my goatee.” Raegan leaned down and buried his face in Yuuki’s hair.

“You do kind of have a baby face without it,” Yuuki teased as he stared fondly at the image of him and Raegan hugging on the first day they had met at culinary school.

They had been assigned to be roommates, and Yuuki's mom had insisted that they take a picture together. She had gushed about how her first college roommate had become her best friend and she had been certain that they would be the same way. A wave of sadness washed over Yuuki at the memory of his mother and how she had been right about him and Raegan. She would have been so happy to see how close they were, but sadly, she never would. The pain in his chest intensified and he willed it to go away. It had been four years since he had lost his mother, but Yuuki still felt the loss as if it had happened yesterday.

“You okay, Yuu?” Raegan asked, his voice full of concern.

Raegan's words snapped Yuuki out of his melancholy, and he pulled up his photo album app. “Yeah, I'm good. Here, look at this.” Yuuki held his phone up for Raegan to look at the picture of the cake.

“Damn, Yuu. That looks amazing. I'm jealous that Dallas gets to eat your macarons and I don't.” Raegan's voice was filled with admiration and a touch of envy.

“That's what he said,” Yuuki joked with a snicker as he lowered his phone.

“Haha. You're a riot. You overgrown child,” Raegan teased as he withdrew his arms from around Yuuki's shoulders and went back to the stove.

“You know you love my humor, and you know you can eat my macarons anytime. All you have to do is ask.” Yuuki batted his eyes coquettishly.

“You’re such a flirt.” Raegan chuckled as he lifted the lid off the pot sitting on one of the back burners of the stovetop and looked inside.

“You know it, handsome.” Yuuki walked over to the kitchen island and took a seat on the barstool. “Speaking of Dallas. You can still get your parents’ trailer to help him move, right?”

“Yeah, I’ve just got to let them know when. Has he found a place yet?” Raegan replaced the pot lid, satisfied with whatever was inside.

“Not that I’m aware of, but he has to find something soon.” Worry permeated Yuuki’s words as he set his phone down on the countertop.

Raegan turned and smiled at Yuuki. “If he doesn’t, we can put him up for a while. We won’t let anything bad happen to him.”

Adoration filled Yuuki, warming him inside out. His bestie had the biggest heart he had ever seen.

“Thanks, Bae.” Yuuki knew the words were inadequate for the amount of gratitude he felt. “So how did your day go?”

Raegan rolled his eyes skyward and turned back to the stove. “Pretty awful.” When he bent down to peer into the oven, Yuuki surreptitiously checked out his ass. “The day started with me discovering that fucking Alfredo hid some of my ingredients like a damn child.”

“Are you serious?” Yuuki felt indignant on Rae’s behalf. He had heard many a story about this Alfredo asshat, and he

couldn't believe he worked in a professional kitchen. Yuuki would have despised the guy even if he wasn't always messing with Rae.

“Yup, and then I found Betha sobbing in the ladies' room because Ted had just threatened to fire her if she didn't go on a date with him.” Rae sounded disgusted and angry as he stood back up.

“No, he didn't!” Yuuki exclaimed in complete disbelief, hopping off his barstool seething with rage.

“He sure enough did. The bastard.” Yuuki could almost see the waves of rage rolling off Raegan. “That reminds me. Y'all are still looking for an intern, right?” Raegan gave Yuuki a questioning look over his shoulder.

“Hell, yeah. Text her right now and tell her to send her resume. I'm texting Arturo and telling him our search is over. Oh, and he's going to fucking pay her, even if it's just minimum wage.”

Yuuki snatched his phone off the countertop so fast, he nearly sent it sailing across the room.

“She texted me earlier saying that she already sent it into the bakery.” Raegan opened the oven to retrieve what he had baked inside.

“Awesome. I'm still going to text Arturo to tell him he has to call and hire her on Monday.” Yuuki spoke with conviction as his fingers flew over his phone screen.

He knew he didn't have any authority to tell Arturo who to hire, but he didn't care. He had to do what he could to help this poor girl out. He hit send on his message and slipped his phone back into his pocket. "Okay, so that takes care of that."

"Not completely. I still have to call her school and convince them that her switching jobs shouldn't affect her graduating on time." Rae started assembling plates for them.

Yuuki shook his head in fond exasperation. "And why is that your job? Shouldn't Betha be calling and explaining things to the school?" Yuuki already knew the answer. Rae had a bit of a hero complex, which Yuuki loved about him, but sometimes, it led to him getting in too deep.

"Yeah, she really should." Rae sighed. "I just feel kind of responsible for her, you know. She just invokes my protective nature. She's this innocent little country bumpkin and isn't equipped with handling things like this."

"I understand, but Rae, you can't fix everyone's problems for them. I love that you try to, though. That makes you a pretty amazing guy, but she's going to have to learn how to stand up for herself. She can't do that if you ride in on a white horse all the time." Yuuki slipped back onto the barstool.

"I know, but you know me, Yuu. I can't just do nothing."

"I'm not saying you can't help. Just make sure she does the work. Being there for support is helping, too."

"Yeah. Thanks, Yuu. You're pretty amazing yourself." Raegan turned with a plate in each hand and walked toward

the island.

Yuuki opened his mouth to reply but stopped when his phone pinged, letting him know he had a new message. He pulled it out again, thinking that it was Arturo replying to him, but when he looked at the screen, he saw it was a message from Ken. Yuuki frowned at the screen and laid it face down on the island top. He was still upset with Ken for canceling on him, so he could just wait until Yuuki wanted to talk to him again.

“I can tell from your frown that the message was from the asshole.” Raegan set the plates on the countertop in front of Yuuki. He headed over to the refrigerator and pulled out a pitcher of sweet tea. He poured them each a glass, returned the pitcher to the fridge, and carried the glasses to the island.

“Yes, and he can just sit there waiting for me to reply. That’ll teach him to cancel on me.” Yuuki shot a dirty look at his phone as he pulled his plate toward him and accepted a glass from Rae.

“This is becoming a pretty regular thing, Yuu. You know I don’t like him but know I say this without bias. Don’t you think that maybe it’s time to cut your losses? It’s not right for you to be the only one putting everything into this relationship.” Raegan took a seat on the barstool beside Yuuki.

“It has been on my mind. Thanks for the food.” Yuuki picked up his fork and scooped up a big mound of food. He shoveled it into his mouth, and as the flavors of tomato, garlic,

and ginger danced on his tongue, an obscene moan resounded in his throat.

“Do you and your plate need to be alone?” Raegan asked with a teasing chuckle.

“Marry me so I can eat like this every day,” Yuuki gushed and took another bite of his meal.

“You do eat like this every day, doofus.” Raegan rolled his eyes as he tucked into his own food.

“True, and I don’t even have to put out for it.” Yuuki gave Raegan a mischievous smirk.

“No, but you have to be my model while I practice my shibari. You still up for that after dinner?” Raegan playfully bumped his shoulder against Yuuki’s.

“Hell yeah, Bae.” Yuuki would never admit it out loud, but he lived for the nights when Raegan practiced his shibari. He loved the feel of being restrained and the peace he found when he was all trussed up like a roast. It was the only time he got to indulge in his kinky side since Ken was not adventurous in bed. The few times he had tried to talk Ken into trying something kinky, he had freaked out and they ended up doing whatever Ken wanted. So yeah, if Raegan needed a warm body to practice his knots on, Yuuki was all too eager to volunteer.

Their conversation lapsed into a companionable silence as they ate their meal and a sense of contentment washed over Yuuki. He found that these quiet moments with Rae were the

best part of his day. They knew each other so well and were so comfortable that they could just silently enjoy each other's company without the need to fill every moment with chatter.

"Fuck, that was good." Yuuki all but licked his plate clean. He leaned back with a happy sigh and patted his full belly.

"Glad you liked it." Raegan picked up Yuuki's empty plate, having finished his meal as well, and walked over to the sink.

"There's no way the food in Vegas is going to taste half as good as your cooking." Yuuki climbed off his seat and joined Rae at the sink.

"You're just biased." Raegan filled the sink with water and added a drizzle of dish soap.

"Maybe a little. Still, there is going to be no competition. You could take me to any five-star restaurant in Vegas and I would still rather have your cooking." Yuuki pulled a dish towel from a drawer, ready to dry everything Raegan washed.

"You're sweet, Sugar." Raegan leaned over and placed a chaste kiss on Yuuki's cheek. "I can't wait to be in Vegas, though. We need a vacation. When was the last time we went on a trip, anyway?"

"Does going to Blowing Rock count?" Yuuki asked, chuckling at the unfortunate name of the North Carolina mountain town they had visited during a camping trip with Raegan's family.

"No. I mean like we left the state and it was just the two of us. I think the last time was when we went to Cal..." Raegan

trailed off as he realized the landmine he had stepped on.

The smile that Yuuki had been sporting fell away to form a sad frown. “I wouldn’t exactly call going to California for my mother’s funeral a trip.”

The ache from earlier came back with a vengeance, and Yuuki clutched the dish towel to his chest like a security blanket. Raegan turned the sink faucet off and turned to Yuuki. He pulled him into a hug that Yuuki gratefully returned.

“I’m sorry, Yuu. I wasn’t thinking. I didn’t mean to hurt you.” Raegan’s voice was full of remorse as he stroked up and down Yuuki’s spine.

“I know, Rae. It’s okay, and you didn’t really hurt me. It’s just that I miss her so much.” Yuuki buried his face in Raegan’s chest. He inhaled the familiar scent of garlic that clung to Raegan’s skin and the heat of his body warmed Yuuki’s cheek.

Yuuki had been in his last year of culinary school when he had gotten the call from his father, letting him know that his mother had been murdered. A gunman had walked into the supermarket his mother often went to and started shooting indiscriminately at the shoppers and staff. After the police had been forced to shoot the gunman, killing him, they had gone in to check for survivors. Yuuki’s mother had been found dead, lying on top of a young mother and her baby. The woman had come to his mother’s funeral and shared that Nomi had sacrificed herself to protect her and the baby. She called his

mother a hero. It was a pretty word, but it was a poor substitute for his mom.

The news had devastated Yuuki, rocking him to his core. He had been so looking forward to graduation and having his mother, his biggest supporter, there to congratulate him. It had gutted him she would never be there for any of his major life accomplishments, all because a selfish jackass had decided her life was his to take. Yuuki knew that if it hadn't been for Rae, he wasn't sure how he would have gotten through that time in his life.

“I know, Sugar.” Raegan switched to stroking Yuuki's hair, and it helped to soothe him.

Yuuki was amazed at how Raegan always seemed to know what to say or do to help Yuuki deal with his grief. He was so lucky to have him as his best friend. The feeling of sadness passed thanks to Raegan's steadfast care, and Yuuki broke their embrace. His playful demeanor returned, and Yuuki looked up at Raegan with a saucy grin.

“Come on. Let's finish these dishes up quickly so that you can twist me all up like a pretzel with your ropes, big boy.” Yuuki batted his eyelashes coyly.

“Flirt.” Raegan chuckled and chucked Yuuki under his chin. Yuuki's heart did a little wobble at the contact, but he thought nothing of it. His heart always did that when they were together, and he hoped that never changed.

Chapter 5

Raegan

“**V**iva Las Vegas, Sugar,” Raegan declared as he and Yuuki climbed out of the limo that had picked them up at the airport and got their first glimpse of The Bellagio Hotel and Casino. Though the light of the day would soon fade, it had little effect on the splendor of the building, alive with lights and sounds of revelry, making it even more resplendent. May and her fiancée had gone all out for this weekend.

“Pinch me because I have to be dreaming. We’re really staying at The Bellagio.” Yuuki gaped at the iconic building, eyes wide.

Yuuki had sported that adorable wide-eyed look on his face the entire ride from the airport and Raegan’s heart did the squeezy thing it did when Yuuki was being adorable. Raegan chuckled as he retrieved their luggage from the limo driver. “You’re stupid cute, you know that.”

“Sure do, Bae.” Yuuki turned to look at him with a wide grin. “Oh, wow. Rae, look behind you.” Yuuki pointed over

Raegan's shoulder. "It's the infamous fountain pool. And the Eiffel Tower, too!"

Yuuki had unconsciously slipped into Japanese, as he did when he got excited. Raegan only caught part of what he said, as he wasn't quite fluent. He could tell that he was excited about the view behind them by the way he pointed. Raegan turned, and when he saw the Eiffel Tower, he knew what had made Yuuki so animated. This place was beyond cool.

"I promise to take you there before we leave, but right now, we need to go get checked in and find May." Raegan wheeled their carry-on luggage bags behind him and headed for the hotel entrance.

"How are you not flipping out right now? This place is amazing." Yuuki sounded incredulous as he took his luggage from Raegan and intertwined their free hands.

"Who says I'm not?" Raegan shot a wink at Yuuki as they walked past a pair of lion-dog statues.

Raegan was just as star-struck as Yuuki by the grandeur of the hotel even though he didn't show it. Raegan was the more introverted of the two of them, and often, people mistook his reserved attitude as being disinterested.

"I always forget that your default setting is to be deadpan all the time, but when you get excited, that means it's something really special." Yuuki's tone was full of affection.

Raegan playfully hip-checked Yuuki. They stepped into the turnstile doors of the hotel and entered the lobby. They both

gasped as they took in the vast space. Hanging from the roof was a massive garden display of glass flowers that glimmered in every color of the rainbow. To the left was the long check-in counter while on their right was the casino.

“We’re definitely not in Raleigh anymore.” Raegan was awestruck as the sights and sounds around him bled into his senses.

“Raegan! Yuuki!” An excited feminine voice called out, pulling Raegan’s attention away from all the surrounding attractions.

A short, full-figured woman with a mass of blonde curls strode toward them with a huge smile on her face and her arms outstretched wide.

“May!” Raegan and Yuuki exclaimed in unison as they started toward their friend, meeting her halfway.

The trio embraced and a warm sense of nostalgia rolled over Raegan. The three musketeers were finally reunited.

“Damn, it’s so good to see you two idiots.” May stepped back from their hug but kept a hand on each of their arms.

“You, too, girl. You’re looking fucking fantastic. Love looks good on you.” Raegan admired the glow that radiated from May.

“For real, May. Congratulations. Blanche had better know that she’s one lucky woman to have caught a catch like you.” Yuuki bounced on the heels of his feet.

“Aw, guys. You’re going to make me cry. Fuck, I’ve missed you both.” May’s smile grew bigger while her eyes filled with happy unshed tears.

Yuuki teased. “Us, too. Don’t you have a private jet now that you’re famous by proxy? Just hop in that thing and come see us in Raleigh whenever you want.”

Raegan chuckled, shaking his head at Yuuki’s antics.

May winked. “I’m pretty sure Blanche doesn’t own a jet, but I can definitely see about coming to visit. After my wedding and honeymoon, of course.”

“Sounds good.” Raegan looked over at the line that had formed at the check-in desk. “We had better get in line or we’re going to spend all day in line rather than having a good time.”

“Oh, you don’t have to check in. I’ve already taken care of that.” May reached into her back pocket and came up with two keycards. “I checked everyone in when I got here and have just been handing out cards as everyone arrived. You all are the last ones to arrive, so voila.”

She held the cards out to them, and they each took one.

“Thanks, May.” Raegan slipped his card into his pocket.

“You bet. Now let me show you to your room so you guys can freshen up. Everyone is meeting out front in three hours so we can get this party started.” May turned and started walking toward the casino.

Yuuki slipped his hand into Raegan's, and they fell in step behind May.

“This place's subliminal game is on point. All these flashing lights and sounds got me wanting to part with my money already.” Yuuki snickered as they followed the signs for the elevators, which seemed to be just beyond the casino.

“Seriously, they knew what they were doing when they designed this place.” Raegan replied as May turned off to the left and the elevators came into sight.

They didn't have to wait long as a car arrived and its occupants filed out. They all stepped in, and May hit the button for the thirtieth floor. The ride up was fast, and they soon stepped out onto their floor.

“And here we are.” May stopped in front of their room door.

Raegan let go of Yuuki's hand and pulled out his keycard. He opened the door and stepped aside so May and Yuuki could enter first.

“Oh, son of a bitch. I told them I needed one room with two beds. I knew I should have paid more attention when they were checking all the rooms in for me. Damn it.” May's voice was a mix of anger and distress as they got their first look at the room.

Raegan looked at the bed and then turned to Yuuki with a mischievous grin.

“Oh no, Yuu. We have to share a small space and a bed. Whatever shall we do?” Raegan asked in mock horror as he

brought his hand up and laid the back of it against his forehead like a distressed Southern Belle.

“Oh, Rae. How will our masculine egos and sensibilities ever survive?” Yuuki played along by clutching at Raegan’s shirt front and looking up at him in faux dismay.

“Har har. I forgot how hilarious you two jackasses are.” May rolled her eyes in annoyance.

“Seriously, though, May. This is no big deal. Rae and I have shared a bed before.” Yuuki stepped away from Raegan and walked over to the bed where he did a belly flop.

“Are you sure, guys? I can have Blanche call the hotel and get you guys another room.” May looked fit to be tied.

“It’s fine, May. That bed is so big we should have plenty of room, but if not what’s a little spooning between friends? Right, Sugar?” Raegan turned to look at Yuuki who was still face down on the bed.

“You got it, Bae.” Yuuki’s words were muffled against the navy blue comforter. “Although this bed and I are having a spiritual moment so you may still end up on the floor.”

May chuckled and shook her head while Raegan rolled his eyes fondly. “You two never change.” She turned and headed for the door. “Remember, we’re meeting out front in three hours. See you then.”

“Bye, May,” Raegan called after her as he wheeled their luggage over to the bed. “All right, lazy bones. Get off the bed. We need to freshen up.”

“No, I’ve died and gone to heaven.” Yuuki wiggled further up onto the bed.

Raegan grabbed one of his ankles and yanked, nearly sending Yuuki sailing off the bed.

“Yeow!” Yuuki shouted, catching himself before he fell to the floor. He straightened up and glared at Raegan. “Damn it, Raegan. Don’t manhandle me with those guns. You could kill me.”

Raegan shrugged, smirking as hoisted the bags onto the bed. He opened his and began rummaging for his toiletry bag.

“What’s this?” Yuuki reached into Raegan’s suitcase and pulled out a book. “*Bet You Missed It: Hidden Attractions of Las Vegas.*”

“I picked it up at Barnes and Noble. Figured if we were going to be here, we should try to see as much as we could since we do not know if we’ll ever be back or not.” Raegan found his toiletry bag and moved on to picking an outfit.

“You are such a nerd.” Yuuki flipped through the pages.

“You know you love my nerdiness.” Raegan winked at Yuuki.

“I do,” Yuuki replied, his eyes growing wide at whatever he was looking at in the book. “OMG! They have a disco ball duck.” Yuuki lifted his gaze and gave Raegan a pointed look. “You’re taking me to see the disco duck.” Yuuki’s eyes flew back to the book, and he started flipping pages frantically. “And you’re taking me on a gondola ride. We’ll see the

dancing fountain and... Holy shit, they have a bar with a big ass aquarium and tubes in it you can slide through. There are freaking mermaids, too.”

“Okay. Okay. Whatever you want, Sugar. Just remember, we’re only here for a short time. We’ll have to plan really well if we want to see all those things before we go.” Raegan shook his head. Yuuki could get excited about the most random things sometimes.

“You’re the best friend ever. I know you’ll figure out a schedule for us.” Yuuki dropped the book back into Raegan’s bag and grabbed his suitcase and dashing for the bathroom. “I call dibs on getting to shower first. Do you think we can talk May into going to the bar with the aquarium?”

“I’m sure we can but know that if you use up all the hot water, I’m making you sleep on the floor.” Raegan called after him. He shook his head again in amused exasperation and ambled after Yuuki to get ready himself.

Chapter 6

Yuuki

“**S**hower’s free.” Yuuki stepped out of the shower feeling refreshed and snagged a towel. “The water pressure is phenomenal, FYI.”

Yuuki wrapped the towel around his waist and walked over to where he had put his suitcase on the counter just as Raegan walked into the bathroom wearing only his underwear.

“Did you leave me any hot water? It’s like a sauna in here.” Raegan joked as he shucked off his boxers, leaving him naked, and walked toward Yuuki.

Fuck, I never get tired of seeing all those fuzzy muscles. Peeking through his lashes, Yuuki drank in all the sexiness that was his best friend.

On some level, it was probably wrong to lust after his best friend, but Yuuki couldn’t muster the effort to care. Raegan was a fine specimen of southern, farm-raised, grade A beefcake. His muscles had been forged over years of hard labor on his family’s pig farm and were maintained at the gym. They were not defined and veiny like bodybuilders. No, they

were more like Olympic weightlifters, and Yuuki loved the decent amount of chub that Raegan had on his belly. His boy loved food, that was for sure.

As Raegan moved closer, Yuuki's gaze was drawn to his cock, swinging between his legs. The pink head peeked out at him from under Raegan's foreskin. Even flaccid, Raegan's dick was an impressive sight to see. Thick and long just like the rest of him. Yuuki had secret fantasies about riding that beast like a bronco rider at the state rodeo. He wouldn't say that he was a size queen but anyone could appreciate that perfect cock.

"Yeah, I think I did. Guess I'll find out when you start shrieking like a banshee," Yuuki teased as he dodged out of Raegan's reach when he tried to tickle Yuuki's sides.

"I'd be careful if I were you. I know where you sleep." Playful mischief danced in Raegan's gray eyes as he stepped into the shower.

Yuuki stuck his tongue out at Raegan before turning his attention back to his suitcase. He grabbed a pair of navy boxer briefs and slipped them on. He turned his attention back to his bag and was trying to decide what he wanted to wear that evening when his phone rang. An aggravated growl escaped him as he recognized Ken's ringtone. It was clear Ken hadn't caught on that Yuuki was giving him the cold shoulder since he had sent a copious amount of texts and voicemails. Yuuki was fed up with Ken's shit and was going to tell him as much.

He snatched his phone off the counter and marched out of the bathroom.

“What, Ken?” he snapped in Japanese, his irritation reaching its peak.

“Well, hello to you, too, Yuuki-tan. Nice of you to finally pick up my call.” Ken’s tone conveyed his own irritation.

“I’m busy right now, Ken. Tell me what you need and make it fast.” Yuuki paced the length of the hotel room to soothe his mood.

“And what are you doing exactly that’s so important you can’t make time for your lover?”

Yuuki stopped his pacing and balled his free hand into a fist. Lover? Could they even be considered lovers when Ken didn’t make time to come see him let alone sleep with him? Fucking inconsiderate, disrespectful bastard.

“I’m at my friend’s bachelorette weekend. How could you forget that? I’ve only been talking about Raegan and I going to this for months now.”

“Yuuki-tan, you can’t honestly expect me to remember every silly little thing you tell me.” Ken huffed, sounding as if he were speaking to an exasperating child.

“Can’t expect... You know what, Ken? You are a fucking asshole, and I have put up with your disrespect for too long. We’re done. Do you hear me? D-O-N-E. Done!” Yuuki shouted, seething with rage at Ken’s audacity.

“Yuuki-tan, you don’t mean that. Who else would have you other than me? That bumpkin you live with? Please. No one could ever take care of you the way I have.” Ken’s honeyed tone conflicted with his condescending words.

“Raegan would be a hundred times better at being my boyfriend than you have ever been. He listens to me and treats me with respect. Hell, he’s way more attractive than you, too.” Yuuki fired back, making sure each of his barbs were sharp. He wanted to wound Ken as deeply as he could.

“A-ha! I knew something was going on between you two. He was all you ever talked about. I bet you’ve been cheating on me with him this whole time. You dirty little slut.” Ken’s insult made Yuuki feel as if he had been slapped. Ken had never been so hateful before. “Well, two can play at that game. The reason I had called was to inform you I was getting married to a lovely young woman who is very obedient. Unlike other people I know. I also wanted to inform you I expect you to move back to Los Angeles so that you can live comfortably as my mistress.”

Yuuki felt as if he had been gut-punched.

“You’re what?”

“Yuuki-tan, you know how I hate to repeat myself.” Ken emitted a put-upon sigh as if Yuuki were trying his patience.

“I could give two shits what you hate right now, you bastard. You just told me you’re getting fucking married and expect me to give up my life here to come be your whore.”

Yuuki raged, wanting nothing more than to go to Los Angeles and punch Ken's lights out.

“You're clearly not seeing what a wonderful gift I'm giving you. You wouldn't have to work or want for anything. Your only concern would be pleasing me.” Yuuki wanted to puke over how egotistical Ken sounded. “Honestly, if you'd just done as I'd asked all those times before and moved here, we would not even be having this conversation. But no, you had to play hard to get.” Yuuki could hear Ken's eyes roll. “Well, the games are over, Yuuki-tan. I'll come to collect you after my wedding, so you need to get your affairs in order,” Ken stated, as if things had long been decided.

That was it. The final straw had been reached, and Yuuki knew he had been played from the moment he had met Ken. All these wasted years thinking that Ken cared for him. All the promises of someday were nothing but empty words. He had been used like a sex toy and, even though he had just showered, he still felt dirty. Angry tears welled up in his eyes, and he had to swallow down the anguished scream that rose in his throat.

“You listen and you listen well, you son of a bitch. We're over. I never want to see you again. I never want to hear your voice again.” Yuuki's jaw hurt from how hard he was clenching it. “You forget I even exist and go rot with whatever unfortunate woman is about to be saddled with you. And if I do ever see you again, be prepared to be beaten into a smear on the pavement.”

“Yuuki-t...”

Yuuki ended the call and blocked Ken’s number. The rage he had been feeling receded, and as it did, Yuuki was surprised he was filled with relief rather than soul-crushing anguish. He was upset, rightly so, but it was more with himself and the time he had lost by being manipulated by Ken. Strong, warm arms wrapped around Yuuki’s shoulders, and he was held in a comforting hug.

“It’s okay, Sugar. You can let it all out. I’ve got you.” Raegan placed a kiss atop Yuuki’s head.

That insignificant gesture was Yuuki’s undoing. He turned in Raegan’s embrace, buried his face in his hairy chest, and sobbed. He cried and cried, letting out all the pain he was feeling, until he was wrung out. All the while, Raegan cradled him. He whispered soothing words and stroked Yuuki’s back with steadfast patience. He was so damn lucky to have a friend like Raegan. Few guys would stand there in their underwear holding their equally underdressed friend as he sobbed his eyes out over a guy. Raegan did, though. He let Yuuki get out all his emotions and didn’t ask him a single question because he knew that once Yuuki was calmer, he would tell him everything.

“Ken called,” Yuuki said once he felt he could speak without crying again.

“I kind of figured since you were shouting in Japanese,” Raegan replied as he continued to hold Yuuki. “So what did he want?”

“He called to tell me he’s getting married.” Yuuki felt Raegan go stiff as stone, and he heard a rumbling sound coming from deep in his chest.

“He did what?” Raegan growled.

Yuuki was sure that Raegan’s teeth were clenched tight as a vice, and he worried his friend would crack a tooth. “He said he’s getting married, and he wants me to move to Los Angeles to be his mistress.”

Raegan’s hold on Yuuki tightened, and he could feel Raegan shaking.

“I’m going to kill that bastard,” Raegan muttered with such ferocity that Yuuki didn’t doubt he would do just that if Ken were standing right there in front of him, and Yuuki would not have lifted a finger to stop him.

“You want to know something funny?”

Yuuki lifted his head and looked up at Raegan. His eyes were dark as thunder clouds, and his damp auburn formed a halo of fire. Yuuki’s breath caught at the sight.

He looks like an avenging angel, Yuuki thought, transfixed by the sight of his friend.

“There’s nothing funny about any of this.” Raegan looked down at Yuuki, his eyes swirling with affection and anger.

“Yeah, well. It may amuse you to know that the son of a bitch accused me of cheating on him with you. He said all I ever talked about was you. You’re my best friend and

roommate. Why wouldn't I talk about you?" Yuuki gave a derisive snort.

"I completely understand. Remember that girl, Allie, I was seeing a year ago? She said something similar when we broke up." Raegan rolled his eyes. "Can't two people be close to each other and not be fucking?"

"Seriously." Yuuki sighed. "I kind of wish I had been cheating on Ken just so that I could rub it in his face now."

Yuuki watched as Raegan's eyes cleared of their anger and turned thoughtful before a devious grin turned up his friend's lips. "Then why don't we?"

"Why don't we what?" Yuuki's brow furrowed in confusion.

"Rub it in his face." Raegan released his hold on Yuuki, dropped to one knee, and took both of Yuuki's hands in his. "Yuuki Nakatani, will you marry me?"

Chapter 7

Raegan

“**Y**ou... You want to get married? What? I’m so confused right now, Rae.” Yuuki’s face scrunched up in confusion, reminding Raegan of a rabbit.

“Let’s get married, or I mean at least make it look like we did.” The plan that had popped into Raegan’s head was slowly coming into focus.

“Explain.” Yuuki’s expression became more confused, and Raegan thought it was that much cuter.

He pushed back up to his feet and smiled at Yuuki, feeling giddy. “So, it’s like this. We’re in Vegas, right?” Yuuki nodded, looking at Raegan as if he had lost all his mental faculties. “People elope here all the time, thinking that you just walk into a little chapel of love and walk out married.”

“Yeah. Still not following you.”

“What I’m saying is that most people buy into that whole Hollywood idea of Vegas not realizing you still need a marriage license. So if we go to a chapel, take a couple of

hokey pictures, and send them to Ken, he'll think we eloped.” Raegan’s voice filled with excitement.

“And I can rub it in his face. Show him I am way better off without his lying, cheating ass. Rae, that’s kind of brilliant.” Yuuki’s lips curled into a bright smile.

“I know. I mean, I would much rather go stomp his ass into the ground, but this will have to do.” The flames of Raegan’s earlier rage flared up at just the thought of Ken.

Raegan had never liked the bastard. From the moment they had met, Raegan had a bad feeling about the guy, but since Yuuki had seemed so happy with Ken, he kept things civil. At least, when Yuuki was around. On the extremely rare occasions that he and Ken had been alone, he made his dislike of the other man well known. Ken had done the same.

“So when do we want to get these pictures? We obviously can’t do it while we’re with May. This weekend is supposed to be about her finding her happily ever after.”

Raegan picked up his phone from where he had left it on the TV console and did a quick Google search. “There’s a chapel within walking distance. If we move fast, we can do it now and be back in time to go get our party on.” Raegan set his phone back down and walked over to his suitcase.

He was glad that he had taken his mother’s advice and packed an outfit that was semiformal instead of just his standard band tees and black jeans. It seemed Yuuki had, too, as he stepped out of the bathroom with a button-up shirt and slacks slung over his arm.

“So we’re really going through with this crazy plan?” His voice was full of disbelief as his hazelnut brown eyes danced with mischief.

“You know it, Sugar. Now help me find an iron. I can’t be looking like I just rolled out of bed in our wedding photos.” Raegan laughed as he retrieved his clothes from his suitcase.



Forty minutes later, Raegan and Yuuki walked through the front doors of the Burning Love Wedding Chapel. Raegan hadn’t been sure of what to expect when they got there, but the simple, white-walled reception area was lackluster.

“Huh, I was expecting a bit more glitz and to be greeted by Elvis as we came in,” Yuuki whispered as they walked up to the glass display counter.

Raegan hummed in agreement as he tapped the bell sitting on the counter next to a sign that read: **Ring for Help**. A moment later, a woman who looked like she was on her way to a Dolly Parton look-alike contest walked through the beaded curtain behind the desk with a huge smile on her made-up face.

“Welcome to the Burning Love Wedding Chapel, gentlemen. My name’s Debbie, and I’ll be helping you today. So what brings you in today? You boys looking to get hitched?” Debbie winked, and Raegan was shocked by how she even acted like Dolly Parton.

“Raegan. Yuuki.” Raegan pointed at himself, and then Yuuki. “And no. We’re actually here as part of a revenge scheme.” Raegan leaned over the counter as if he were sharing secret information.

“Oh, do tell. This sounds juicy.” Debbie leaned in as well.

“So, I just found out that my now ex-boyfriend has not only been cheating on me, but he’s going to marry the girl he was cheating on me with. The cherry on top is that he accused me of cheating on him first with my friend here,” Yuuki explained, his voice full of disdain as he leaned in next to Raegan.

“Well, he sounds like a real bastard.” Debbie reached out her manicured hand and sympathetically patted Yuuki’s shoulder.

“Oh, he is. So to get back at him, we want to pretend to get married and send him all the pictures. Let him draw his own conclusions and drive him crazy. So do you think you can help us, Debbie?” Raegan hoped she wouldn’t turn them away. This was their only opportunity to complete Raegan’s plan.

“Oh, I surely can. You boys are in luck. We have a package just for this sort of thing and our next appointment was canceled because the groom found out his bride was sleeping with his sister.” Debbie’s smile grew wider as she straightened up and turned toward the curtain. “Lester! Gord! Donnie! We got customers. We need a Fake it to Make it special.”

“And how much does a Fake it to Make it special cost?” Raegan asked, pumping the brakes on this entire plan. He had

a couple of hundred dollars he had set aside for gambling, but that was it.

“Three-fifty, but I’ll knock off fifty bucks if y’all let us use the pictures for advertising and y’all do a testimonial.” Debbie bargained with a glint in her eyes. Behind her façade, she was a shrewd businesswoman.

“Deal.” Yuuki pulled out his wallet.

“Now, hold up, Sugar. I was going to pay for this since it was my idea.” Raegan set his hand over Yuuki’s wallet.

“You two are adorable. How about you just split it fifty-fifty so we can get this shindig going?” Debbie pulled a tablet from beneath the display case along with a tray of rings. “Y’all go on and find some rings that fit while the boys and I set up the chapel. First things first, though.”

Debbie held the tablet out expectantly to Yuuki who took it and made his half of the payment. Debbie took it back, tapped it a few times, and then handed it to Raegan. Raegan pulled out his wallet and made his payment.

“Wonderful. I’ll come to fetch you boys once we’re ready.”

Debbie put away the tablet before disappearing behind the beaded curtain. Raegan put away his wallet and turned his attention to the rings. They were the kind of cheap rings you would find in any gift shop—silver in color and fairly plain. Save for a few that were set with small turquoise stones. Raegan picked up one of the turquoise rings that he thought may fit and slid it onto his ring finger. The fit was perfect, and

when he turned his attention to Yuuki, he found he had chosen a ring that matched his perfectly.

“Well, look at that.” Rae held his hand next to Yuuki’s and wiggled his finger. “Perfect fits and they match. It must be fate.”

“Yeah.” Yuuki chuckled. “Maybe we should upgrade and see if we can do this for real. You wouldn’t be the worst person to be married to.”

“Hey, now. You better be nice, or I’ll leave you standing at the altar.” Raegan gave Yuuki’s shoulder a playful shove. He knew Yuuki was kidding, but the thought of actually being married to Yuuki made his heart flutter. He didn’t have time to examine that feeling, though, because Debbie bustled back into the room with two young men, who bore a strong resemblance to her, in tow.

“These are my boys. Donnie,” Debbie gestured to the man on the right, “Who is going to be taking all the photos, and Gordon,” she indicated the man on the left, “Who will film everything,” Debbie clapped her hands together and grinned. “Lester, my husband, will be officiating. He’s in his Elvis costume. That okay?” Raegan and Yuuki both nodded. “Great. Let’s get this show on the road.”

“You ready, Sugar?” Raegan held his crooked arm out toward Yuuki.

“Lead the way, Bae.” Yuuki slipped his arm into Raegan’s.

“The rings, fellas.” Debbie gestured to Yuuki’s hand.

“Oh, yeah.” Reagan chuckled.

They untwined their arms and removed their rings before exchanging them. That minor disaster averted, they resumed their prior positions.

“Be sure to sell it, guys, and we’re rolling.” Gordon pointed his camera at Yuuki and Reagan.

Raegan’s lips curled into a smile as he and Yuuki moved down the short hall that led to the chapel. It impressed Raegan how nicely the room was decorated. The tall windows were draped in white linen, and the walls were a warm shade of cream. He knew it didn’t matter what the place looked like since none of this was real, but he appreciated he was getting his money’s worth.

They approached the podium that stood in front of them, where a man dressed as Elvis—white satin jumpsuit bedazzled with colorful rhinestones and fringe—stood waiting. Out of the corner of his eye, Raegan saw Debbie take a seat on one of the cushioned chairs that formed a semi-circle facing the podium. She tugged a handkerchief from her ample cleavage and dabbed at her eyes.

They go all out around here, Raegan thought as he and Yuuki came to a stop in front of the podium.

Elvis, or rather Lester, lowered his glasses just enough to wink at them before striking a pose.

“Honored guests, we are gathered today to witness the union of Raegan and Yuuki. If anyone has any reason why

these two should not be wed, speak now or forever hold your peace.”

Raegan had to suppress a snicker as Lester paused for dramatic effect.

“Now then. Gentleman, please turn and face each other.”

All right, Rae. You got this. Just pretend that Yuu is the love of your life and this is the best day of your life, Raegan thought as they unlinked their arms and he turned to face Yuuki.

As his eyes met Yuuki’s, Raegan felt as if someone had punched him in the chest, and his breath was stolen away. He had looked at his best friend more than a trillion times, but at that moment, it was as if he were seeing him for the first time. His smile could turn day into night, and his eyes danced with joy. He was beautiful, and Raegan wondered how he had never seen him like this before.

I’m just getting caught up in the act, Raegan reassured himself, but as he continued to look into Yuuki’s eyes, he was anything other than convinced.

“Do you gentlemen have your rings?” Lester snapped Raegan out of his thoughts.

He reached into his pocket where he had tucked Yuuki’s ring and pulled it out. He held it up for Lester to see and Yuuki did the same.

“Now, Raegan, take Yuuki’s left hand and repeat after me.”

Raegan heard Lester and himself speak the perfunctory marriage vows but none of it registered as all his focus was on

Yuuki. Had his eyes always been that pretty hazelnut color with that perfect almond shape? Had his lips always been that pale pink? How would they feel if he were to kiss them? Wait. What? Why was he thinking of kissing Yuuki? He was his best friend. Normal people didn't think about kissing their best friends. Did they?

“By the power vested in me by the state of Nevada, I pronounce you wed. You may kiss your groom.”

Lester's words cut through Raegan's thoughts and panic gripped his chest. He hadn't thought this plan through well enough if he had overlooked the part where they had to kiss. Then again, he also hadn't been in the middle of a mental crisis after discovering that his best friend was fucking gorgeous. Yuuki didn't seem to have any problem with this development as he grabbed the front of Raegan's shirt and went up on his toes, his lips pursed in invitation.

Fuck it, Raegan thought, tossing aside his worries as his arms went around Yuuki and he bent down to meet Yuuki halfway. The instant their lips touched, Raegan's brain shut down and all he could do was focus on the sensation of holding and kissing Yuuki. Yuuki's slight frame allowed for Raegan's own larger one to wrap around him in a protective way that Raegan always loved in his partners. Yuuki's lips were as soft as rose petals, and Raegan wanted to go on kissing them forever.

Sadly, Yuuki broke away from the kiss, and Raegan missed the feel of him instantly.

“Damn, Rae. That was a hell of a kiss. Way to sell it, Bae,” Yuuki whispered, so that Gordon’s camera would not pick up what he said.

Yuuki’s words were like a bucket of ice water being poured down Raegan’s back, and the haze fogging his head cleared. This was all pretend. Just them playing things up so that things would look good for the pictures and video. All so that Yuuki could get a little revenge on Ken.

Just caught up in the game, that’s all, Raegan thought, but the words still felt untrue as Donnie started directing them to stand with Lester for more pictures. Raegan didn’t have much time to dwell on his thoughts as he and Yuuki were swept up in a frenzy of camera flashes and a video testimonial. When they finally walked out of the chapel with their freshly signed commitment certificate and assurances that they would have their pictures later that evening, Raegan was surprised to see that the sun was setting.

“Shit,” he cursed as he pulled out his phone and saw that they had less than half an hour to get back to the hotel and change before they had to meet up with May. “Come on, Yuu. We have to get moving or we’re going to be late.”

Raegan pocketed his phone and grabbed Yuuki’s hand. A bolt of electricity shot through his chest as their hands met. That had never happened before, but Raegan pushed those thoughts aside to unload later. They made it back to the hotel and up to their room in record time. They took lightning-fast

showers, having worked up a sweat from their mad dash, and changed into clothes more suitable for partying.

“I can’t wait to get those pictures. I wish I could be there to see the look on Ken’s face when he sees them. Bastard is going to blow a gasket, I’m sure.” They left their room to head down to the lobby.

“For sure.” Raegan agreed, though his words lacked the enthusiasm that he’d had earlier. He was still preoccupied with what he had been feeling at the chapel.

“Hey.” Yuuki put his hand on Raegan’s arm, sending a jolt of exhilaration through him. “You okay?”

“Huh? Oh, yeah. Just a little worn out from all that running.” Raegan gave Yuuki’s hand a reassuring pat. “Don’t worry. I’ll get a drink or two in me and I’ll be right as rain.”

“You sure that’s all?” Yuuki gave him a disbelieving look.

“Yeah, Sugar. I’m good. Let’s go get our drink on and celebrate your newly single status.” Raegan forced a note of excitement into his voice just as they arrived at the elevators.

“Hell, yeah. Look out Sin City. We’re going to tear up the strip tonight!” Yuuki danced his way onto the elevator car to the chagrin of the elderly couple and family of four that were already inside.

Raegan gave them all an apologetic look, but he couldn’t help smiling at Yuuki’s antics. As they rode down to the lobby, Raegan put his thoughts of what he had felt at the chapel aside.

Tomorrow was for worrying, and tonight was for having a good time.

Chapter 8

Raegan

“Come on, Yuu. We’re nearly there.” Raegan’s words were slurred as the elevator doors swooshed open, letting them out onto their floor.

“I can’t walk another step. Carry me?” Yuuki begged, his words equally sloppy as he leaned all his weight into Raegan, nearly sending them tumbling out of the elevator.

“Fine.” Raegan sighed as he crouched down on one knee.

Yuuki gave a little squeal of delight as he fumbled onto Raegan’s back and wrapped his arms around Rae’s neck. Raegan looped his arms over Yuuki’s legs and gripped his thighs for support. With an exerted grunt, Raegan forced himself up to his feet with only minimal danger of them crashing to the floor.

“You’re so strong, Rae. I bet if you fucked me against a wall, you’d have no trouble holding me up.” Yuuki pressed himself tighter against Rae’s back.

“You are always so horny when you drink.” Raegan chuckled as they reached their room. “Gotta put you down.”

“No.” Yuuki wrapped his legs around Raegan’s torso, refusing to let go.

“Okay, well when you fall on your ass, it’s not my fault.” Raegan released his hold on Yuuki and reached into his pocket for their room key.

Surprisingly, Yuuki didn’t fall, and Rae was able to get the door open after his sixth attempt. Raegan fumbled his way inside, foregoing turning on the lights since they were just going to bed, anyway. He found his way to the bed and dumped Yuuki onto it.

“You’re an asshole.” Yuuki grumbled as Raegan removed his shoes.

“Yeah, the asshole who just carried your ass in here and is getting you ready for bed.” Raegan finished removing Yuuki’s shoes and was working on his own.

“Okay, I take it back. You’re the best friend ever. You take such good care of me. You even married me.” Yuuki bolted upright, surprising Raegan to where he fell off the bed, landing in a heap on the floor.

“The fuck, Yuu?”

“The pictures.” Yuuki rolled onto his side and pulled his phone from his back pocket.

“Oh, yeah.” Raegan rose off the floor and sat back on the foot of the bed.

Raegan retrieved his phone from his pocket and checked his notifications. Sure enough, he had a new email. He tapped the

email and the link that was enclosed. Within seconds, his screen was filled with images of him and Yuuki. His heart did the wobbly thing as he scrolled through the pictures until it came to a dead stop when he found one of them kissing. As he stared at the picture, he could feel his entire body burn as he remembered how it had felt to hold Yuuki. How their lips had felt as they moved against each other.

The sound of Yuuki growling in frustration snapped Raegan out of his reverie. “What’s wrong, Sugar?”

“My stupid fingers are drunk and won’t do what I tell them,” Yuuki muttered as he made another aggravated noise before flopping back on the bed.

“You’re such a drama queen.” Raegan stretched out next to Yuuki and took his phone from him. He opened the email and link just as he had done on his phone before handing the device back to Yuuki.

“Yes! Now to send Ken these pics and show him I’m living the good life without his ass.”

Yuuki rolled onto his stomach and started clumsily tapping on his phone screen. Raegan smiled in amusement as he sat up. It had been a long day, and he was ready to go to sleep. He stood and stripped down to his underwear. As he did, his phone pinged, letting him know he had a new notification. He ignored it, though, and plugged his charger into his phone.

“Come on, Sugar. Time for sleep.” When Raegan turned back to the bed, Yuuki was fast asleep.

Raegan gave out a put-upon sigh as he walked around to the other side of the bed and undressed Yuuki. When Raegan went to remove Yuuki's shirt he dislodged Yuuki's phone from his hand and it slid off the bed to hit the carpeted floor.

"Shit." Raegan cursed as he retrieved the device and checked to make sure it wasn't damaged. When he looked at the screen, he saw Facebook was open.

Must have happened when it hit the floor, he thought as he closed the app and plugged the phone in to charge. He returned to undressing Yuuki down to his boxer briefs.

"Five more minutes," Yuuki grumbled as Raegan lifted him so that he could tug the comforter out from under him.

"Just tucking you in, Sugar." Raegan pulled the blanket free and maneuvered Yuuki beneath it.

With Yuuki tucked in, he went back to his side of the bed and climbed in. He had barely settled down when Yuuki rolled over and buried his face in Raegan's chest.

"Goodnight, Rae," Yuuki muttered. His warm breath made Raegan's skin tingle and certain parts of him twitch in interest.

"Night, Yuu." Raegan willed his body to stop having weird reactions as he wrapped his arms around Yuuki and kissed the top of his head as he had done a million times before. It was supposed to be normal for them to sleep snuggled together. So why did it feel so awkward now? The fatigue of the day caught up to him, and Raegan drifted off, feeling unsettled yet content.

Chapter 9

Yuuki

*O*h, my head. What the hell is that buzzing sound? It's making me feel like someone is taking a jackhammer to it, Yuuki thought as he grudgingly came awake. He cracked his eyes open and was glad to find the room still swathed in darkness. The buzzing noise and pounding in his skull eased, and his surroundings became clear. It was then he realized he had been sleeping on a familiar fuzzy chest. He looked up at Raegan's sleeping face. A small smile turned up the corners of Yuuki's mouth as he took in Raegan's parted lips and the soft snores that escaped him.

The sound was soothing in its familiarity and was lulling Yuuki back to sleep. He had just settled himself back on Raegan's chest when the buzzing started again. Frustrated with the insistent noise, Yuuki lifted his head to determine where it was coming from so that he could silence it. Not spotting it from where he lay, Yuuki reluctantly rolled onto his back and looked at the other side of the room.

He noticed light coming from the nightstand on his side of the bed and recognized it as coming from his phone. With a

quiet groan so as not to wake Raegan, Yuuki rolled onto his stomach and reached for his phone. He squinted against the brightness of his screen as it sent a jolt of pain straight through his brain. As his vision cleared, he could see that someone was calling him. Yuuki was in no state to be answering calls, so he sent it to voicemail.

He went to power his phone down but stopped when the call came through again. Now Yuuki was beyond annoyed. He dragged himself out of bed and staggered his way into the bathroom before answering the call.

“What?” he barked at whoever was on the other end of the call.

“Do you just live to embarrass me?” an all too familiar male voice asked angrily in Japanese.

Fuck. Me. Yuuki thought, his already sour mood becoming more bitter.

“What have I done now, Dad?” Yuuki switched from English to Japanese and felt more tired than he had a moment ago. Any time Yuuki spoke with his father, it was a taxing ordeal on his sanity.

“Don’t play stupid with me, boy. I just spoke to your Aunt Yuuko. Your cousin, Ami, showed her all the pictures you put on Facebook last night. Would you care to explain yourself?” Yuusei Nakatani’s fury was so strong it was palpable.

“Pictures?” Yuuki asked, feeling confused. He pulled his phone away from his ear and minimized the call. He tapped on

his Facebook app, and his eyes nearly burst out of their sockets when he saw he had over one hundred notifications. Yuuki tapped the icon and opened the first notification. The image that popped up on his screen made his stomach drop. It was the picture of him and Raegan kissing at their fake wedding.

How the hell did these get on Facebook? Yuuki tried to recall the events of the previous evening. He remembered getting the pictures and sending them to Ken. No, wait. He had blocked Ken's number and couldn't remember how to unblock it. Then in his drunken state, he'd had the brilliant idea to post everything on Facebook. Ken was sure to see it since they were friends there. Unfortunately, drunk Yuuki hadn't thought about the fact that his entire friends list would see them, too. He'd even tagged Raegan so that all his contacts could see the pictures as well.

"Oh, fuck. What have I done?" Yuuki fell back against the wall and slid to the floor.

"Yuuki? Yuuki! Answer me, boy." Yuusei's irritated voice rang out from Yuuki's phone.

"Dad, listen." His reply was cut off by his father's scathing words.

"No, you listen. No son of mine is gay."

"Dad." Yuuki's heart clenched, making his chest throb.

"I will not tolerate this. Do you hear me? If this is one of your little rebellious pranks, it isn't funny, and if it is all true,

then you can consider yourself dead to me.”

“Dad, please.” Yuuki could feel his throat constrict, and he gasped for air.

“Did you even think about how this would affect me? Affect my work? How am I to face my colleagues now? I have very important contracts that could fall through because of you.”

“Stop, Dad.” As his father continued his tirade, the anguish Yuuki felt transformed into anger.

“No, of course you didn’t think of me because you are selfish. Just like your mother.”

Oh, the fuck he didn’t!!! Rage that had been building up for years shot up through Yuuki like rising magma, and now the fury of his emotional volcano was going to explode.

“Don’t you dare fucking talk about my mother like that. Mom was the most unselfish person to have ever lived. You’re the selfish one, Dad. You were always worried about your fucking image and adhering to antiquated ideals. Well, you know what? Fuck you.”

Yuuki pulled his phone away from his head and violently jabbed the screen, ending the call. He then powered it down and set it on the floor beside him. Drawing his knees to his chest, he wrapped his arms around them and rested his head. He wanted to cry but he wouldn’t. His dad wasn’t worth the tears.

He’d never planned to come out to his father because he had known this would be his reaction. Still, the pain of knowing

he'd never be accepted or loved by his father stung. He wished he had actually married Raegan because then he could flaunt it everywhere and make his dad even madder. That would show him that Yuuki didn't need him or his approval. He would live his life his way.

He heard the bathroom door open, followed by the sound of Raegan's approaching footsteps. Yuuki didn't lift his head as he felt Raegan come to a stop and take a seat beside him. A brawny arm came around Yuuki, and he allowed himself to be pulled into Raegan's side. He uncurled and buried himself in Raegan's soft chest. Yuuki clung to his friend like a lifeline, drawing strength from his silent presence. He loved Raegan didn't ask what had happened but just offered his support.

Yuuki wasn't sure how many minutes passed. All he knew was that his butt was going numb, and he was a little cold. He pulled away from Raegan and looked up into his friend's ever-patient eyes.

"Thanks." Yuuki didn't know what else to say to express how grateful he was for Raegan being there.

"You're welcome, Sugar." Raegan gave him a sleepy, lopsided smile.

Shit! How do I tell Raegan that I have royally fucked up and posted our fake wedding on Facebook? Yuuki realized he hadn't only messed things up for himself, but Raegan, too.

"Rae, I have something I need to tell you." Yuuki cast his eyes to the floor.

“Would it have anything to do with our wedding pictures being on Facebook and why I have a bazillion messages on my phone?” Although Raegan’s tone was calm, it still made Yuuki wince.

“Yeah. I forgot I blocked Ken’s number yesterday, and in my drunken genius, I thought it was a good idea to put it on Facebook.” Yuuki looked up at Raegan. “I’m sorry.”

“It’s all good. What’s done is done.” Rae shrugged, but Yuuki could see the tension in his shoulders. “What matters is what we do next. I’m guessing that was your father on the phone.”

Yuuki sighed as he slumped back against the wall. “Yes.” That one word was loaded with so much emotion it felt like a stone. Yuuki thumped the back of his head against the wall. “I knew that if my father ever learned I was gay, he would be a bastard about it.” Yuuki glanced over at Rae with a sad smile. “But it still hurts.” Yuuki huffed out a breath and leaned more into Raegan. “I kind of wish we didn’t have to come clean now. It would be nice to rub this in his face for a while. To show him I don’t give two shits about what he thinks.”

“And who says we have to come clean?” Rae shifted his body and rose to his feet. “My ass is asleep. Let’s move this conversation to someplace more comfortable.”

Confused, Yuuki snapped his gaze toward Raegan and watched as he walked out of the bathroom. He stumbled to his feet and dashed after his friend. When he fumbled into the

main room, he found Raegan sitting on the bed, nonchalantly looking at his phone.

“What do you mean about not telling the truth? We have to.” Yuuki insisted as he climbed into the bed beside Rae.

“Do we, though?” Rae shot back as he continued to toy with his phone.

“Okay, I am so not following you on this.”

Raegan set his phone down on the nightstand and turned to face Yuuki.

“Our original plan was to just piss Ken off, right?” Yuuki nodded. “But that went a bit sideways, and now your dad knows.”

“Yes, but what does that—”

Raegan cut Yuuki off. “So now the plan includes pissing off your dad and Ken. We’ll just play along like we really got married, and it will drive them both nuts for a while.”

Yuuki stared at Raegan’s passive face feeling lost. “Since when did we decide the plan was expanding?”

“When your dad decided to be a douche and got you upset.” Raegan’s eyes flashed with anger.

Yuuki’s chest filled with warmth. It was so sweet when Raegan got mad on his behalf. He felt so blessed to have someone who was always in his corner. “I appreciate you being pissed at my dad for me, but are you really comfortable lying to your family? You know your mom’s going to flip.”

A slight grimace crossed Raegan's face, but he wiped it away. "It's not a perfect idea, but it won't be forever. We'll play the happy newlyweds for say, three months, and then we'll say we had things annulled because we found we were better off as friends. No one will be the wiser, and we stick it to your dad and Ken. Sounds like wins all around to me."

"I'm still not sure, Rae." Yuuki felt apprehensive about this plan. So much could go wrong and hurt many people.

"It'll be fine. Everyone already thinks we're together a lot of the time, anyway. Not much will change other than we have to kiss every once in a while."

There was a strange hitch in Raegan's voice when he spoke, but Yuuki took little notice. The whole situation was odd, but the more that Raegan pressed the issue, the more intrigued Yuuki became. When they kissed yesterday, Yuuki had felt like he had touched a live wire. He had fantasies about kissing Rae, but they had come nowhere near close to the reality. The feel of his soft lips moving against his and the rasp of his goatee hair on his skin had felt amazing. Of course, all those feelings had probably been him getting carried away with the excitement of their fake wedding. Just the kind of crazy, spontaneous thing that Yuuki had always dreamed of doing.

He had to admit though that playing Raegan's husband and getting to kiss him wasn't much of a hardship. Yuuki had always envied the women and men who had been Raegan's partners over the years. He was such a generous lover. Often catering to every whim that his significant other wanted. It

would be stupid for Yuuki not to take this opportunity to be the recipient of all that care. He still had misgivings about lying to everyone they knew, but it was more a lie of omission, so that made it a little okay. At least that was what he told himself. He also thought of how it would affect their friendship. They were extremely close, but kissing was pretty intimate. Still, when would an opportunity like this come again? He and Rae had weathered worse storms, so why not go for it? What was the worst that could happen?

“Okay. I’m in.” Yuuki sounded more confident than he felt.

“Cool.” Raegan grinned, looking relieved. “So I guess we need to get our story straight.”

“Yeah, and we should keep it simple. Otherwise, people will know we’re full of it.”

“Okay, so what if we go with this? Just before we left Raleigh, we each realized that we had deeper feelings for each other and confessed those feelings. Then, when we got here, we decided to just go whole hog on these new feelings and get married.” Raegan looked at Yuuki for his thoughts.

“Sounds good to me. It’s just vague enough to be easy to remember but sounds legit. People have gotten married for less. Plus, when we split in three months, everyone won’t be totally surprised.” Yuuki appreciated Raegan was always the man with the plan.

Their conversation was interrupted by Raegan’s phone vibrating on the nightstand. Raegan reached over and picked it

up. He grimaced when he looked at the screen, and Yuuki knew that whatever he was looking at wasn't good.

“Well, we're going to be putting this new relationship to the test a lot sooner than I thought.” Raegan turned his phone to face Yuuki, and Yuuki blanched as he read the message.

May was on her way to their room, and she was pissed.

Chapter 10

Raegan

Raegan had barely pulled on a pair of pajama pants before there was the sound of furious pounding coming from their hotel room door. When he opened it, he found a scowling May on the other side.

“You sneaky mother fucking bastards,” she growled as she shoved past Raegan and stormed into the room.

“H-hey, May.” Raegan heard Yuuki stammer as he closed the door and rushed to Yuuki’s aid.

Yuuki stood frozen by the bathroom door, having just come out dressed in one of Raegan’s T-shirts, and eyed May wearily. Raegan came to stand at his side and slipped a supportive arm around his waist.

“Don’t you *hey* me. You two had better start explaining yourselves right now.” May took a seat on the end of the bed and pinned them with a killer glare.

Raegan pulled Yuuki closer, putting himself between May and Yuuki. “I’m guessing that you saw the Facebook post.” Raegan got straight to the heart of the matter.

“I’m pretty sure the whole fucking internet has seen it. You were trending on Instagram last I checked.” May crossed her arms over her ample chest.

Yuuki looked up at Raegan with a sad expression before returning his focus to May. “May, we weren’t trying to steal your thunder. This is your weekend, and you know we would do nothing to hurt you. We weren’t even going to post those pictures, but when I’m drunk...”

May cut Yuuki off by raising her hand for him to stop. Raegan felt Yuuki droop in his arms, and he tightened his hold to support Yuuki, both physically and emotionally.

“You really think I’m mad about my bachelorette party?” May asked, somehow looking even angrier and offended.

Raegan and Yuuki exchanged confused looks.

“Honestly, you two idiots.” May squeezed her eyes closed and pinched the bridge of her nose. “I’m mad that you jackasses didn’t invite me to the ceremony. We’ve been friends forever, so it hurts that I didn’t get included in your wedding when I’m including you in mine.”

Understanding slammed into Raegan like a bull and a wave of guilt swept over him. Being confronted by the hurt feelings of the people they loved wasn’t something he had factored into them continuing their charade. He thought about how his own family was going to react and that only intensified his guilt. He would have to deal with his own twisted emotions on that front later. Right now, they had to deal with May’s wounded feelings. He turned his gaze toward Yuuki, who looked just as

repentant as he felt, and could see the need for guidance in his eyes.

Well, in for a penny, in for the whole enchilada, Raegan thought as he pulled in a fortifying breath.

“We’re sorry to have hurt your feelings like that, May. Honestly, it was a real spur-of-the-moment thing with zero planning.” The half-truth tasted bitter on Raegan’s tongue.

Yuuki chimed in. “Yeah, and we weren’t even going to say anything until after this weekend, but I got a little post-happy while I was drunk last night. Sorry.”

Rae gave her an apologetic smile. He could see that Yuuki was feeling just as weird about all of this as he was. Neither of them cared to lie to people they loved, but it was too late to turn back now.

May opened her eyes and looked them over suspiciously. “So when exactly did you two decide to do this wedding thing? Better question. When did you two start dating? For as long as I have known you, every time anyone even hinted you two were together, you flipped. Saying ‘*Oh, we’re just besties*’. So when did the story change?”

Thank fuck we got our story straight before she showed up. Raegan patted himself on the back for his foresight.

“It’s been, what, like a week or two, Sugar?” Raegan asked, looking down at Yuuki like a smitten teenager.

“Oh, I have no idea, Bae. Time ceased to exist from the moment you confessed your feelings.” Yuuki looked up at

Raegan with adoring puppy dog eyes.

Raegan cringed at how thick Yuuki was laying it on. May was going to see right through their ruse for sure.

“You two have been together less than a month and just got married out of the blue?” May’s manicured eyebrows arched in disbelief.

Raegan needed to save this situation, and there was one sure-fire way to do that. Too bad he couldn’t warn Yuuki. Raegan turned his gaze toward May and gave her a casual shrug of his shoulders. “Well, you know how it goes.” He looked back at Yuuki and tried to convey with his eyes what he was about to do. “When you know, you know.”

Raegan leaned into Yuuki and captured his lips in a chaste kiss. The moment their lips met, that same fire from yesterday engulfed Raegan, and the simple kiss he had intended morphed into one of passion. Yuuki gave a small gasp of surprise, and Raegan used that opportunity to delve his tongue into his fake husband’s mouth. His arms took Yuuki into a possessive hold. As Raegan continued his exploration of Yuuki’s mouth, he felt Yuuki’s arms twine around his neck, and his tongue flicked against Raegan’s.

A hungry growl rumbled in Raegan’s chest as his tongue chased and teased Yuuki’s. His hand slid down Yuuki’s back until it came to his ass, and he gripped one cheek. It irked him that there was a layer of fabric between his hand and Yuuki’s supple flesh. Just as Raegan hitched up the T-shirt that Yuuki

wore, the sound of someone clearing their throat caught his attention.

Raegan broke away from the kiss looking dazed, and to his utter mortification, he saw May sitting on the bed looking a bit flustered.

Oh, fuck. I forgot she was here, Raegan thought, feeling his cheeks burn.

Yuuki made a strangled sound as he, too, came back to his senses. They jumped apart from each other like a pair of teenagers caught making out, and the room filled with awkward silence.

“Well,” May said, breaking the quiet. “That was... something. I’m just going to go now. Congrats, you guys. I’ll see you later.”

May shot to her feet and bolted from the room like her ass was on fire. Raegan watched her retreating form, and the embarrassment he felt for having lost control of himself grew stronger. What the fuck had come over him? He had meant to just give Yuuki a simple kiss to convince May they were legit, and the next thing he knew he was all but mauling Yuuki.

Yuuki! Oh, sugar honey iced tea. Yuuki had to be madder than a hornet about the way Rae had accosted him. Feeling lower than pond scum, Raegan hesitantly turned to look at Yuuki, expecting his best friend to tear him a new one when their eyes met. What Raegan found instead was a beaming smile and a victorious look in Yuuki’s eyes, which left Raegan perplexed.

“Damn, we sold the shit out of that kiss. Did you see the look on May’s face? This pretending to be a couple thing is going to be a cakewalk.”

“Uh, yeah. So, you were okay with...what happened?” Raegan asked, reeling from Yuuki’s unexpected behavior.

“Are you kidding? That was hot as fuck. If we are going to be doing more of that then call me Katniss Everdeen because I volunteer as tribute.” Yuuki snagged his bag and hoisted it onto the bed.

Raegan felt as if he were spinning around on a tilt-a-whirl. His head was still processing the kiss and lying to May, while his heart was going overboard with the wobbling thing, and his dick was now getting in on the act by twitching at the prospect of kissing Yuuki again. Left was right. North was south, and if Raegan didn’t find some stability soon, he feared he would be sick.

“Hey, you hungry?”

“Starving. Please tell me you have some amazing place in mind for us to grab some breakfast.” Yuuki pulled the borrowed T-shirt off, leaving him standing in only his underwear.

Raegan’s eyes zeroed in on Yuuki’s ass, and the memory of how that plump cheek had felt in his hand had his prick chubbing up. Raegan spun to face the other way and started for the bathroom.

“You know it, Sugar. I’m going to hop in the shower to wash off the hangover scuzz.”

“Save me some hot water and hurry. I’m so hungry I might pass out if you take too long,” Yuuki teased.

“Yeah, yeah, drama queen,” Raegan called back as he stepped into the bathroom and closed the door.

Once safely out of sight of Yuuki, Raegan sagged against the door and sighed in relief. That had been close. If Yuuki had turned to look at him, he would have seen Raegan’s tented pajama pants and that would have been beyond awkward. He had seen Yuuki in all manner of undress through the years, and yeah, occasionally, he had been turned on by Yuuki’s beautiful body. Hell, it happened almost every time he practiced his shibari on Yuuki. So why had Raegan skittered off like a pre-teen who popped a boner after seeing his crush?

Maybe it has something to do with you getting up close and personal with his tonsils? Raegan thought, and his traitorous cock throbbed at the memory of how Yuuki felt in his arms.

“Nope. Stop it. This is not happening,” Raegan muttered as he stripped out of his clothes and got in the shower.

He turned the cold water on and slid under the icy spray, hoping it would wilt his erection. He snagged the bar of soap and began washing. Unfortunately, as his hands moved over his body, his mind wandered, conjuring up images of Yuuki in the shower with him. He imagined it was Yuuki’s hands moving over him leaving trails of fire in their wake. Raegan tried to banish the thoughts, but they would not stop. His hand

trailed down to his still rock-hard dick just as imaginary Yuuki's hand did the same.

What the fuck am I doing? Am I really about to jerk off to thoughts of my best friend while he's just on the other side of the bathroom door? Raegan fisted his thick cock while the images in his mind continued to play. It wasn't the first time Raegan had done so. Yuuki was a gorgeous man, but he had never done it when he was feeling so emotionally confused. His aching prick reminded him there were more pressing matters to worry about, and he refocused on the fantasy.

"Do you like that, Rae-kun?" Imagi-Yuuki asked cutely in Japanese as he moved his hand in long, languid strokes.

Raegan leaned against the shower wall and shoved his fist into his mouth to stifle the moan that he couldn't hold back.

"Oh, I think he does." Imagi-Yuuki chuckled as he thumbed over Raegan's slit just the way he liked. *"You're going to love this then."*

As Imagi-Yuuki slipped down onto his knees, Raegan felt his orgasm barrel through him like a bullet train. He came harder than he could ever remember and bit into his hand to muffle his howl of ecstasy. Slumped against the shower wall, Raegan shivered from more than the cold of the water as he rode out his release.

As his prick softened and the haze of his climax cleared, the reality of what he had just done hit Rae square in the chest. He hadn't come that embarrassingly fast since he was a pre-teen. He had never come that hard when he fantasized about Yuuki

before. What had been different this time? And where was this odd feeling of warmth and contentment coming from?

“Rae? You okay in there?” Yuuki’s voice cut through the quagmire of Raegan’s thoughts, pulling him free.

“Yeah. I’ll be out in a sec,” Raegan called back as he rinsed himself and turned off the water.

Stepping out of the shower, he grabbed a towel and started rubbing himself dry. His eyes found his reflection in the mirror and as he met his own gaze, he realized what had caused that weird feeling.

Holy shit! I’m in love with Yuuki.

Chapter 11

Raegan

“**T**hat was so good. Nowhere near as good as your cooking, but still good.” Yuuki patted his belly as they walked out of the restaurant.

“Yeah, it was nice,” Raegan responded distractedly.

Raegan hadn't tasted the food. Ever since his revelation earlier about his feelings for Yuuki, he had been drifting in a haze. His mind was a whirlwind of thoughts that moved so fast he had no time to sort through them. How had he never noticed that he was in love? When had he fallen for Yuuki? Was it a new feeling, or had he been in love since they met? What did he do now? At the eye of the cyclone was the simple fact that he loved Yuuki. That love filled him with a sense of rightness and joy that Raegan wanted to hold on to forever. Yet, just at the edge of those warm feelings was the icy grip of fear.

He had seen it repeatedly where friends crossed that line into romantic relationships and then, when it all imploded, that friendship was irrevocably damaged. He would rather die than lose Yuuki, but his heart had now entered the equation.

What was he going to do? Did he just confess and pray that things worked out? Did he bury this feeling, hoping it would wither away and things would go back to how they had always been? Even as he thought that, he knew they could never go back to how they were. Not after the kisses they had shared. The idea of never being able to kiss Yuuki again but to have him so close sounded like the worst kind of torture.

Raegan grunted in surprise as he slammed into something. While he had been so caught up in his head, Yuuki had stopped at a crosswalk and was now about to stumble forward into traffic because of Raegan's absentmindedness. Raegan's arms shot out and wrapped around Yuuki, stopping his fall. Rae pulled Yuuki back and held him tight to his chest as cars sped past them.

"You okay, Sugar?" Raegan looked down at Yuuki, his heart racing with worry.

"I'm good, but what's with you? You've been acting like a zombie since we left the hotel. I thought it was from being hungover and hungry, but now I'm worried." Yuuki looked up at Rae with concern etched all over his face.

"Sorry." With great reluctance Raegan released his hold on Yuuki and took a step back. "I've just got some things on my mind."

"Is it about this fake marriage? Because if it is, we can call the whole thing off. I don't want to do anything to upset you."

Raegan's heart swelled with adoration. Yuuki always thought of others, even at the expense of himself. He had such

a loving heart. That just made Raegan love him more.

Loving? Could it be possible that Yuuki returned his feelings? Was there a way for him to find out without jeopardizing their friendship? That was when it hit Raegan. Their marriage! If they were going to convince people they were crazy about each other, then they needed to do things like go on dates and be more physical with each other than they already were. They basically needed to be in a genuine relationship to make their fake one convincing. Through that, Raegan could woo Yuuki and get his best friend to fall in love with him for real. It was a good idea, and if things didn't work out, they could stick to their original plan of calling it all off in a few months. It wasn't a perfect plan for sure. At best, Raegan gained the love of his life, and at worst, he lost his best friend forever. He had to take the chance, though. Yuuki was worth it.

“Hey, Yuu. Let's go on a date.”

Yuuki's eyes widened at Raegan's abrupt change in subject, and Raegan found it adorable.

“A date? Where did that come from?” Yuuki asked, with a perplexed look.

“Well, we're supposed to be a couple, right? What better way to practice being a couple than going on a date?” Raegan mentally patted himself on the back for his brilliant plan.

The light for the crosswalk changed, and Raegan slipped his hand into Yuuki's as they crossed the street.

“Is that why you were all twisted up? You were thinking of how to make this look real?” Yuuki lifted their conjoined hands for emphasis.

“Yeah, mostly. You gotta fake it till you make it, right? Plus, we can get some selfies to post and tick your dad off.”

Raegan turned a reassuring smile on Yuuki to help ease the lingering concern in his voice. Yuuki eyed him with suspicion for a moment before a sneaky smile turned up the corners of his lips.

“So if this is a date does that mean you’re paying for everything and will get me anything I want? You gonna be my Sugar daddy?”

Yuuki batted his eyes, making Raegan want to do just as he said.

“I thought you didn’t want to be a kept man.” Raegan laughed at Yuuki’s antics.

“That’s right, but being spoiled is completely different. Come on, Rae-kun. Spoil me. I’ve been such a good boy.” Yuuki wrapped himself around Raegan’s arm and gave him the most sinful, innocent pleading look that Raegan had ever seen.

SO CUTE!!! And damn him for using kun with my name. He knows I can’t resist him when he does that, Raegan thought as he looked into those beautiful brown eyes.

“Okay. You can have one treat while we’re on our date, but I reserve the right to veto whatever you pick. I’m not going bankrupt for you.”

“Deal.” Yuuki wiggled against Raegan’s side in a way that had Rae’s dick giving an appreciative twitch.

“All right then. If I remember correctly, you had an entire list of things you wanted to see. So where do you want to start, or would you rather I pick?”

“You’re paying for everything and you’re letting me make all the choices? Oh, I am so going to enjoy being fake married to you. You’re the best husband ever.”

You know it, Sugar. I’m going to wine and dine you so good that there’s no way you won’t be falling head over heels for me.

Chapter 12

Yuuki

This has been the best day ever! Yuuki thought as he walked into their hotel room carrying the bags of gifts Raegan had bought him, as well as the souvenirs they had gotten for Raegan's family. Yuuki couldn't remember the last time he had so much fun on a date. They had gone to every sightseeing spot that Yuuki had found in Raegan's book and even found some things along the way. The slide through the giant aquarium was breathtaking, and Yuuki knew he would never forget this day as long as he lived. The fact that he had shared it all with Rae was a bonus.

He set the bags down on the bed and started digging through them to find the gift that Rae had bought him. It was buried beneath the bag of novelty T-shirts. He pulled the velvet box out of the bag and snapped it open. Inside was an engraved silver rectangular pendant on a matching braided chain. Yuuki had been drawn to the specialty jeweler's display window by some unknown force, and when he had seen the necklace, he had known it was the gift he wanted.

Yuuki lovingly trailed his finger over the characters that formed his and Raegan's names in Japanese. The necklace was gorgeous, and he vowed to wear it every day.

"You want me to put it on you?" Raegan came up behind Yuuki and placed his hands on Yuuki's shoulders.

"Yes, please." Yuuki smiled over his shoulder and held the box up for Raegan to take from him.

Raegan accepted it, and Yuuki turned his gaze to face forward. A moment later, the pendant appeared in his line of sight and descended to rest against his chest. He felt Raegan fiddle with the clasp before the weight of the chain settled on his neck.

"Silver looks great on you." Raegan's breath ghosted over the skin of Yuuki's neck, sending shivers of delight down his spine.

Yuuki gasped in surprise when Raegan kissed his neck just above the necklace. He turned to face Raegan and became entranced by the way Raegan stared at him. Raegan's eyes were so intense, and there was a fire in them that Yuuki had never seen before. Slowly, Raegan leaned into Yuuki, bringing their lips so close that their breaths mingled.

They jumped apart in shock when the silence of the room was broken by the sound of Dolly Parton singing her heart out. Yuuki clutched his hand over his chest as his heart raced. Whether that was from being startled by the ringtone or the kiss he had almost shared with Rae, he didn't know.

“That’s my mom. I’d better get it. I’ll put it on speaker so you can say hi.” Raegan sounded annoyed and disappointed as he pulled his phone from his back pocket.

Yuuki nodded, still reeling from the near kiss. The way Raegan had looked at him and then went to kiss him seemed a bit much for them practicing at being a couple. The hunger in his eyes had been so real.

“Hi, Mama,” Yuuki half heard Raegan say as his mind continued to whirl.

His thoughts were interrupted by the sound of Renata Dietrich’s angry voice filling the room as she shouted at her son.

“Raegan Joseph Dietrich! I’m going to tan your hide when you get back home! How dare you run off and elope! What were you thinking?”

“Yuuki and I hadn’t—” Raegan started but was cut off by his mother talking over him.

“And that’s another thing. How long have you and Yuuki been seeing each other? Every time I said you two made a cute couple, you insisted you were just friends. Did you think we wouldn’t approve? Is that why you’ve been sneaking around?”

“No, Mrs. Dietrich. That’s not it at all.” Yuuki interjected, coming to Raegan’s aid. They were in this together, so it wouldn’t be fair to let Mrs. Dietrich continue fussing at Raegan alone.

“Oh, Yuuki, darling. You’re there, too. Let me be the first to welcome you to the family, but don’t think I’m not upset with you, too. How could you let my naughty son talk you into eloping?” Mrs. Dietrich chastised, her voice full of sweet fondness. A stark contrast to how she had sounded only a moment ago.

Yuuki looked at Raegan and found his face drawn into an irritated scowl.

“He didn’t talk me into anything, Mrs. Dietrich.”

“Mama, Yuuki. Call me Mama. Oh, I’m just so thrilled to have you in the family. You’ve always been such a dear boy, and y’all are going to give me the prettiest grandbabies.”

“Babies!” Yuuki squeaked, reeling from the verbal roller coaster that Mrs. Dietrich had them on.

“Mama, stop. Yuuki looks like he is about to faint. We’ve only been together for a short while. You’re going to send him running for the hills.” Raegan slid a supportive arm around Yuuki, who was feeling quite off kilter.

“Oh, hush, Raegan. I’m not expecting y’all to have youngins right out the gate. Maybe in a year,” Mrs. Dietrich suggested.

“Mama,” Raegan warned with a hard edge to his voice.

“You are no fun, Raegan. Anyway, when y’all get back, you need to come to the farm for a family dinner so we can welcome Yuuki properly and plan your reception.”

“Reception?” Yuuki queried, feeling a tad nauseous as this conversation took yet another turn.

“Yes, sweetie. Since I was robbed of y’all having a ceremony, I am at least going to throw a big shindig for all your friends and family to come together to celebrate. Do you think your family will fly in from California, Yuuki?”

“Hey, Mama? We have to go. It’s time for us to meet the others,” Raegan interrupted, doing his best to bring the discussion to an end.

“Okay, boys. You go have fun, and we’ll talk more when you get back. Love you,” Mrs. Dietrich chirped happily.

Yuuki suddenly felt exhausted and slumped against Raegan. “What in the world was that?”

“That would be hurricane Renata.” Raegan slid his phone back into his pocket before wrapping his other arm around Yuuki.

“She was never that intense when we would visit before.” Yuuki buried his face in Raegan’s chest.

“Oh, she’s that way all the time. I just made it a point to keep you out of her path when we were visiting the farm. She’d have eaten you alive and had us married off to each other ages ago if I hadn’t shut her down.” Yuuki could hear the mix of exasperation and love in Raegan’s voice.

“I feel kind of bad that we’re lying to her. Did you hear how happy she was?” Yuuki looked back up at Rae with guilty eyes.

“Yeah, but it’s too late to turn back now. It will be okay, Sugar. Trust me.” Raegan reached up and gave Yuuki’s temple a reassuring caress. “Your hair is getting long on the sides. Remind me to trim it down for you when we get back home.”

“Okay.” Yuuki hid his smile by burying his face in Raegan’s chest again.

Yuuki adored his current hairstyle. The sides were cut close to his scalp, leaving the top longer. It showed off the waviness of his hair that he had inherited from his mom, and it had pissed off his dad. Raegan kept his own hair in a buzz cut and had decided that rather than spend money at a salon, he would take care of Yuuki’s hair as well. Yuuki loved when Raegan cut his hair, his thick fingers scratched at Yuuki’s scalp, his breath hot on Yuuki’s neck, his deep growl whispered in Yuuki’s ear—it was the sweetest torture.

Raegan’s hand came away from Yuuki’s head, and he took a step back, breaking their embrace. Yuuki felt bereft at the loss of contact but didn’t have time to dwell as Raegan reminded him they needed to get ready. While getting to hang out with May and her friends was sure to be a blast, Yuuki yearned to stay in with Raegan. They could cuddle up on the bed while they watched a movie as they often did at home, but as the scene played through Yuuki’s head, it took a decidedly spicy turn. An image of the two of them locked in a heated kiss, movie forgotten, writhing like a pair of teenagers, had color rising to Yuuki’s cheeks.

Get a hold of yourself, you perv. You're letting this whole fake marriage thing go to your head, he chastised himself because the dumbest thing he could do was believe any of this could be real.

Chapter 13

Raegan

“**M**an, it’s a good thing we decided not to drink last night. There’s no way we would have made this flight with a hangover.” Raegan settled into his seat after having stowed his and Yuuki’s bags in the overhead storage.

“Who decided that it was a good idea for us to fly out at eight in the morning, knowing that we were going to be out partying the night before?” Yuuki curled up in a ball like an angry cat.

“I vaguely remember past you making points about wanting to have time to decompress from the stress of flying and insisting on going to work on Monday,” Raegan teased as he reached out and ruffled Yuuki’s hair.

Yuuki batted Rae’s hand away and glared at him. “Past me was an idiotic dick.”

Raegan chuckled and lifted his arm to wrap around Yuuki, pulling him into his side. “Here, cranky. Snuggle up and snooze. I’ll wake you when the plane moves.”

Yuuki grinned up at him before burrowing into Raegan's side until he was comfortable. Moments later, the soft sound of Yuuki's snoring drifted up to Raegan's ears, and his heart somersaulted. They had been in this very position so many times that Raegan had long since lost count. Now though, it was more intimate and special. Raegan bent his head and placed a kiss on the crown of Yuuki's head and nuzzled his wavy locks.

"Aw... You two are so cute," a feminine voice whispered.

Raegan lifted and turned his head to find a flight attendant hovering near his seat.

"Um, thank you," Raegan replied, feeling a bit off-put that the young woman had interrupted his quiet moment.

"How long have you two been together?" Her shiny gold name tag said Kim.

Why was she standing here shooting the breeze with him? Didn't this girl have work to do?

"Since college." Raegan hoped that would be the end of the conversation. He wanted to get back to enjoying having his arms full of Yuuki.

"Oh, how sweet. And when did you get married?"

Oh, for fuck's sake, Raegan opened his mouth to give her a smart retort, but stopped when another flight attendant approached, looking as annoyed as he felt.

"Oops. Better get back to work. It was nice chatting with you." Kim waved before scurrying off under the stern gaze of

her co-worker.

Raegan was glad to be alone again so that he could snuggle Yuuki in peace. He fished out his phone and snapped a quick picture of them to use to upset Yuuki's father and then a second one of just Yuuki. That one he would save for just him. It was funny. Just a day ago, he would have been all flustered and insistent that he and Yuu were exceptionally close friends. Now though, he would never deny that assumption again. All he had to do to make that stick was to charm the pants off his best friend. Piece of cake. He hoped.

Chapter 14

Yuuki

Something had changed about Rae but Yuuki, for the life of him, couldn't put a finger on what it was. Ever since they got back from Vegas, he had been downright charming. Raegan was always thoughtful, but now he catered to every one of Yuuki's wants and needs. If Yuuki mentioned that he wanted something mango-flavored for dinner, Raegan would have a mango chutney ready for him when he got home. If his feet ached, Raegan would rub them. It wasn't just that. Raegan was also way more tactile than he had been. Kisses being his favorite form of affection. Raegan couldn't walk past Yuuki without placing a kiss on him somewhere—his neck, the top of his head, his cheek or forehead—all got treated to being touched by those luscious lips.

And when Raegan had trimmed Yuuki's hair. *Holy shit.* It had been one of the most sensual experiences Yuuki had ever felt. Raegan had touched and cared for him as if he were about to make sweet slow love to him. When Yuuki had made the excuse of needing to wash the stray hairs off himself he had in actuality needed to go jerk off or die from exsanguination. Yuuki couldn't understand how the fuck any of the people

Raegan had dated could walk away from the world's most perfect man.

He had to remind himself though that this was supposed to all be pretend. Raegan did nothing half-assed. A boy could wish, though. Yuuki sighed as he imagined himself and Rae being real.

"I'm going to tie a lead weight to your feet if you sigh all moony like that one more time. You're liable to float away at this rate," Dallas teased, snapping Yuuki out of his daydream.

"I haven't been sighing that much," Yuuki grumbled as he went back to piping the pearl border on his last cake of the day.

"Dude, do you want to see my icing tally sheet? I've been keeping count, and it's a lot." Dallas gestured to the parchment paper sitting beside the cake he was working on.

"You're one to talk. You get all bouncy when your Daddy comes to pick you up," Yuuki shot back, and a victorious smile curled his lips when color rose in Dallas's cheeks.

Dallas returned to working on his cake, and Yuuki felt a little bad. Dallas was a very private person, and sometimes, their friendly teasing hit a nerve. Yuuki set down his piping bag and went over to his friend.

"Hey, Dallas." Yuuki placed a comforting hand on the other man's shoulder. "I'm just teasing, but if I crossed a line, I'm sorry."

Dallas looked up from his work and gave Yuuki a lopsided smile.

“It’s all right, Yuuki. We’re good.”

Yuuki could see an indecipherable emotion hiding in Dallas’s eyes, but he chose not to press. He hoped that someday Dallas would open up and be free of whatever specters held him back from being his authentic self. Until then, Yuuki would support his friend as best he could. Yuuki patted Dallas’s shoulder and returned to his work. A short while later his work was finished, and he was on his way home.

When he walked into his apartment, it surprised him that he hadn’t been bombarded by a wave of delectable smells. He removed his shoes and stowed his bag in the closet before wandering into the kitchen. When he didn’t find Raegan at the stove, he became a bit concerned. Yuuki made his way to Raegan’s bedroom and, finding the door open, walked right in. He came to an abrupt stop just inside the door when he was treated to the sight of a bare-chested Raegan pulling on a nice heather gray polo.

“Oh, hey, Sugar. I didn’t hear you come in.” Raegan smiled as he tugged his shirt down.

“Huh? Oh, yeah. I just got home, and when I didn’t find you in the kitchen, I went looking, thinking something happened to you.” Yuuki shook himself out of the fog he had been in.

“Ha ha. You’re a funny guy. You know I do things other than cook, right?” Raegan rolled his eyes as he started toward

Yuuki.

“Lies!” Yuuki declared with a smirk as he stepped backward out of Raegan’s room. “So why are you all dressed up?”

Raegan’s grin turned charming as he took hold of Yuuki’s hand, halting his steps, and placed a kiss on his knuckles. “Well, Sugar, I was planning on asking you out on a date.”

Yuuki felt heat rise to his cheeks, and his heart stuttered. Fuck, Rae was behaving sexy as sin. “Uh, sure. A date sounds good.”

“Excellent.” Raegan stepped into Yuuki and placed a quick kiss on his lips. “Hurry and freshen up so we can get going.”

Yuuki gave a quick nod before bolting to his room. Once in the safety of his own space, Yuuki leaned back against his closed door and traced the tips of his fingers over his tingling lips. He would never survive this whole fake marriage thing if Raegan kept doing things like that. Not that Yuuki hated any of it, but it hurt every time Yuuki remembered it wasn’t real.

Funny how my fake relationship is so much more amazing than my actual one had been, Yuuki thought as he pushed away from the door and went into the bathroom to take a quick shower. Ever since Vegas, Yuuki had been going over his and Ken’s relationship with a fine-tooth comb. And the more that he did, he found that what they had was more of a lie than his marriage to Raegan.

When Yuuki would visit California, Ken always had some excuse for why they couldn’t see each other outside of Ken’s

apartment. That had to have been so that no one Ken knew would see them together. When Ken came to Raleigh, they went out all the time, but Ken never let Yuuki take any pictures of them together. Yuuki could see now that he had been the clueless side piece for the past three years and that made him the angriest.

Well, it was all over, and Yuuki was going to stop looking back. Tonight, he would enjoy his date with Raegan, and when they stopped pretending to be married, he would find someone worthy of his time. Yuuki finished his shower and found an outfit similar to Raegan's to wear.

When he came out of his room, he found Raegan waiting in the foyer. Raegan's eyes landed on Yuuki, and he gave a long, low whistle.

"Damn, Yuu. You look gorgeous." Raegan's eyes roamed over Yuuki like a caress.

Yuuki shuddered and his cock gave an appreciative twitch at Raegan's blatant ogling.

"Thanks," Yuuki's voice came out huskier sounding than normal.

Raegan smirked and held his crooked arm out toward Yuuki. "Shall we then?"

"Oh, so chivalrous," Yuuki joked as he slipped his arm into Raegan's. Together, they left the apartment, climbed into Raegan's truck, and headed off to their unknown destination. "So where are you taking me? If it's La Villa, I am going to

punch you,” Yuuki said after they had been driving for a little while.

Raegan laughed as he brought the car to a stop at a red light. “No, Sugar. You know nothing at La Villa is good unless I make it.” Raegan winked at Yuuki, making his tummy do a backflip. “No, I’m taking you to a new fusion restaurant that just opened.”

“Ooo, fancy. What kind of fusion?” Yuuki leaned into Rae, partly out of curiosity and partly as an excuse to be closer to him.

“You’ll just have to wait and see.” Raegan stole a quick kiss as the light turned green and they started rolling again.

Yuuki suppressed the dreamy sigh that threatened to escape him as he settled back into his seat. He felt his phone vibrate in his pocket and pulled it out. When he looked at the screen, he saw it was a text from an unknown number. He opened the message and frowned as he read it. Ken, it seemed, was none too pleased at being blocked and demanded that Yuuki contact him. Yuuki rolled his eyes and blocked this new number. What part of they were over had Ken not understood? Asshole.

“Everything, okay?” Raegan asked, concern clear in his voice.

“Yeah. Just a spoof text.” Yuuki slid his phone back into his pocket.

He didn’t need to bother Raegan with Ken being a dick and ruin their date. Raegan was already in this mess far deeper

than Yuuki liked. A few harassing messages from his father and Ken were nothing Raegan needed to concern himself with. Yuuki could handle things with his father and ex on his own.

“Ugh, I hate those things.” Raegan turned the wheel, and they pulled into the parking lot of a restaurant called *Have a Rice Day*.

Yuuki snickered at the name, but at least now he had some idea of what they would be eating. Raegan parked the car, and Yuuki reached to undo his seat belt but stopped when Raegan placed his hand on Yuuki’s.

“Wait there.” Raegan held his hand up in a stay gesture.

Yuuki arched his brow curiously but nodded his consent. A tiny smile turned up Rae’s lips as he climbed out of the car and jogged over to Yuuki’s door. Yuuki watched him pull it open and sat still as Reagan reached across him to unfasten his belt. Stepping back, Raegan offered his hand to Yuuki. Yuuki didn’t need help to get out of the car, but there was something so sweet in Raegan’s behavior that he slid his hand into Raegan’s without a second thought.

Once Yuuki was out of the car, Raegan tucked Yuuki’s hand into his elbow and locked the car. Arm in arm, they walked up to the entrance where a crowd of people stood waiting.

“Rae, the wait looks like it’s a long one. We can go somewhere else. I don’t mind,” Yuuki offered when they paused for Raegan to open the door.

Raegan unhooked their arms, shooting a confident wink at Yuuki, and opened the door, gesturing for Yuuki to enter first. Once inside, Raegan re-linked their arms, and they strode up to the hostess.

“Welcome to Have a Rice Day, gentlemen. How may I help you?”

“I have a reservation for two under the name Dietrich.” Raegan gave the young woman a kind smile.

The hostess nodded and scanned something on her podium. Having found what she was looking for she picked up two menus and returned her gaze to Raegan. “Right this way.”

They fell into step behind her as she led them to a cozy table for two by a window with a view of the vegetable garden outside. The hostess left their menus on the table and let them know their server would be by soon before walking away.

“This is lovely, Rae. How did you get a reservation?”

“I’m acquainted with one of the chefs, and they did me a favor.”

Their server appeared at that moment and asked for their drink order.

“What do you think, Sugar? Want some wine?”

Yuuki knew nothing about wine other than he liked to drink it. Whenever the mood struck them to have wine, Yuuki always let Raegan pick since he had taken an actual class on choosing and pairing wines.

“Sure thing. You pick.”

“We’ll have a bottle of white, please.” Rae pointed to something on the menu he had picked out.

Their server nodded and strode off. Yuuki picked up his own menu and started scanning their options. “This Thai red curry risotto sounds interesting.” Yuuki’s mouth watered as he read the dish’s description.

“It does. Is that what you want to have?” Raegan asked as Yuuki continued to glance over what was on order.

Yuuki looked up to respond but stopped when he found Raegan wasn’t looking at the menu. His gray eyes were focused on Yuuki, and there was a hungry glint in them.

Yuuki’s stomach quivered, and his heart rate sped up.

Damn it, Rae. Don’t look at me like that when this isn’t real. Cause if you keep this up, I’m going to start falling for you, Yuuki thought as his chest twisted in confusion. He needed to get them back to familiar ground fast.

“Um, yeah.” Yuuki cleared his throat and willed himself not to blush. “So this is going to make a nice first date story for when we go see your family for dinner. Got to keep up pretenses, right? Oh, we should take a picture for evidence.”

Raegan startled at Yuuki’s words, and his gaze drifted to the menu he still held. “Yeah, right.” Raegan’s tone became more subdued than it had been only a moment ago.

Yuuki leaned closer to Raegan and held up his phone. Raegan wrapped his arm around Yuuki and leaned in so their

cheeks touched.

“Say cheese.” Yuuki snapped several pictures. Raegan released Yuuki and went back to looking at the menu.

The sudden change in Raegan confused Yuuki. Why did he sound so down? Should they not be concocting stories and taking pictures to share with his family to bolster this whole illusion of a grand romance they were playing at? Was the guilt of lying getting to Raegan?

Yuuki looked at the pictures he’d taken, and while they looked like a happy couple, Yuuki could see something sad in Raegan’s eyes. Yuuki opened his mouth to ask Raegan what was wrong but was cut off by the arrival of their server.

“Your wine, gentleman.” The server poured them each a glass before setting the bottle on the table. “Are you ready to order?”

Yuuki watched as Raegan picked up his glass, giving the liquid a little swirl, before taking a sip. Yuuki enjoyed watching Raegan when he acted as their sommelier. Like everything else he did, he put his full attention into it, and it made him look like the world’s foremost authority on wine.

“Excellent stuff. It should complement our meal nicely.” Raegan turned his attention to the server. “We would both like to have the Thai red curry risotto, please.”

“Excellent choice.” The server jotted down their order before gathering their menus and walking off.

Silence fell over their table, and it surprised Yuuki how awkward it felt. He and Rae never had awkward silences. What the hell was going on?

“This place is nice, but I still prefer catering.” Raegan broke the silence, and Yuuki suppressed a relieved sigh.

“Oh, and why is that?” Yuuki asked. He already knew why, but he didn’t want to drift back into that weird quiet again.

“They’re going to be stuck with a set menu and occasionally they are going to do something new. With catering, depending on the clients, I’ll get to do something new all the time.”

Raegan’s eyes lit up as he spoke, and it warmed Yuuki’s heart. He loved the passion that Raegan had for food and getting to do new things with it. It reminded Yuuki of his own love for cake decorating. At one time, Yuuki had dreamed of having his own bakery and getting to make all kinds of amazing cakes. Sadly, he had found during his business classes at school he didn’t have the head for owning a business. He was an artist, not an accountant. Which is why he had ended up working for Arturo.

“I’ve been thinking a lot here recently about looking into opening my own catering business,” Rae sighed, his eyes full of sadness. “But then I think about the start-up capital and the business part. All that money and paperwork gives me hives.”

“I know what you mean. I’d love to have my own bakery to do what I want, but I’d probably be bankrupt in three months.” Yuuki chuckled and reached out to place his hand on top of Raegan’s. Raegan turned his hand over and held Yuuki’s as if

it were made of porcelain. He looked up and locked eyes with Yuuki.

“If I opened my own place, I’d want you to come work with me. I’d let you have free rein over all things pastry.”

Yuuki’s heart did an entire gymnastics routine worthy of an Olympic gold medal. He knew Raegan meant every word he said and that long sleeping dream of Yuuki’s youth stirred from its slumber. To have his own kitchen, being in charge of what cakes they made, and getting to work with Rae. What more could a man ask for?

“That would be amazing, Rae. You know I’d have to bring Dallas with me. I couldn’t leave him at Sugar and Spice. There would be a homicide, and Dallas is too pretty for prison.”

“Of course, Dallas would come, too. We gotta look out for that little boy.” Raegan put a world of meaning in his words.

Raegan could spot a sub a mile away, and the dominant in him must have seen some things in Dallas for him to feel so confident in declaring him a little. That was another thing that Yuuki admired about Raegan. He was an observant and caring Dom which Yuuki hoped he could find in a partner so that he could explore his kinky side. Maybe he could ask Rae to be his partner? It made sense for him to ask since they were supposed to be in a relationship.

Yuuki would need time to mull over that question, but at that moment, their food arrived to distract him. Once the server departed, they tucked into their meal, bringing back that comfortable silence that Yuuki was used to. Yet in the back of

his mind, Yuuki was burning with the desire to ask Raegan to be his guide in exploring his kinks. Hiding behind that want was another thought. One that had Yuuki realizing that he may be halfway in love with Raegan, and that sent a jolt of fear through his heart. He was playing a dangerous game, but he couldn't back out now.

Chapter 15

Raegan

Raegan brought his mallet down hard enough to make his cutting board bounce and clatter on the countertop. He was certain that he had pulverized the boneless pork chop he was flattening to make pork cutlets. Regardless, he gave the meat another satisfying smack. His day had been an utter shit show and taking his frustration out on what was supposed to be his and Yuuki's dinner wasn't helping his mood as much as he had hoped it would.

The new guy that Ted had hired to replace Betha was all thumbs and shouldn't be allowed anywhere near a kitchen. The kid, Ricky, had let slip that he was Alfredo's nephew and his parents had forced him into the job. That information already had Raegan's hackles up, since Ted had saddled him with the kid out of spite. It hadn't taken rocket science to figure out who had helped Betha escape Ted's clutches and the man had now put a target on Raegan's back. So Raegan had found himself with a less than willing kitchen assistant. Raegan knew from experience that if a person didn't want to be in the kitchen, their work would be sloppy, and Raegan had been proven right at every turn that day.

Every time Raegan turned around, Ricky was on his phone or standing around looking lost even though Raegan had given him explicit instructions on what he needed to be doing. The crowning fuck up was when he had asked Ricky to put the warming tray of brisket and coleslaw sliders Raegan had spent so much time making on the rack with the other items for the event they were going to. Ricky had snatched the tray up with a huff but hadn't had a good hold on it. The food ended up all over the floor, and Raegan thought he was going to bust a vein in his head that would cause an aneurysm.

Raegan didn't often lose his temper but that had been the final straw. He gave Ricky the dressing down of his life to the point that the kid had been about to cry. Raegan had felt bad about that afterward but there wasn't much he could do about it. He had then marched Ricky to Ted's office and left him there for Ted to deal with as he now had an entire tray of sliders to redo. Everyone had given Raegan a wide berth the rest of the day. The only one brave enough to approach Raegan was Chris and even he had looked scared when he offered to lend Raegan a hand.

Raegan accepted the help with as much kindness as he could muster, given his black humor. Between them, they got the order to put together and sent off in the nick of time. Chris then hustled back to his station like his ass was on fire. That was fine with Raegan. He only had a few things to do before going home.

Unfortunately, karma was out for Raegan that day as on his way home he got rear-ended by a teenage girl out joyriding

with her friends at a red light. The girl had barely tapped him, and their cars had only swapped some paint. Raegan would have just let it go and been on his merry way. The girl, however, had been in complete hysterics and one of her oh-so-helpful friends had already called the cops. So Raegan had been stuck there waiting thirty minutes for a cop to show up to take their statements. Another thirty minutes later, the cop declared it the girl's fault, and Raegan was free to go.

By the time Raegan had gotten home, he had been over the day and had decided that he would work out his issues by cooking. Sadly, that didn't seem to do the job. Raegan was still antsy, and he knew what he wanted to do to work out that nervous energy. A trip to Icons was just what he needed, but there was one other thing he wanted to make the night perfect.

"I'm home." Yuuki's voice rang throughout the apartment, and Raegan's heart did a triple somersault.

"Welcome home." Raegan set aside his mallet and wiped his hands on a dish towel. He strode over to the foyer where he found Yuuki hanging up his baker's kit. He walked right up behind Yuuki and wrapped him in a bear hug from behind. Raegan pressed his face into the crook of Yuuki's neck and breathed in the scent of icing and cake that always lingered on Yuuki's skin. Beneath all that sweetness was a spicy aroma that was all Yuuki. The familiar comforting smell was like a balm, and Raegan could feel his bad mood dissipate a little.

Yuuki's hands came up to rest on Raegan's forearms, and he rubbed his cheek against Raegan's temple. "What's wrong,

Bae?”

Raegan sighed and tightened his hold on Yuuki. “I had a real shit day at work, and I may have beaten our dinner to a pulp.”

Yuuki gave Raegan’s arm a sympathetic pat. “I’m sorry, Bae. You wanna talk about it while we see if we can save dinner?”

How is he this perfect? I couldn’t have fallen in love with a better man, Raegan thought as he released his hold on Yuuki and turned him so they were facing each other.

“Not really.” Raegan put his hands on Yuuki’s arms and stroked up and down their length. “How about you tell me about your day while I see what I can do about dinner?”

Yuuki grinned and lifted his hand to place it over Raegan’s heart. “I can do that.”

A grateful smile curled Raegan’s lips as they made their way to the kitchen. Raegan went back to his spot on the island and sighed over the decimated pork.

“You weren’t kidding about pulverizing dinner.” Yuuki gave the paper-thin slice of meat a dubious look as he slid onto a barstool.

Raegan shrugged as he racked his brain for some inspiration. “So how was your day?”

“Pretty good. Betha has been such a big help, and Dallas has been opening up ever since he moved in with that sexy, silver

fox.” Yuuki pretended to swoon while fanning himself pulling a laugh from Raegan.

“That’s good. The boy needed someone to get him out of his shell.” Inspiration finally struck, and Raegan went to the refrigerator.

Yuuki hummed in agreement. “So you feeling better?”

“Yeah.” Raegan paused and pulled in a deep breath. “But what would really cheer me up is if you would come to Icons with me.” Raegan turned to face Yuuki.

Yuuki’s eyes had blown to the size of saucers, and Raegan worried that he may have crossed a line. Maybe Raegan had read things wrong whenever Yuuki let him practice his knots on him? Could it be that he was okay with doing things in private but going to the club was too much?

Raegan opened his mouth to take back his offer but stopped when Yuuki’s face split into a broad overjoyed smile.

“Hell, yeah, I’ll go to Icons with you. When do we leave? What should I wear?” Yuuki shot up onto the balls of his feet and wrapped his arms around Raegan’s neck in a hug. “I’ve been dying for you to ask me to go to Icons. Thank you, Rae.”

“You’re welcome, Sugar.” Raegan was a bit stunned by Yuuki’s reaction.

Yuuki released his hold on Raegan and bounded toward his room. “Forget making dinner. Let’s just grab something on the way. I’m going to go take a shower and get ready.”

Yuuki disappeared into his bedroom leaving Raegan standing there stupefied.

Huh? Well that was a lot easier than I thought it would be. Better go put the food away and get ready myself, Raegan thought as he turned back to the kitchen with a little skip in his step. His dark mood was forgotten in the face of enjoying a night at the kink club with the man he loved.

Chapter 16

Raegan

Raegan breathed in the evening air, letting out a contented sigh as he and Yuuki approached the club arm in arm. They'd had to park down the block as the club's lot was packed. There must have been an event going on that night, which made Raegan even more glad they had gone out. Watching a demo would help him gauge just how into kink Yuuki might be. He had found that he could learn a lot about someone by seeing how they reacted to a live demonstration.

Raegan held the door open for Yuuki, and he followed him into the club antechamber. They checked in with the receptionist, and a few moments later, they walked into the club. It had been a little while since Raegan had been to Icons, so he stopped for a moment to familiarize himself with the room, finding that nothing had changed.

“Where do those stairs next to the bar lead?” Yuuki asked, pulling Raegan's attention to the left side of the room.

Raegan couldn't stop the smirk that curled his lips as he leaned in close to Yuuki's ear.

“That leads up to the private rooms for more intimate play.”

Even in the dim light, Raegan could see a touch of color rise to the tips of Yuuki's ears, and he chuckled at how adorable that was.

"Have..." Yuuki squeaked before clearing his throat. "Have you ever been up there?"

Raegan's smile turned wolfish, and he traced the tip of his nose along the shell of Yuuki's ear. "A time or two. Why? Does it make you jealous?"

Raegan would never know Yuuki's answer as at that moment he heard someone call his name. Raegan suppressed a growl as he ripped his attention away from Yuuki to set unhappy eyes on whoever was intruding on his evening.

"Oh, what a scary face." A man dressed in a black corset and matching mini skirt said as he sauntered up to Raegan and Yuuki, which was impressive seeing as he was wearing six-inch spiked heels.

"Hello, Britt. Long time, no see." Raegan did his best to sound friendly even though he was irritated. Britt was another Dom that Raegan was acquainted with but hadn't seen in a while, so he didn't want to come across as an ass.

"It has." Britt came to a stop in front of them and turned his kohl-lined eyes on Yuuki. "And who is this?"

Raegan didn't care for the appraising look that Britt was giving Yuuki.

"Yuuki Nakatani. It's nice to meet you." Yuuki extended his hand.

“Britt Ivarsson. It’s a pleasure.” Britt slipped his hand into Yuuki’s, the lights gleaming off his blood-red nails. “And who are you to Rae? It’s been some time since I’ve seen him with a partner.”

As Yuuki and Britt released each other’s hands Raegan wrapped a possessive arm around Yuuki pulling him in close to his side.

“He’s my husband.” Raegan’s words carried a slight warning growl in it.

Britt chuckled and lifted his hands in a placating gesture.

“Down, boy. You know my tastes run distinctly toward macho Latin men who need breaking.” Britt winked at Raegan. “Congrats by the way, you two. You make a lovely couple.”

“Thank you.” Yuuki’s tone was friendly, but Raegan could hear the underlying irritation. He was going to get an ear full once Britt left.

“Most welcome, cutie. I’ll let you two get back to your evening while I see if there are any boys who need to be told what nasty sluts they are.” Britt gave a little wave before striding off.

As soon as Britt was far enough away, Yuuki rounded on Raegan and punched him in the shoulder.

“Hey.” Raegan rubbed at his shoulder even though it didn’t hurt.

“If you’re going to be acting like a neanderthal, then we can just go back home.” Yuuki crossed his arms over his chest and gave Rae an annoyed glare.

Raegan glared back for a moment before sighing in defeat and casting his eyes to the ground. It was unusual for him to behave like such a possessive alpha asshole, but when Britt had run his hungry eyes over Yuuki, something primal in Raegan had sparked to life. Raegan wasn’t ashamed of wanting to stake his claim, but he knew Yuuki didn’t appreciate being treated like property. Ken had done that shit, and Raegan needed to be better than that douche canoe.

“Sorry, Sugar. I’m not sure what came over me.”

Yuuki’s posture relaxed, and he uncrossed his arms. He reached up and put his hand on the spot he’d hit, rubbing it soothingly. “It’s okay. Just try not to do it again. I’m sorry for punching you.”

“It’s all good. I barely felt it with those noodle arms of yours,” Reagan teased, showing that things were good between them.

“Excuse me? Noodle arms? Do you know how much of a workout I get kneading fondant?” Yuuki shot back with laughter in his voice.

“Not as good of one as you’d get if you’d come to the gym with me.” Raegan flexed his biceps, stretching the sleeve of his shirt to the point it was in danger of ripping.

“Ugh, no, thank you. If I’m getting all sweaty and grunting, it had better because someone is wrecking my hole. Not me lifting dumbbells until my arms feel like they are going to fall off.” Yuuki made a disgusted face.

An unbidden image of Yuuki tied up in a rope harness with his chest pressed to the bed and his ass in the air while Raegan pounded into him came to Raegan’s mind. He swallowed a groan as his pants got uncomfortable.

Fuck! I can’t pop a boner in the middle of the club. I need a distraction, Raegan thought as he tried to convince his dick to cool it.

“Patrons. Please direct your attention to the demo stage. Our presentation on sensation play is about to begin,” the DJ announced over the sound system, and Raegan cursed under his breath.

A sexy demo wasn’t going to help him get his arousal under control at all. Yuuki grabbed Raegan’s hand and started tugging on it excitedly, pulling Rae’s attention away from his trouser issue. “Come on, Rae. I wanna get good seats to watch.”

Raegan allowed himself to be pulled along as Yuuki led them to a spot right in front of the stage. There was only one spot left on the couch and Raegan was about to offer to sit on the floor when Yuuki pushed him. Taken by surprise, Raegan plopped onto the seat, and before he had time to recover, Yuuki sat himself on Raegan’s lap.

“Got yourself a handful there, don’t ya.” The plus-size guy with glasses sitting next to them chuckled.

“Uh, yeah,” Raegan replied, forcing a kind smile to his lips.

The other man nodded and gave Raegan a playful wink before turning his attention back to the stage.

Oh, Fuck. My. Life, Raegan despaired as Yuuki started wiggling around on Raegan’s lap until he was comfortable, sitting sideways on Raegan and wrapped his arm around Raegan’s shoulders.

“There we go. Best seat in the house.” Yuuki’s attention was focused on the stage where the demonstrators were finishing setting up.

“Um, Yuu. I would have been fine sitting on the floor.” Raegan started but Yuuki turned on him with an exasperated glare.

“This is fine, and we can both be comfortable. Now hush so I can pay attention.”

Yuuki turned his gaze back to the stage, and Raegan resigned himself to his fate.

Think unsexy thoughts, Rae, Raegan tried to pull up images that would distract him from the fact that Yuuki’s delectable little ass was planted over his dick. His treacherous dick had taken notice of the situation and was starting to chub up.

Down you idiotic bastard, Raegan scolded his cock, which wasn’t helping him to clear his mind. Maybe if he switched tactics? Instead of trying not to think of Yuuki he could focus

on him and his reaction to the demonstration. Yeah, that sounded like a good plan. Flip the script to be analytical. That should kill the semi he was sporting.

Raegan drew a calming breath in and settled his gaze on Yuuki's face as the presenter started into their spiel about consent and hygiene. Yuuki was hanging on every word. Drinking it in like this was the most important thing he would hear in his life. It was the same kind of focus he would get when he was decorating intricate patterns on a cake. Raegan had watched Yuuki when he was like this more than once, and every time, he found himself entranced. There was something so beautiful and strong about Yuuki in those moments that Rae couldn't look away. It sort of reminded Raegan of a ballet dancer. The dancers had such delicate frames, yet they did such impossible things with their bodies that created a breathtaking vision.

The presenter had moved on to the demonstration part of the program, and Raegan could feel Yuuki go taut as a bow string. Raegan split his attention to see what was happening on stage. The presenter, an older man dressed in leather pants and a chest harness, had donned mitts, one made of fluffy material and one that had a rough texture to it. He started alternating using them on the female submissive, garbed in only her undergarments, who lay on a massage table in front of him. Pretty tame stuff for sensation play. Raegan's eyes went to the table off to the side that had many toys on it. Vibrowand, shock wand, and then he saw the candles. Raegan hadn't done

much wax play, but the times he had, the subs he'd been with seemed to enjoy the fuck out of it.

The presenter set the mitts aside and picked up a candle along with a lighter. Raegan felt a shudder go through Yuuki, and he turned his attention back to the man in his lap. Yuuki's eyes were hooded with desire, and his lips were parted. Still, Raegan could hear the little needy pants coming from Yuuki.

Interesting, Raegan thought as he kept one eye on Yuuki and the other on the demo. The Dom had lit the candle and was preparing to drip it on the sub as he spoke about different types of wax and safety. The first drop of wax fell from the candle, and when it hit the sub's skin, she hissed in pleased pain. A whimper of desire came from Yuuki and went straight to Raegan's balls.

Fuck, he had never heard anything so hot in his life. The demonstration went on with the sub getting more vocal with each drop of wax. Yuuki was squirming and making all manner of lusty noises, his eyes never once straying from the sub. Raegan by this point had long given up on reigning in his dick, which was now hard as diamonds and painfully pressed against his zipper. Raegan barely noticed though as his gaze was riveted to the beautiful sight in his lap.

Yuuki's skin was aglow from his yearning, and his pupils were blown wide, eclipsing his irises. The hand that had been resting on Raegan's shoulder now clutched his shirt like a lifeline while the other hand was pressed to his groin. Yuuki's

hips had started rocking about halfway through the demo and had picked up pace as things had gone on.

The cries of the sub stopped, and the spell they had been under evaporated. Raegan glanced to the stage and saw the Dom was checking in with the sub before they continued. She looked blissed out of her mind but not in distress. Raegan turned his attention back to Yuuki and was disappointed to find the beautiful glow of lust gone.

“Wow. That was something, wasn’t it?” Yuuki turned an awkward smile on Raegan.

“Um, yeah,” Raegan replied, feeling just as out of sorts as Yuuki seemed to be. Raegan tried to meet Yuuki’s eyes to make sure he was okay, but he kept looking away.

Raegan caught movement out of the corner of his eye and looked back at the stage. The Dom was helping his sub off the table so it would seem they were taking a quick break.

“Do you want to stay for the rest of the demo or maybe get a drink?” Rae asked as he looked back at Yuuki.

“Drinks! Drinks sound great right now.” Yuuki hopped off Raegan’s lap and started walking toward the bar.

Raegan was perplexed by Yuuki’s abrupt actions but didn’t have time to worry about it as Yuuki was getting further away by the second. Yuuki didn’t know the club etiquette, and he didn’t want some random Dom coming up to his man propositioning him. Raegan got to his feet and, with long

strides, caught up to Yuuki. They reached the bar, and each slid onto a stool.

“Hands,” the bartender, a gruff-looking man, said as he stepped up to serve them.

They held their hands out to show that they didn’t have the skull stamp that marked them as not being allowed to drink. The man nodded and asked what they wanted.

“Rum and coke.” Yuuki’s fingers anxiously tapped the bar top.

“I’ll just have a whiskey sour,” Raegan ordered as worry filled his chest.

Had he misread Yuuki’s reaction to the demo? Had that not been arousal, but fear? No, that didn’t make sense. So why was Yuuki acting so twitchy?

The bartender placed their drinks in front of them and accepted the twenty Raegan handed him. Yuuki snatched his drink up and downed it in one swallow. Yeah, something was wrong, and Raegan needed to figure out what it was now.

Chapter 17

Yuuki

*O*h, my fuck. Why do I feel like I'm about to have a panic attack? Rae and I have been in more compromising situations. So why am I tripping over grinding on his thigh? Yuuki thought as he downed his drink like it was air. The rum scorched his throat on the way down and helped pull his focus away from his earlier behavior. He couldn't fathom why he was so upset. He and Rae had woken up naked in each other's beds before. Why was a little grinding worse than that?

Maybe because the whole time you watched that demo you were picturing Rae dripping all that glorious wax on you? An unhelpful voice whispered to Yuuki, and he could feel color rise in his cheeks. Which only made him more confused. He'd had fantasies about Raegan before and had never gotten so disconcerted. Then again, he hadn't been sitting in Raegan's lap when he'd had those fantasies. That had to be it. He was worried that Raegan would somehow figure out he was imagining the two of them together and get upset.

But given Raegan's recent behavior would he get upset? Or would he be turned on? Yuuki swore he had felt a telltale

bulge under his thigh during the presentation. Could Yuuki maybe use this to turn his daydream into a reality?

Yuuki jumped when a hand settled on his shoulder, pulling him out of his mental crisis. His gaze shifted to the side where he found a worried-looking Raegan staring at him.

“You okay, Sugar?”

Yuuki’s chest filled with warmth at the care and concern that laced every syllable of Raegan’s words. How could he ever think that Raegan would be upset with him? Raegan was the most considerate and loving person Yuuki knew. Still, what Yuuki wanted was going to cross the line of friendship and take them into a weird nebulous state. Yuuki didn’t like unknowns. Especially ones that would put the single most important relationship in his life in jeopardy. He wanted this so badly, though, and the foundation of kink was all about trust. Raegan was the person he trusted most in the world. Did he take the chance? Did he risk things with Raegan just to explore his kinky side?

“Yuu.” Raegan’s hands came up to cradle Yuuki’s head. “If this is too much for you, we can leave. You know I would never ask you to stay somewhere that made you uncomfortable.”

I don’t know what I did in my past life to deserve to have this man in my life but I’m damn sure glad of it, Yuuki thought as he brought his hands up and laid them over Raegan’s having made his decision. Yuuki turned his hooded gaze up to meet Raegan’s.

“I’m not uncomfortable, Rae-kun. Quite the opposite.” Yuuki drew in a slow breath before continuing. “Do... Do you think we could play together? With the wax?”

Yuuki watched Raegan’s eyes blow wide in shock, and he regretted his choice. Why had he thought that was an okay thing to ask his best friend? Now he had gone and fucked things up. He needed to save this. Maybe he could play it off as a joke?

Without warning Raegan’s lips were on Yuuki’s and all rational thought left him. Yuuki was stunned for a nanosecond before he returned the kiss. He parted his lips and teased at the seam of Raegan’s until they parted. That was all the invitation Yuuki needed, and his tongue dove in like a heat-seeking missile. Their tongues collided and moved in a sliding sensual dance. Chasing each other back and forth until Yuuki couldn’t tell whose mouth was whose. Sadly, breathing was still a thing, so they broke apart, gasping for air.

“So in case, you didn’t get the message. Yes, I would love to play with you.” Yuuki’s face lit up, and he wanted to dance with joy. “But not here.”

Yuuki’s good mood deflated, and he stuck his bottom lip out in a pout. Raegan snickered and chucked Yuuki under the chin.

“Don’t make that face. I’m going to take you home, where I have all the good stuff.” Raegan leaned in to whisper in Yuuki’s ear. “Like the pale blue rope that looks so good on you.”

A shudder ran down Yuuki's spine, and his dick that had wilted a little surged back to life.

"Then why are we still here?" Yuuki hopped off his stool and held his hand out to Raegan. "Let's go home."

Raegan smiled, downed his drink, and climbed off his stool. He slid his hand into Yuuki's, and they walked out of the club. The drive back to their apartment seemed to take forever as Yuuki became consumed with anticipation. This was happening. He was going home to have kinky sex with his best friend. Because there was no way their play session wouldn't end in them getting off, and Yuuki was going to get to live one of his favorite fantasies. A little voice in the back of his head piped up to remind him that this was possibly the stupidest thing he had ever done. Everything about his and Rae's relationship was going to change after this. If he went through with this, there was no turning back. He stuffed that voice in a box and shoved it off a mental cliff.

This was going to happen and damn the consequences. Their lives were already weird and blurry with faking a marriage. So why not throw some sex in there, too? They were just playing pretend, anyway. What's the worst that could happen?

Raegan pulled up to their apartment building and put his truck in park. They were both out of the vehicle in a flash and sprinting for their unit. Yuuki reached their door first, and in his haste to get inside, dropped his keys. He retrieved them and had gotten the key in the lock when he found himself

pressed against the door. Raegan trailed kisses all along Yuuki's neck, short-circuiting his brain so that he forgot what he was doing.

The door opened without warning, and Yuuki would have fallen flat on his face if Raegan's arm hadn't come around his waist to steady him. Yuuki turned in Raegan's hold and leaped up to wrap his legs around Raegan's waist. Thankfully, Raegan realized what Yuuki was doing and caught him before he landed on his ass. Raegan's big hands cupped Yuuki's cheeks as Yuuki wound his arms around Raegan's neck and pulled him into another kiss.

Yuuki's eyes drifted shut as his tongue dove into Raegan's waiting mouth. He heard Raegan kick the door closed, and he felt the world spin. His back was pressed hard against what he assumed was the door, but he didn't know for sure because he was too busy trying to touch Raegan's tonsils.

Raegan grunted, and Yuuki felt himself slide down the door a bit. Yuuki whimpered and chased after Raegan's lips when the other man broke away from their kiss.

"I'm trying to get my shoes off, Yuu. I can't do that if I pass out from lack of oxygen." Raegan dodged Yuuki's persistent lips and shuffled his feet.

"Forget your shoes and breathing. It's overrated, anyway." Yuuki grabbed the back of Rae's head and tried to hold him still so he could catch his lips.

"As much as I am loving kissing you, didn't we come home to play?"

That reminder had Yuuki snapping his eyes open and grinning like a fool. “Oh, yeah.” Yuuki unwrapped his legs and tapped at Raegan’s shoulders to show he wanted down. “I have to go shower.”

Yuuki moved to go around Raegan but found himself boxed in by Raegan’s massive arms with his back again pressed to the door. Raegan lowered his head for a quick kiss before shifting to Yuuki’s ear.

“Be sure to wash yourself for how far you want this to go and then meet me in my room.”

Yuuki’s whole body quaked with desire as Raegan’s breath tickled his ear. Fuck, he was close to coming in his jeans, and they hadn’t even done anything yet.

“Okay.” Yuuki’s knees felt like they were turning to jelly.

“Good boy,” Raegan said, his voice all deep, husky, and sexy as sin. Yeah, definitely in danger of messing up his pants if Raegan kept talking to him like that.

Raegan gave Yuuki’s hip a gentle swat before turning and striding toward his room. Yuuki stared after Raegan for a moment before stumbling to his room in a lust-filled haze. As he walked, he began shedding his clothes, leaving a trail behind him. He went into his bathroom, and when he caught sight of himself in the mirror, it helped to clear his mind.

His entire body was flushed, and his pupils were so big, he couldn’t see his irises. The head of his throbbing cock was

peeking out of his foreskin and dripping from his need. He couldn't remember the last time he had been this turned on.

Stop admiring yourself in the mirror and get in the damn shower. Your ass isn't going to douche itself. His inner voice chastised him, pulling Yuuki back to the present.

He stooped down and opened his vanity cabinet to pull out what he would need. He grabbed a new razor, his mint and sage body wash, but as he reached for his douche, he paused. Was he really going to do this? Was he going to prep himself so that his best friend could fuck him? Apprehension left him paralyzed, and for a split second, he considered calling the whole thing off. He then heard the water cut on and knew Raegan had gotten into the shower. That reminder that Rae was just as eager for this bolstered Yuuki.

He snatched up his douche and went to work. After scrubbing, shaving, and prepping every inch of himself, Yuuki emerged from his room naked and made his way to Raegan's room. The door was open, and a small gasp escaped him when he took in the scene before him. There were a dozen jar candles lit sitting on every flat surface, casting the room in a shadowy, intimate glow. The queen-sized bed had been stripped to the fitted sheet, and the restraints were fixed to the metal headboard and footboard. A bundle of baby blue rope lay on the bed beside a long candle, lube, and condoms.

Raegan came striding naked out of his bathroom but stopped when he saw Yuuki hovering in his doorway. Something in the air shifted and seemed to crackle as if

preparing for a lightning strike. Before Yuuki had time to think, he was running at Raegan and launched himself into his best friend's arms. Raegan caught him with ease and crushed their lips together in a savage kiss. Teeth clashed, lips were nipped, and tongues dueled for dominance. Yuuki loved every second and whined in frustration when his lungs burned, screaming for air.

Yuuki yelped when he fell and crashed onto the mattress. He had no time to gain his bearings as Raegan's body was covering his and his mouth was once more claimed by Raegan's. Yuuki wrapped his legs around Raegan's waist, dragging their hips closer together and lining their cocks up to rub against each other. As their satiny members met, they shared a mutual moan of desire. Yuuki wrapped his arms around Raegan's sides and dug his nails into the larger man's back. They were as close as two people could be, but it wasn't enough. Yuuki felt as if he wanted to crawl inside Raegan's skin and live there.

"As much as I would love to stay like this and kiss you until you forget your name, I thought we were going to play." Raegan nipped his way up Yuuki's neck to his ear.

"Can't we do both?" Yuuki bucked his hips, making their dicks drag against each other.

Raegan groaned before pressing all his weight down onto Yuuki, pinning him to the mattress. Raegan lifted his head so their eyes could meet and gave Yuuki a playful glare. "You're trouble. You know that, right?"

Yuuki smirked up at him before lifting his head and placing a kiss on Raegan's fuzzy chin. "You know you love it."

An odd emotion flashed in Raegan's eyes but was gone so fast that Yuuki was sure he had imagined it. Raegan's gaze shifted to resemble that of a big cat about to pounce on its prey. "Well, I went through all this trouble of setting up to play, so that's what we're going to do."

Yuuki gulped at the commanding tone in Raegan's voice. Damn, he was hot when he shifted into Dom mode.

"But first we need to have a little talk."

Raegan sat up, and Yuuki missed the feel of Raegan's bigger body covering him. Reluctantly, Yuuki sat up facing Raegan.

"If this is the BDSM rules and regs talk, I know all that stuff. Safe, sane, consensual. Risk-aware consensual kink. Stoplight system, and yes, I agree to let you do all kinds of dirty things to me. Do we really have to do this?"

Raegan frowned and crossed his arms over his chest. Yuuki noticed that the raging hard-on Rae had been sporting had deflated, and Yuuki realized he might have just fucked up.

"While I'm glad you are not a kink novice, that doesn't mean you know everything." Raegan unfolded one arm and held up a single finger. "Rule number one is communication. That means we talk and agree on things before any scene. So yeah, we're doing this."

It wasn't often that Raegan got upset with Yuuki, but when he did, it always made Yuuki's heart hurt. Yuuki reached out

and took the hand Reagan held up into his hand. “I’m sorry, Rae. I know this is important, and I shouldn’t have been so flippant. I’ll stop being a jackass.”

Raegan gave Yuuki a tiny smile and squeezed his hand.

“I appreciate that, Sugar, and you aren’t a total jackass. Just an over-excited one.”

“Jerk.” Yuuki dropped Raegan’s hand and gave him a half-hearted glare.

Raegan chuckled before sobering into a mask of seriousness. “All kidding aside. I need to know that you’re going into this willingly and that you promise to use a safeword if it gets to be too much or you’re not enjoying it. The horror stories I’ve heard of people who didn’t take kink seriously would curl your toes.”

Yuuki shifted up onto his knees, shuffled forward until he could straddle Raegan, and took his face between his hands. “I am one hundred percent wanting to do this and swear on my mother that if I can’t handle it, I will use a safeword.”

Yuuki watched Raegan’s eyes widen in shock at his declaration, which was what he wanted. He needed to make sure that Raegan knew he was dead serious. Raegan’s face gentled, and he turned his face into Yuuki’s palm, placing a kiss there. “Alright then, Sugar. I promise the same and appreciate the trust you’re putting in me.”

“There’s no one else in this world I trust more than you.” Yuuki leaned in and placed a kiss on Reagan’s forehead. “And

that's why I prepared myself for us to go all the way together."

Raegan stilled, looking at Yuuki with astonished eyes before his face shifted into a sly grin.

"Oh, you're just full of surprises tonight." Raegan's hands came to rest on Yuuki's hips before sliding back to grip his ass. "And you have no idea what you have gotten yourself into."

"Well, whatever it is, I'm sure I'll enjoy the shit out of it." Yuuki smirked back at Raegan.

"We'll see." Without warning, Raegan grabbed Yuuki's hands, bringing them above his head before forcing Yuuki onto his back.

"I had all these wonderful plans to put your entire body in a harness with that pretty rope, but now you have me all worked up, and my patience has flown out the window." Raegan shifted his body to cover Yuuki's. "So now, I'm going to strap you to this bed and cover you in wax before fucking your brains out. Give me a color to let me know that's okay."

"So green. Like neon green." Yuuki's dick, which had been waning while they had talked, was back to full mast in an instant because of all of Raegan's manhandling and was aching so bad it bordered on painful.

The look in Raegan's eyes was pure hunger and the way he licked his lips made Yuuki think of a man about to enjoy a steak dinner. "That's all I needed to hear."

Raegan released Yuuki's hands and reached for the strap restraints. Yuuki remained perfectly still as Raegan moved

around securing his wrists and ankles to the frame. Taking care to check that Yuuki was comfortable and his circulation wasn't restricted. Yuuki watched him remove the rope bundle and Yuuki regretted they weren't going to do rope play as well. Oh, well. Maybe next time. If there was a next time.

Yuuki heard a clicking sound and found that Raegan had produced a lighter from the nightstand. He was lighting the candle, and Yuuki's breathing sped up. This was it. His fantasy was coming true.

"Last chance to call this off, Sugar. Color?" Raegan brought the candle to hover over Yuuki's left nipple.

"Still fluorescent green." Yuuki's entire focus was on the candle flame.

Raegan nodded and twisted his wrist. Yuuki watched a bead of wax form and then fall from the candle toward him. The wax landed on his nipple and a burning sensation consumed the sensitive nub. Yuuki hissed in pain. Yuuki had been burned before by baking pans and ovens, but this pain was different somehow. It stung at first, but as the wax cooled, the heat became a more pleasurable warmth.

Yuuki wasn't given time to enjoy the warmth for long though as Raegan left a scorching trail of small wax drops as he moved the candle over to Yuuki's other nipple. Yuuki cried out and strained against his bonds as wax engulfed his nipple.

"Color," Raegan commanded.

He's asking for a color? How am I supposed to even think with all this sensation coming at me? Yuuki thought as he pulled some brain cells together to make his mouth work.

“Green.”

Raegan made an acknowledging sound just as a stream of wax was poured along Yuuki's sternum.

“Ah! Fuck!” Yuuki screamed as his back arched off the bed.

The assault didn't stop as Raegan began making patterns with the wax, and Yuuki became lost in the sensation. Every nerve-ending Yuuki had felt as if it was alight, and he was sure his skin was glowing like a Christmas tree.

“Damn. You look so beautiful.” Raegan leaned down and kissed Yuuki.

Yuuki's brain was too fried to respond at first, but after a moment, he returned the kiss, loving the feel of Raegan's lips on his. Raegan swallowed Yuuki's shout as more wax dripped onto his belly. Raegan broke the kiss, stealing one last peck, before pulling away. Yuuki cracked open his eyes that had fallen shut at some point and gasped when he saw that Raegan now had the candle waiting over his cock that lay against his stomach.

Their eyes met, and Raegan must have seen distress in Yuuki's eyes as he again asked Yuuki for a color. Was Yuuki okay with this? His nipples were one thing, but his dick a whole other? Raegan wouldn't do anything that wasn't safe, though, so it must be okay, right? As Yuuki continued to look

into Raegan's eyes, he saw a universe of emotions. Lust was at the fore, while worry lay not close behind, but above all, he saw tenderness and care. Raegan cared so much about Yuuki that even though his cock looked like it was so hard it was causing him pain, he would end everything right there if Yuuki wished it. He would cater to Yuuki's needs above his own, and that knowledge made Yuuki's decision for him.

“Evergreen.”

Relief and delight danced in Raegan's eyes, making Yuuki feel like he was on top of the world. He would walk through fire if it would make Raegan happy and look at him like that. Yuuki watched Raegan's hand tip and a stream of wax spilled from the candle. It hit his cock, and Yuuki's eyes rolled back in his head. The sensation was so intense that Yuuki thought his soul had left his body. More wax trickled onto his balls and thighs, ripping more screams from his lips.

As the warm feeling subsided, Yuuki felt the bed shift and his ankles were released from their bindings. Somehow, Yuuki cracked his eyes open just in time to see Raegan reaching for the lube and condoms.

Oh, heck no. If I'm taking that cock, it's going to be bare, Yuuki thought, astonished he was coherent enough to even form full thoughts. Mustering what little strength he had left, Yuuki lifted his foot, since his hands were still bound, and swatted at the condom packets that Raegan was picking up. Raegan turned his gaze toward Yuuki and arched one eyebrow.

“No,” Yuuki croaked, swiping at the condoms again.

Raegan sat there, stunned for a moment before letting the foil packs fall from his hand. He crawled up the bed and released Yuuki's wrists from the restraints. He rubbed each tenderly to help with circulation before cradling Yuuki's face in his hands.

"Are you sure, Sugar?" Raegan asked, his eyes full of tenderness and a glimmer of hope.

Am I sure? Yuuki had never been more sure of anything in his life. They had both been tested recently, at Raegan's insistence after Ken's revelation, so there were no worries there. Yuuki had also dreamed of this moment more times than he should admit.

"Yes." Yuuki nuzzled his cheek against Raegan's hand.

A pleased smile turned up Raegan's face, and he leaned down placing a kiss on Yuuki's lips. "No whining when you can't walk tomorrow." Raegan pulled away from Yuuki. He snagged a pillow and shoved it under Yuuki's hips before moving to kneel between his legs. Using anticipation as fuel, Yuuki pulled his knees up and planted his feet on the bed. Raegan had picked up the lube and was pouring a fair amount into his hand. He grabbed Yuuki's left leg and hitched it over his shoulder as he brought his hand to Yuuki's hole.

He circled and teased the ring of muscle several times, dragging a moan from Yuuki's lips. Yuuki had already loosened himself up, but when Raegan pressed two of his much larger fingers into Yuuki, it still burned. Yuuki hissed between his teeth at the stretch as Raegan worked his fingers

in and out of Yuuki. If two of Raegan's fingers had him feeling this full already, how was he ever going to take that monster between his legs?

"Ah!" Yuuki cried out as Raegan added a third finger.

"You're doing good, Sugar." Raegan kissed Yuuki's calf as he continued to work him open.

"Rae-kun." Yuuki whined knowing that Raegan couldn't resist when Yuuki called him that and bucked into Raegan's hand. If he didn't get Raegan's dick in him pronto, he was liable to lose his mind.

A feral growl erupted from Raegan, and before he knew what was happening Yuuki found his ankles by his ears.

"Hold on tight, Sugar." Raegan shifted his hips, and Yuuki felt his tip pressing at his hole.

Yuuki did his best to relax as Raegan pressed his hips forward and the tip of his cock worked to breach Yuuki. A pained whimper escaped Yuuki as Raegan's cock head finally pushed past his entrance.

"Shh. I got you, Sugar," Raegan cooed as he paused, allowing Yuuki to adjust to the intrusion.

"Fuck, I... uh... didn't realize... ah... you were this big," Yuuki stammered as the burning in his ass eased.

"Not a size queen I take it then," Raegan teased as he started inching his way further into Yuuki.

Yuuki would have given Raegan a withering look with a scathing retort, but his brain went offline as Raegan's tip brushed his prostate. His waning erection received a jolt of desire and sprang back to life. The wax that encased his prick peeled away from his skin, exposing it to the air. The sensation sent shudders up Yuuki's spine. They were so playing with wax again, but right now, Yuuki needed Raegan to wreck his hole.

"Stop playing around and fuck me already." Yuuki thrust his hips and pulled a grunt from Raegan.

"You asked for this." Raegan's tone sounded husky and harsh.

Yuuki had barely pulled in a breath before Raegan pushed his full length into him and then pulled back. Raegan's hips snapped forward so hard Yuuki felt as if his organs had been shoved into his chest.

"Fuck, yeah." Yuuki raised his arms above his head and braced his hands on the headboard.

Raegan set a brutal pace, and Yuuki knew he was going to feel this for days. The sound of skin smacking skin filled the room, accompanied by pleased cries and exerted grunts. Yuuki felt his balls tingling, but he knew he would need more to reach his climax. Yuuki reached for his cock, but Raegan slapped his hand away.

"That's mine," Raegan growled, his eyes boring into Yuuki's, daring him to protest.

Yuuki swallowed and nodded. That little possessive act was hot as fuck.

Raegan let go of Yuuki's left leg and wrapped his large hand around Yuuki's weeping cock.

"Oh, fuck!" Yuuki shouted as Raegan moved his hand over his member, pulling more wax away from his skin.

Raegan adjusted his hips, and when he did, he tagged Yuuki's prostate. Yuuki screamed and nearly came off the bed. That tingle in his sac grew more intense, and he knew he was close.

"Rae-kun," he whined in warning.

"Let go, Sugar. I wanna watch you fly." Raegan pistoned his hips to hit Yuuki's spot with every thrust and tightened his grip to how Yuuki liked it.

That was all Yuuki needed, and with an ecstatic cry, he came harder than he ever had in his life. Raegan continued to stroke him through his climax until his softening cock gave a final spurt. Yuuki felt boneless and was floating along on cotton candy clouds. He felt Raegan release his dick and leg, then those big hands were on his hips. Raegan was thrusting into him at a breakneck pace, and Yuuki thought he wanted Raegan to finish inside him. He wanted Raegan's seed to paint his insides marking Yuuki as his.

Yuuki wrapped his legs around Raegan and brought his arms up to grab his shoulders. Raegan stopped thrusting as

Yuuki hoisted himself up and brought his head close to Raegan's ear.

"Come inside me," he whispered.

Raegan stilled for a moment before emitting a feral roar as he surged up into Yuuki. The new angle allowed Raegan to go deeper inside Yuuki and had his dick giving a valiant twitch. Not one to be passive, Yuuki unwrapped his legs from around Raegan's waist, planted his feet on the bed, and started moving his hips up and down. Raegan gave another roar, and the grip he had on Yuuki's hips tightened to be almost painful.

"Close," Raegan grunted as he brought his head forward and started nibbling on Yuuki's collarbone.

"Do it, Rae-kun. Fill me up with your cum." Yuuki thrust down hard.

Raegan bellowed as his climax overtook him before burying his teeth into Yuuki's shoulder. Yuuki cried out from the pain of the bite as he felt spurt after spurt of Raegan's warm seed coat his insides. Raegan fell forward and rolled onto his side with Yuuki cradled close to him. They lay there wrapped around each other as they recovered from the intense scene.

Yuuki had experienced nothing that amazing in his life. There was no way any man after this could match what he had just been through.

Doesn't matter because I could never love another man the way I love Rae-kun, Yuuki thought as he nuzzled his nose against Raegan's head. A voice in the back of his head was

screaming out warnings about how loving Raegan was going to ruin everything but he ignored it. For just a moment, he would allow himself to be happy and in love with the man who was his entire world.

Chapter 18

Raegan

Raegan sang along to the rock ballad blasting from his radio as he drove him and Yuuki to his parents' house. He had been in the most amazing mood since the night he and Yuuki had played together and made love. Because to him, that was what they had done. Made love.

He now knew, without a doubt, that he was one hundred and ten percent to the infinite power in love with Yuuki. There would never be another for him, and he could never go back to them being just friends. What he was still unsure about was how Yuuki felt.

Something had been off with Yuuki since that night, but Raegan couldn't quite put his finger on what it was. He'd puzzled over it until his head hurt, yet came up short. Whatever it was he would figure it out at some other time. Right now, he needed to focus on playing the love-struck newlywed. Well, he wouldn't be playing since he was in love, but he still had to play it up for his family.

His stomach twisted at the thought of lying to his folks. He had an amazing relationship with his family. They had been

nothing but loving since he came out as bisexual during culinary school. The idea of doing anything that could mess that up didn't sit well with him. Unfortunately, it was too late to turn back.

Out of the corner of his eye, Raegan saw Yuuki reach for the volume dial and turned the radio down. "What are we going to do about this reception your mom wants to throw for us?"

"Do we need to do anything about it?" Raegan turned off the highway onto a country road.

"I mean I feel kind of bad that she's going to go to all this trouble for us and we're not actually married." Raegan could see Yuuki squirm in his seat.

Raegan could tell that Yuuki had been thinking about this a lot and it was bothering him. He took his hand off the wheel and interlaced his fingers with Yuuki's.

"I understand, Sugar. It makes me feel bad, too, but we agreed to be committed to this thing." He brought Yuuki's hand up and kissed the back of it. "Besides my mom loves doing things like this. If it makes her happy then it can't be all bad, right?"

"I guess not." Yuuki slumped down into his seat looking miserable.

Well, that's not going to do, Raegan thought as he took in Yuuki's somber mood. They couldn't show up to his parents and Yuuki was all mopey. That didn't fit their love-struck couple persona at all. Raegan thought of what he could do to

cheer Yuuki up as he turned onto the road that was the entrance to his parents' pig farm. As the big, two-story farmhouse came into view, a sudden idea struck Raegan.

“Hey, Yuu?” Raegan released Yuuki's hand and reached for his glove box. “You wanna do something a little wild?”

Raegan saw Yuuki give him a quizzical look as Raegan opened the glove box and a small hank of thin rope fell out.

“Rae! You can't be serious.” Yuuki sounded embarrassed but intrigued as Raegan pulled off the drive. He took care to make sure they were out of sight of the house and parked the truck.

“Like a heart attack, Sugar.” An impish grin curled Raegan's lips as he retrieved the rope.

He pulled his pocketknife out, set it in the console, and started measuring out the length of rope he would need.

“And what exactly are you planning on doing? It's not like we have a lot of room or time for you to put me in a harness.” Yuuki's voice was panicked and that had Raegan chuckling.

Flustered Yuuki wasn't a sight he got to see often, so when Raegan did, he loved to just amp the situation up.

“You obviously underestimate my skills,” Raegan teased. “But you're not wrong. I was thinking of something simpler and in a place, no one is going to see.”

Raegan wiggled his eyebrows suggestively and waited for Yuuki to catch onto his meaning. Yuuki's brow furrowed for a

moment before shooting up to his hairline and his mouth fell open in an O of surprise.

“Fuck, Rae. You have to be kidding me,” Yuuki exclaimed, color rising in his cheeks.

“I said it would be wild,” Raegan replied, shooting Yuuki a playful wink as he picked up his knife to cut the rope.

“I want a fake divorce. I didn’t realize I was fake marrying such a kinky perv.” Yuuki mimed clutching a string of pearls like some uptight old biddy, but he couldn’t keep a smile from forming on his lips.

“So are you in or are you out?” Raegan held up the rope and wiggled it at Yuuki.

The smile fell from Yuuki’s face, and he worried his lip.

“Okay, but if your mom ends up hating me after tonight, I’m really divorcing your ass.” The teasing smile that turned up Yuuki’s lips belied his threatening words.

The mischief that danced in his brown eyes let Raegan know he was just as into this as Rae was. Raegan unfastened his seatbelt and scooted closer to Yuuki.

“I can accept that. Now pull your pants down,” Raegan ordered, his voice having dropped several octaves and taking on a husky tone.

Yuuki shuddered as his hands went to his fly and popped the button. Raegan focused on Yuuki’s zipper watching it open one tooth at a time. It would seem his sweet little husband wanted to drag this out and give him a show.

Once his zipper was down, Yuuki undid his seatbelt and lifted his ass off the seat. His fingers teased all along his waistband for a minute before Raegan growled at him in warning that he was growing impatient. Yuuki snickered and hitched his thumbs into the waistband of his pants and underwear. He slid the material down his hips until they gathered on his thighs and exposed his semi-erect cock and balls.

Raegan hummed his approval as he reached out and took Yuuki's package in his hand. Wanting to do some teasing of his own, he rolled Yuuki's balls in his palm while his thumb stroked his shaft. Yuuki pulled a hissing breath between his teeth and arched into Raegan's grip. Raegan brought the length of rope under Yuuki's balls before releasing them. He then went to work, wrapping the rope around the base of Yuuki's dick and sac several times before tying it off.

"So pretty." Raegan leaned down and placed a kiss on the tip of Yuuki's cockhead that was peeping out of his foreskin.

"Rae, you're killing me." Yuuki groaned, bringing his hands up to cover his face to hide his embarrassment.

"Hardly. If I really wanted to torture you, then I'd have you tied up in a full torso harness with a special setup that held a vibrator in your ass that I controlled the intensity on." Raegan gave Yuuki a devilish look.

Yuuki moaned and shook his head. "You are evil. Pure, unadulterated evil."

You have no idea, Sugar, Raegan mentally rubbed his hands together like an old-time villain. Yuuki did not know that Raegan had now made it his mission to get and keep him hard all night. This was going to be a fun game.

“Hurry and get redressed. You know Mama gets ornery when people are late.” Raegan shifted back to the driver’s seat and put the truck into drive.

“We’re late because of you, and that’s exactly what I’m going to tell her. Remember, I’m her favorite.” Yuuki shimmied back into his clothes and adjusted himself.

Raegan flipped Yuuki off just as they pulled up to the house. Raegan hadn’t even brought the car to a full stop before the front door flew open and a gaggle of people charged toward them.

“Brace yourself. They’re already attacking.” Raegan opened his door and slid out of the car.

“Uncle Rae!!!” an excited young boy’s voice exclaimed just as a small body slammed into Raegan’s legs.

“Hey, Linc. How’s it going, little man?” Raegan reached down and scooped his nephew up into his arms.

“I got in trouble for smacking on Ellie’s braids because I like the sound the beads make.” Lincoln crossed his arms and pouted.

“And when we get back inside, you’re going straight back into the time-out chair,” a deep masculine voice said authoritatively.

Raegan lifted his gaze to see a tall, African American man wearing a Stetson rounding the end of his truck.

“John, man it is good to see you.” Raegan stepped forward and pulled the other man into a warm embrace.

“You, too, Rae. You need to come around more often. Ain’t nobody in this house who I can play me a decent game of cornhole with.”

“I heard that, John McCoy.” Raegan and John both turned their heads to see a small blonde woman striding toward them with an angry glower on her face.

“Sup, Kennedy?” Raegan greeted as his sister continued to advance on him.

As soon as she was within arm’s reach, Kennedy cocked her arm back and punched Raegan in the arm with all of her strength.

“Hell, Kennedy. What was that for?”

“What do you think, you big, pigheaded jerk? You ran off to Vegas and got married. You made Mama upset and robbed me and mine of the chance to be in your wedding party. Lincoln would have looked so adorable in a tiny tux.” Kennedy had fury written all over her face.

“Kens, honey, you know he didn’t do it on purpose. You didn’t have to slug him.” John placed his hands on his wife’s shoulders. Whether to calm her or save Raegan from her, Rae couldn’t tell.

“Does Mommy have to go to time out now, too, for hitting Uncle Rae?” Lincoln asked innocently, and Raegan couldn’t hold back a chuckle.

“It would only be fair, right little man?” Raegan leaned in and raspberried Lincoln’s cheek, making the little boy squeal with delight.

“All right, everyone. Get out of my way. Mother of the groom coming through,” a commanding female voice said, and all those gathered parted to form a path to Raegan.

John took Lincoln out of Raegan’s arms just as Raegan’s mother rounded the truck and marched right up to stand in front of Raegan.

“Hey, Mama.” Raegan leaned down to hug his mom. He had bent about halfway down when his mom’s hand came up and smacked his arm right where Kennedy had punched him. “Ow! What the heck is with all the women in this family and hitting me today?”

“Because you are a very naughty boy, Raegan Joseph. I told you I was going to tan your hide. Now get down here and give me a hug.” Renata Dietrich spread her arms in welcome.

“Careful, Raegan, it could be a trap,” a man, who was an older version of Raegan, said with a snicker as he came to stand beside Raegan’s mom.

“Oh, hush, Joe. I got my lick in. Now I just want to squeeze the life out of him. Both my babies are married now. It’s something to celebrate.” Renata swatted at her husband’s arm.

“You okay, Bae? That was one heck of a punch Kennedy landed on you.” Yuuki appeared at Raegan’s side with concern in his eyes.

Raegan’s heart skipped a beat as he wrapped his arm around Yuuki and placed a kiss on his temple.

“I don’t know. I might have to have you kiss it better when we get home.” Raegan made his voice all husky the way he knew got Yuuki riled up.

The blush that bloomed on Yuuki’s cheeks looked delectable and had Raegan considering skipping dinner with his family in favor of taking Yuuki home for some hot, dirty sex.

“Okay, you two. Keep it PG. My kids are here in case you forgot.” Kennedy pretended to cover her daughter, Eleanor’s eyes.

Everyone laughed when Raegan dipped his head and stole a quick kiss from Yuuki. At this rate, he was going to have Yuuki begging him to bend him over the nearest flat surface before dinner was even served.

“Can we eat now? I’m hungry, and Grammy made mac’n’cheese special for me,” Lincoln piped up, causing another peel of laughter to ring out from everyone.

Without being told, everyone started for the front door to enter the house. As Raegan stepped into his childhood home, a familiar, comfortable warmth filled him. Family pictures lined every wall and stood on every flat surface. The smell of baked

goods was always in the air, and country music played on the old radio in the kitchen.

When Raegan glanced at the staircase that led up to the bedrooms, he paused, and his brow furrowed in confusion. “Did y’all replace all the posts in the banister?”

John erupted in raucous laughter and playfully slapped Raegan on the back.

“We had to after someone,” John shot a look at Lincoln, “took after his uncle and got his head stuck between two of them.”

“Ellie dared me to,” Lincoln protested, glaring at his sister, who was doing her best to hide her giggles.

“Wait. What is this about Raegan getting his head stuck in the banister?” Yuuki slipped out of Raegan’s hold to turn and look at John with eager eyes.

“How have you not heard about the banister incident before?” Kennedy waved her hands at everyone to continue heading for the dining room.

“Because I cleverly changed the subject with an embarrassing story about you. Like, let’s talk about how Mom caught you making out with Erastus Johnson in the treehouse.” Raegan smirked as his sister’s cheeks went red as a tomato.

“OMG. You kissed a guy named Erastus?” Yuuki doubled over with laughter, and Raegan thought he had never heard a more beautiful sound.

“Y’all get in here and start eating before this food goes cold. I’ll be madder than a hornet if all my effort was wasted,” Raegan’s mom called out.

Everyone made their way into the dining room and took their seats on the long benches that lined either side of the custom dining table. Raegan sat close beside Yuuki, as he was still planning on teasing Yuuki until he was a puddle of pent-up lust.

“OMG, Mrs. D,” Yuuki started but stopped when Raegan’s mom pinned him with a sharp look.

“No more of that Missus mess, Yuuki. You’re my son now, so you call me Mama,” she ordered, her features softening into an adoring smile.

“Ah, okay.” Yuuki squirmed a little beside Raegan. “Mama, you have an amazing spread here.”

Raegan could see that Yuuki was uncomfortable with this development of his mother wanting to be called Mama but there wasn’t anything to do about it at the moment. Once dinner was over, he would talk to him and make sure he was okay. For now, he slipped his hand under the table and took Yuuki’s hand in his. Yuuki shot him a grateful look, and Raegan’s heart soared.

“Oh, this is nothing dear. You just wait and see what I have planned for the reception. It’s going to make this look like breadcrumbs. Go on and dig in everyone.” Renata chuckled at Yuuki’s praise. She waved her hand in a dismissive gesture and scooped a big spoonful of mashed potatoes onto her plate.

“Grammy had all the ladies from her book club over, and they’re all going to help with the cooking. Grammy said I can even help. I’m going to make cookies like the ones from your bakery,” Eleanor piped up, looking thrilled.

Eleanor had been enamored with Yuuki and baking ever since Raegan had taken her to Sugar and Spice to visit Yuuki. He had taken her in the back and showed her around. The awe in her eyes then was still as bright now.

Raegan loved this. Having the man he loved being so warmly welcomed by his family. He wanted more nights like this. He wanted Christmases, birthdays, and everything else. And he could have it if he could just get Yuuki to fall in love with him. He needed to find some way to determine Yuuki’s feelings. He had to be sure Yuuki was in this with him because if he wasn’t and it came between them... Well, Raegan would rather die than lose Yuuki at all.

“That’s great, Ellie. I bet they’re going to be delicious. Might even give Yuu a run for his money.” Raegan gave Yuuki’s shoulder a playful bump.

“I dunno. I’m still learning.” Ellie played with her fork for a moment before turning pleading eyes on Yuuki. “Uncle Yuuki, do you think I could come to you and Uncle Rae’s house to practice?”

Raegan felt Yuuki flinch, but he put a warm smile on his face.

“We’ll see, Ellie. I’ll have Uncle Rae figure it out with your mom later. Right now, let’s eat this delicious meal. Thank you

for the food.” Yuuki picked up an ear of corn and set it on his plate.

Ellie squealed in delight and started filling her plate. The conversation tapered off as everyone piled their plates with food and began eating. Blessedly, the conversation moved away from the reception, and Raegan was glad to see Yuuki relax. It made Raegan’s heart ache to see Yuuki suffering from their lying. Maybe they should just come clean? But when Raegan thought of how excited his mom and Eleanor were about the reception, he couldn’t bring himself to do it.

You just need to make it not a lie, Raegan’s inner voice reminded him. Which was easier said than done. Fuck, Raegan needed to get this sorted out soon before someone ended up hurt.

Chapter 19

Raegan

Before he realized it, dinner was over, and Raegan needed to check on Yuuki. Unfortunately, Raegan's mom swooped in and carried Yuuki off to the kitchen with Kennedy and Eleanor to talk pastries. Raegan went to go after them but was stopped by John taking his arm.

"Come out to the porch with me." John's tone let Raegan know he had little say in the matter.

"Sure." Together, they went out to the front porch.

John wandered down to the far end, where a pair of rocking chairs sat and took a seat. Raegan followed suit and sat there in silence, waiting for what John had to say. Having been friends since they were in diapers, Raegan knew that when John took him off like this, he had something important to talk about.

"So you gonna tell me what's really going on between you and Yuuki, or am I going to have to beat it out of you?" John asked after a moment.

Raegan's head whipped around in surprise. He hadn't been expecting that at all. "What do you mean?" Raegan decided that playing dumb was the best course of action at the moment.

"Don't bullshit me, Rae. I've known you long enough to know when something is going on with you. Now start talking," John commanded, turning to pin Raegan with a pointed look.

Raegan should have known that John would notice something was up. He was observant like that, which was why he was now running the farm for Raegan's dad. He also had always been able to read Rae like a book, which is why they no longer played poker together. Raegan gave a defeated sigh and ran his hand back over his head.

"Okay. You have to swear to me you will not tell anyone about what I'm going to tell you." Raegan met John's hard look with one of his own. He knew it was risky to tell John the truth, but he also knew that he could trust John with his life.

"I swear. Ride or die," John promised as he settled back into his seat more.

Raegan took a deep breath, deciding the best thing to do was treat this like a bandaid and just rip it off. "Yuuki and I aren't actually married." John gave him an incredulous look, but Raegan stayed him by raising his hand. "Before you jump all over me, let me explain."

John narrowed his eyes dubiously but waved his hand for Raegan to continue.

“It all started as a revenge prank,” Raegan started. “Yuuki’s ex had been cheating on him and some other bullshit I won’t get into. So, I had this brilliant idea for us to take some fake pictures so he would think we eloped together.”

“You and your bright ideas.” John scoffed. They both had plenty of memories and scars from all the plans Raegan had talked John into as kids.

“It was a good one.” Raegan crossed his arms. “Until, well, it wasn’t. We got the pics and then went drinking.”

“Oh, boy.” Raegan rolled his eyes at John’s interjection.

“So I didn’t realize Yuuki had drunkenly posted the pictures until the next morning.” Raegan had to admit that to his own ears this whole thing sounded ludicrous, but it was what it was.

“So why not just come clean? Why keep up this whole pretense knowing that if people learned the truth it was going to blow up epically in your face?” John asked, gesturing broadly to encompass the severity of the situation.

“Well, his dad got a hold of him and was spouting all his homophobic BS. So, to rub it in his face we dragged things out. Then we were going to end things amicably in like three months, thinking no harm, no foul,” Raegan continued, knowing that he was leading up to another bombshell.

“You said were. What’s changed?” John stared at Raegan for a moment before understanding dawned in his eyes. “You’re in love with him.”

Raegan leaned forward placing his elbows on his knees and clasped his hands behind his bowed head. “Yeah.”

“When did that happen? I mean you two have always insisted you were just friends. You even read Kennedy the riot act on how two queer men can be friends and not be fucking.” John sounded perplexed.

“That’s the thing. I don’t even know myself anymore.” Raegan blew out an exasperated breath. “I mean, it first really hit me while we were in Vegas, but then I had to wonder if I hadn’t been in love with him from the minute we met.” Raegan turned his head to look at John. “If you look at it from a certain perspective, we’ve been basically dating this whole time. He’s the first and last person I think about every day. He’s the most important person in my life.”

John gave out a low whistle before giving Raegan a knowing smirk. “Damn, Rae. You have got it bad. So have you told him any of this yet?”

Raegan dropped his head and sighed. “No.”

“What the fuck is holding you back? It’s not like you to hold back from anything.” John sounded a bit irritated.

“Because I don’t know how he feels. What if he doesn’t feel the same way? What if my feelings become a wedge between us? I can’t lose him, John. I’d rather die pining for him than have him walk out of my life.” Raegan bolted upright and looked John square in the eye. He knew he was being a coward, but he was just so scared of the possibility of a life without Yuuki in it.

“What about your family, Rae? Don’t you think they will be upset to learn that you were lying? Everyone was so excited and happy about you getting married. The fact that it was Yuuki only made them more so. You know we all love him like kin, and you’re willing to fuck all that up?” John asked, his voice accusatory, and his face had fallen into a scowl.

Raegan could feel his temper rising but he beat it back. John had a right to be upset.

“No, I’m not. Which is why I have been doing my best to woo Yuuki. If I can get him to fall in love with me then that would fix everything,” Raegan shot back.

“That would. If you can pull it off, but you’re playing a dangerous game, Raegan. One that could hurt my family, and that I will not abide.” Anger flared in John’s eyes, and Raegan could see the serious set of his jaw.

John had thrown down the gauntlet. Raegan needed to get his shit together. If he didn’t, he was facing the real possibility of not only losing Yuuki but his family as well. “I won’t let that happen, John. I’m going to make this work. I swear.”

“Unfortunately, that’s not something you can decide. Yuuki has his say in the matter.” John stood up from his seat and started walking toward the front door. “And for everyone’s sake, I’m hoping that he decides your dumbass is worth loving.”

Chapter 20

Yuuki

Something was rotten in Denmark. Ever since the dinner at the farm, something had been up with Raegan. Yuuki couldn't quite figure out what it was, but something was definitely up. He would catch Raegan giving him these looks like he was trying to figure out a puzzle but coming up with nothing. He wondered if Raegan had caught on to how he was pulling away.

After their play session the other night had shattered the wall between friends and lovers, Yuuki had decided it was best to withdraw. To protect his heart, he had to get that wall reconstructed. While being with Raegan more sounded like perfection, he didn't want another relationship built on a lie. He had learned that lesson all too well from Ken.

Dinner with Raegan's family had also put him on edge. He had grown to see the Dietrichs as a second family, and it had made him uncomfortable to lie to their faces. He would've loved to call Mrs. Dietrich "Mama", but under the pretense of being her fake son-in-law, it made the word sour in his mouth. Ellie calling him Uncle Yuuki had him wanting to jump on the

table and confess the whole thing. If it hadn't been for Raegan's hand in his, that was what he would have done.

Raegan. His wonderful, amazing, too good to be true, best friend. His rock. The person he trusted and relied on most in this world. What in the world would he do without him? If he lost Raegan to this farce, he was going to curl up in a ball and die.

Fuck! How had what was supposed to be a simple revenge prank gotten so out of hand? He knew things wouldn't come to the tidy end they had imagined that day in Vegas. No, it was all going to end in an epic dumpster fire, and the price they would pay for their folly would be each other.

Yuuki shuddered at the thought, pausing in his piping to not mess up his work. He was home alone and feeling anxious, so he did the one thing he knew would calm him. He started baking. He had already made two dozen sugar cookies, iced to look like flowers, and was now working on a dozen cupcakes with plans to do a dozen more. He and Rae could never eat all these sweets, so he would take them down to the local fire department. It had been a while since he had stress baked, so the firefighters would be overjoyed when they saw him walking up with his treats.

Yuuki smiled at the memory of the first time he had taken his baking to the fire station. He had baked six dozen cookies after Ken had canceled their plans, and Raegan had suggested they go to the station. He had been casually seeing one of the female firefighters back then and had wanted to surprise her.

She hadn't been thrilled to see them while her coworkers had been ecstatic over the goodies. Raegan had broken things off with her not long after that, but they had continued to bring confections occasionally. The smile that had split Yuuki's face fell as he realized that almost every happy memory he had was tied to Raegan. They needed to sort out this pretend marriage mess and get back to that happy place they had been when they were just friends before Yuuki's heart got annihilated.

Yuuki sighed as he finished piping a sunflower on the top of a cupcake and moved to work on the next. He was interrupted by his phone ringing. Yuuki set down his piping bag, wiped his hands on his apron, and pulled the device from his back pocket. Without looking at his caller ID, he answered the call.

"Hello," he answered as he wedged the phone between his shoulder and ear before reaching for his piping bag.

"So you finally picked up, Yuuki-tan." Ken's sickening sweet voice came over the line.

Yuuki stumbled back as if he had been hit and scrambled to catch his phone as it fell away from his ear. He stared dumbstruck at the screen, unsure what to do. Hanging up was the smart thing to do, but he hesitated as he heard Ken speak again. "Yuuki-tan? Are you there? Please answer me, sweetheart."

The fake tenderness and concern in Ken's words had Yuuki's hackles up. Who did this bastard think he was calling Yuuki and pretending he cared about him? Yuuki brought his

phone back to his ear, ready to give Ken a piece of his mind.
“The fuck do you want, you cheating bastard?”

“Now, Yuuki-tan. Is that any way to speak to your loving boyfriend who has been out of his mind with worry?” Ken asked, sounding wounded.

“Bullshit, you mother fucker. If you had given a single fuck about me, then you wouldn’t be marrying some woman and asking me to be your side tail. I thought I told you to lose my number,” Yuuki raged as he untied his apron and yanked it off.

He threw it on the counter and stalked toward his room. The last thing he wanted was for Raegan to walk in on him arguing with his ex.

“Now why would I do a silly thing like that?” Ken’s voice held a note of humor to cover up his condescending tone.

Ugh, just listening to him was making Yuuki want to puke. How had he ever found this guy attractive? Every word out of his mouth had this haughty air to it. Like he thought he was so superior to Yuuki that the simple fact he even spoke to him should be treated as a favor. Well, fuck that.

“Because I broke up with you. I am not some pet that sits at the door waiting anxiously for you to come home and pet my head.” Yuuki closed his bedroom door behind him and began pacing his room.

“Oh, Yuuki-tan. You know that isn’t how I see you. I love you.” Ken’s candied words fell from his lips like syrup.

It made Yuuki gag. How had he fallen for all of Ken's garbage all these years? How had he not seen the manipulation and abuse? How had he ever believed this man truly loved him? Genuine love didn't make you feel like a child who should be grateful for every scrap of attention you were given. Actual love was how Yuuki felt about Raegan.

As much as Yuuki wanted to deny his feelings, he knew they were true. He loved Rae more than a friend. He wouldn't be so fanciful as to say Raegan was his soulmate or anything like that, but he was very special to Yuuki. It just sucked that it had taken him getting involved with Ken to realize that.

"No, Ken. You don't love me. You love power and control. You love the idea of owning me." Yuuki stopped pacing as he felt a power he had never felt before welling up in him. All the things he had wanted to say in anger were pouring out of him, and it felt amazing.

"Yuuki-tan."

"STOP FUCKING CALLING ME THAT!" Yuuki shouted. "I am not a child, and I am not a thing to be owned. I am a man with his own mind and feelings. A man who deserves way better than a two-timing bastard like you."

The only sound that could be heard was Yuuki's panting breath as all the rage that had filled him evaporated like mist. He felt so light he thought for a moment he just might float up to the ceiling.

"Are you quite through?" Yuuki deflated a little at the sound of Ken's voice. Fuck he should have hung up on the douche

bag. "I'll assume you are, you ungrateful brat."

Yuuki reeled back at the venom in Ken's voice. This was someone he had never met before. Even when they had argued before Ken had never sounded like this. He sounded furious and that sent a blade of fear through Yuuki's heart.

"You call me a two-timing bastard when you yourself were shacking up with that white man you live with. I saw the photos of your little wedding in Las Vegas. I have put up with all your games this far, Yuuki, but that was the last straw." The growl that rumbled in the undertone of Ken's words was almost feral, and Yuuki was thankful that Ken was on the other side of the country. "You're going to get your marriage annulled. You're going to quit your job. Then you're going to move your sorry ass to Los Angeles as I told you to. You belong to me, Yuuki, and me alone. Do you hear me? I'm a very jealous man, and I will not be held responsible for my actions if you disobey me."

The terror that had gripped Yuuki eased as the fury he had felt before forced its way to the forefront.

"No," Yuuki stated with more conviction than he felt.

"What did you just say?" Ken bit out.

"I said no, you jackass. Like I told you, I am not a thing to be owned. So you can go fuck yourself. Maybe decide to stop being an unfaithful prick and treat that poor woman you're going to marry better. Hell, do her a favor and call the whole thing off." With each word, Yuuki felt his resolve strengthen.

He would break the shackles that held him to Ken and move on. He didn't deserve any more of Yuuki's energy.

Again silence filled the line, and for a moment, Yuuki thought that Ken may have ended the call. "You're playing with fire, Yuuki, and you're going to get burned. I'm not a man to be crossed. The next time I call you, I hope that you have realized your mistake and will do as you are told."

Yuuki let his arm drop to his side as the line went dead. The adrenaline that had coursed through him while he argued with Ken was drying up, leaving him feeling drained and weak. Stumbling on jelly legs, Yuuki made it to his bed and tumbled onto it. He set his phone aside and grabbed his giant plush Ramen bowl. He squeezed it to his chest and took a shaky breath.

His nerves were frayed to the point that even if he went back to baking, he didn't think it would help calm him. He needed something more intense. Something that only Rae could give him. Raegan was due to be home soon. Yuuki would get up and go finish his baking. Then when Raegan got home, he would ask him to play.

Chapter 21

Yuuki

Yuuki was just finishing putting the last cupcakes in the cardboard to-go containers when he heard the front door open.

“I’m home.” Raegan’s rich voice called out in greeting, and the sound was like a balm for Yuuki’s soul.

Yuuki finished with the cupcakes and rushed to the foyer. As soon as his eyes landed on Raegan, he broke into a quick sprint and leaped into the air. Raegan dropped his shopping bags and caught Yuuki in just the nick of time. Yuuki wrapped himself around Raegan’s torso like a squid before capturing his lips in a passionate kiss. His tongue dove into Raegan’s mouth, lapping up the taste of winter mint gum and something spicier that was pure Raegan.

Raegan spun them so that he could pin Yuuki against the door, and his hands squeezed Yuuki’s ass possessively. Yuuki could have gone on kissing Raegan like that forever, but his lungs were screaming for air. He had to tear away from the kiss before he suffocated.

“Welcome home.” Yuuki gasped as he broke away from Raegan.

“If this is how I’m going to be greeted every time I go out, then I’m going shopping more often.” Raegan regained his breath.

Raegan lowered Yuuki to his feet but not before stealing one last kiss. Yuuki could feel his anxiety ease but only a bit. “So what’s the real reason for you mauling me as soon as I walked in the door?”

Damn, Yuuki thought, cursing Raegan’s astute perceptiveness. Yuuki should have known nothing would get past him.

“Does there have to be a reason? Couldn’t I have simply missed you?” Yuuki batted his eyes coquettishly in hopes it would distract Rae.

“Yeah, not buying it, flirt.” Raegan crushed Yuuki’s hope of skipping the feelings talk in favor of getting kinky.

Yuuki rolled his eyes and heaved a put-upon sigh. He didn’t want to tell Raegan about his fight with Ken. He could handle that on his own, but he had to tell him something. His phone chose that moment to start buzzing in his pocket. He fished it out, glanced at the screen, saw it was his father, and sent him to voicemail. Between Ken’s nasty voicemails and his father’s emasculating ones, Yuuki’s box was always full these days.

“Ah. Now I know what happened.” Raegan’s tone was equal parts sympathetic and angry as Yuuki slipped his phone into

his pocket. “Your dad got a hold of you, didn’t he? What did he say this time?”

Yuuki could have used his dad as a scapegoat but something about that made him feel gross. He didn’t like keeping things from Rae, and he didn’t like to lie. Yet Raegan didn’t need to be dragged into his drama with Ken. He had enough going on with keeping up pretenses with his family, and things at his job just seemed to be getting worse. No. Yuuki would handle his business on his own without lying.

He stepped into Raegan and laid his head on his chest while his hands came up and gripped Raegan’s shirt front.

“Nothing is wrong, Rae-kun. I’m just feeling needy today. Needy for you.” Yuuki turned his face up to look at Raegan with pleading eyes. “Won’t you tie me up and take this ache away?”

“Oh, Sugar. I love it when you beg.” Raegan moaned.

Before Yuuki realized what was happening Raegan stooped down and pulled Yuuki over his shoulder in a fireman carry. Yuuki yelped when he felt his feet come out from under him as Raegan stood up.

“You’re such a barbarian,” Yuuki teased, crying out again when Raegan delivered a smack to his ass.

“The barbarian that’s about to destroy your ass. So quit sounding ungrateful.” Raegan chuckled darkly, and that sound did all kinds of dirty things to Yuuki’s insides.

Yuuki clamped his mouth shut and focused his attention downward. He watched Raegan's meaty ass roll and sway like tantalizing ocean waves. He wondered if Raegan enjoyed any kind of ass play. Ken had refused to even entertain the idea of Yuuki going anywhere near his ass. Would Raegan be different? Would he let Yuuki eat him out? Finger him? Fuck him?

The idea of getting to fuck Raegan's big, solid ass had Yuuki's dick filling up in an instant. Yuuki could count on one hand the number of times he'd been allowed to top and none of them had been very memorable. Would it be different with Raegan?

"Find something you like back there?" Raegan asked, snapping Yuuki out of his thoughts. It was then that Yuuki noticed that his hands had traveled down and had a firm grip on each of Raegan's cheeks.

"Oops." Yuuki grudgingly released his hold on Raegan's behind.

"I didn't say you had to stop. It's been a while since someone paid attention to my ass." Raegan's tone sounded wistful as they entered his room.

Hello! What have we here? Yuuki thought with great curiosity as Raegan lowered Yuuki to the floor and held him until he was settled on his feet.

"What? Why is that? Your ass is kind of amazing. Who wouldn't want to get all up in that?" Yuuki didn't want to flat out ask Raegan if he would be up for getting fucked.

Raegan gestured to all of himself. “When people look at me, all they see is a dominant power top. No one ever thinks that I could be vers.”

The tinge of hurt that rang in Raegan’s words made Yuuki’s chest feel tight. Raegan was so good at taking care of others and making sure they got what they wanted, that he often forgot his own desires. Well, Yuuki was going to let him know that just wouldn’t do.

Yuuki grabbed Raegan’s hand and pressed it over his heart. “I see you, Rae-kun, and if that’s something you want, I’m happy to oblige.”

An awestruck gasp escaped Raegan, and his eyes shone with an emotion Yuuki couldn’t quite identify. Raegan leaned down and stole a quick kiss before pressing his forehead to Yuuki’s.

“You don’t know how happy it makes me to hear you say that, but,” Raegan leaned back, his eyes burning with naked desire, and he licked his lips like a hungry wolf, “tonight is about catering to you, and I have some delicious things planned that will have you screaming my name.”

“Fuck, Rae. I love it when you talk dirty like that.” Yuuki’s aching cock throbbed.

“I’ll keep that in mind while I truss you up like a Christmas ham.” Raegan chucked Yuuki under the chin. “Now get naked and hit the shower so I can tie you up.”

Yuuki didn't have to be told twice. He dashed for the bathroom, clothes flying behind him, and took the fastest shower of his life. He had, thankfully, had the foresight to handle other prep matters before finishing his baking. Now he emerged from the bathroom, feeling more than ready to take whatever Raegan had planned.

"That was quick. Eager much?" Raegan teased as he set a hank of rope on the bed before walking toward Yuuki.

"Hell, yeah, Bae." Yuuki met him halfway and struck a provocative pose.

"Hee. Well then, I'll try to be quick." Raegan whipped his shirt up and over his head. "Go make yourself comfortable on the bed, and I'll be out in a jiff."

Raegan smacked Yuuki's ass as he walked past him to the bathroom, and Yuuki moaned at the contact.

"You'd better. Otherwise, I'm starting without you." Yuuki dashed to the bed, barely avoiding another swat to his rear.

He climbed onto the bed and laid down so that he could see the bathroom door but had access to his dick. Getting Raegan riled up with some teasing always led to good things for him, so Yuuki intended to do just that.

Yuuki paid close attention to the sounds that came from the bathroom, and after several long, agonizing minutes, he heard the click of the door opening. He reached down and wrapped his hand around his dick. As he stroked it, he gave out an over the top moan. Through his hooded lashes, he watched Raegan

pause in the doorway before leaning on the frame with an amused smirk on his face.

Better lay it on thicker, Yuuki thought as he gave out another moan and his other hand slid down his body to grip his balls. He rolled and tugged on them, all as he watched Raegan to see his reaction. Raegan's smirk grew wider as Yuuki watched him slide his hand into his boxers. Yuuki knew he had to have taken himself in hand but those damn loose underwear gave nothing away.

Images of Raegan touching himself as Yuuki watched filled Yuuki's head, and he felt his balls tingle. Yuuki jerked his hands away from himself, not wanting to end things before they even began.

"Aw, why'd you stop? I was enjoying the show." Raegan snickered.

Yuuki shot him a glare before rolling onto his stomach with an affronted pout.

"No, free show for you, mister tardy. I was promised dirty shibari sex, and that's what I am going to get." Yuuki reached out and toyed with the end of the bundle of rope.

"Oh, well. What the little prince wants he shall get." Raegan flourished his arms and dipped into a bow.

"Damn right." Yuuki pushed up into a sitting position and crooked his finger beckoning Raegan. "So come here and give it to me."

The playful smirk that had adorned Raegan's face fell away into a neutral mask, but his eyes glinted like a predator on the prowl for its next meal. Yuuki's heart rate ticked up as Raegan stalked toward him. He'd not seen Raegan like this before. So powerful and commanding. It had Yuuki wanting to get on his knees before him and do anything he asked.

When Raegan reached the bed, he took Yuuki's chin between his thumb and forefinger while pinning him in place with an intense look.

"Let's get one thing straight before we get started," Raegan growled. "From this moment on, I'm in charge. You got that? Are we green?"

"Yes, Rae-kun." Yuuki's breath came in little pants. He was surprised he had answered Raegan at all.

Raegan's smirk returned as he released Yuuki's chin. "Good. Then let's get started."

As Raegan picked up the rope, Yuuki shifted into a comfortable position. Yuuki let his eyes drift shut and waited for Raegan to start working. Yuuki loved the freedom that came with letting Raegan take control of his body. Manipulating it as he pleased as he tied him up in beautiful intricate knots.

Yuuki felt Raegan's hands and the rope touch the skin of his chest, starting with the anchor knot. As Raegan worked, Yuuki allowed his mind to slip into a floaty state. He could feel everything and obeyed commands, like when Raegan told him to lift his arms, but other than that, he merely existed. It was a

glorious state of being. Here, he didn't have to think about his worries over Ken, his bigoted dad, or lying to the people who treated him like family. He was just Rae's toy to play with however he pleased, and that suited him just fine.

“Arms behind your back, grabbing your elbows.” Raegan's command came accompanied by gentle pressure on his biceps.

Yuuki moved his arms into the position Rae had asked for without further prodding. They had done this type of harness before, so Yuuki knew just how to hold himself. More rope moved over his skin, and Yuuki loved the feel of it. Just tight enough to bite into his skin but not cut off circulation.

“Nearly done. Color?” Raegan asked, and Yuuki could feel him securing a series of knots over his folded arms.

“Green.” Yuuki lapsed into Japanese.

Raegan chuckled as he placed a kiss on the nape of Yuuki's neck. Raegan's lips felt like a brand on Yuuki's skin, and that heat radiated outward until he felt like he was engulfed in flames. The bed dipped as Raegan changed position, and Yuuki heard something dragging on metal. He then heard two clicks and more dragging before he felt his bindings pulling him upward.

Yuuki snapped his eyes open in surprise and turned his head as best he could to look at Raegan in confusion. Raegan smirked down at him from where he stood, naked, on the bed, adjusting straps that were attached to the metal frame of the canopy bed.

“I told you I had plans.” Raegan lowered himself to his knees and grabbed Yuuki’s hips. “I need you to move back a bit.” Yuuki was still confused but did as Raegan asked. “Good. Now spread your knees. Yeah, like that. You comfortable like that?”

Yuuki nodded, and Raegan stood up again. He made a few more adjustments to the rigging before making a satisfied noise. He lowered himself onto the mattress before slipping around in front of Yuuki. Yuuki was about to ask what he was doing when Raegan moved to lie on his back and started sliding his head beneath Yuuki.

“Rae-kAH!” Yuuki cried out as Raegan’s hands gripped his ass cheeks, spreading them, and his tongue swiped over Yuuki’s hole. Raegan then started up a pattern of circling Yuuki’s rim with the tip of his tongue, then lapping at it with the flat of his tongue, and then sucking on it. The man ate ass like it was his last meal, and it had Yuuki’s brain on the fritz.

“Sit back, Sugar.” Raegan applied pressure to Yuuki’s thighs.

Yuuki did as Rae asked and was rewarded with more of his magical mouth doing filthy things to his hole and taint. Yuuki wished his hands weren’t tied up because he desperately needed to touch his dick. It ached and throbbed so badly that he was sure it was going to burst. A scream ripped its way out of Yuuki’s throat when Raegan’s calloused hand wrapped around him and began stroking his hard flesh.

“Rae! Oh, fuck, Rae!” Yuuki panted out as his brain tried to keep up with the onslaught of pleasure.

“Told you I’d have you screaming my name.” Raegan words were muffled as he paused for a moment before spearing Yuuki’s entrance with his tongue.

Yuuki cried out as Raegan worked his tongue inside him and began fucking Yuuki’s hole with it while his hand glided over Yuuki’s cock using precum for lube. Yuuki didn’t know whether to press back to try to force Raegan’s tongue deeper or thrust forward to gain more of that sweet friction.

Yuuki could feel his balls growing tight, and he knew he wasn’t far from his orgasm. Rough fingers traced over Yuuki’s balls and moved back along his taint before returning to Yuuki’s balls. Raegan’s hand closed around Yuuki’s sac and rolled it in his palm several times before giving it a firm tug.

“Raegan!” Yuuki shouted as his cock erupted, covering Raegan’s hand and stomach with his cum.

Yuuki slumped forward, held up by his bindings as Raegan continued to milk him until the very last spurt. Yuuki hung there, panting and spent. Fuck! Was every orgasm that he shared with Rae going to be that intense because, if so, he was ruined for any other man.

Yuuki felt the straps that had been holding him up loosen, and he was lowered to the bed. As soon as he hit the mattress, Raegan’s hands went to work untying the knots that held Yuuki. Before too long, Yuuki was free of the rope, and he could stretch out his sore muscles.

“You doing okay, Sugar?” Raegan asked as he massaged Yuuki’s arms to help with the soreness.

“Yeah, I’m fucking amazing,” Yuuki responded, his face falling into a frown when he caught sight of Raegan’s hard cock. “You on the other hand, seem to be anything but.”

“Whoa, Yuu. What are...” Raegan started as Yuuki used all his strength to go up on his knees and forced Raegan onto his back.

Before Raegan could react, Yuuki forced his legs apart and settled between them. He stared at Raegan’s dick and, for a split second, worried he couldn’t even get it in his mouth. He pushed that concern aside and wrapped both his hands around Raegan’s member. Stroking downward, he peeled back Raegan’s foreskin, exposing his tip. A bead of precum formed, and Yuuki didn’t hesitate to dive in and lap it up. The salty fluid hit Yuuki’s tongue, and he had to hold back a moan.

He’d wondered what Raegan would taste like and none of his fantasies had even come close. Greedy for more, Yuuki opened his mouth as wide as he could and swallowed Raegan’s cockhead. He swirled his tongue around it before dipping the tip of his tongue into Raegan’s slit. He tried to work his way down Raegan’s length but didn’t get far. Mouth and hands working in tandem, Yuuki suckled at Raegan’s tip while his hands slid over the velvety, hard flesh.

“Yuu. Ah. Fuck. Not. Ugh. Gonna last,” Raegan groaned, and Yuuki doubled his efforts.

He took one hand off Raegan's cock and reached up toward Raegan's face. It was a stretch, but he found Rae's lips and tapped them. Raegan must have gotten the hint because, a moment later, his first two fingers were enveloped in Raegan's mouth. Raegan licked and suckled at Yuuki's fingers until they were dripping wet.

Yuuki retracted his hand and brought it down, rubbing over Raegan's balls and back along his taint to his rim. Raegan adjusted his hips as best he could with his dick in Yuuki's mouth to allow Yuuki better access to his ass. Yuuki made an appreciative noise as he circled Raegan's hole with his fingers.

"Shit! Sugar. Close," Raegan warned, and Yuuki felt him tangle his fingers into his hair and tried to pull him off. Yuuki was having none of that. He had worked hard for his prize, and he was damn well going to get it.

Yuuki's hand and head picked up speed as he continued to tease Raegan's entrance. With great care, Yuuki slowly worked his middle finger into Raegan's hole until he found that special bundle of nerves and rubbed it.

"YUUKI!" Raegan bellowed as the hand that was still in Yuuki's hair tightened to the point of being painful and the rest of his body went still as stone.

The first spurt of Raegan's cum flooded Yuuki's mouth, surprising him, and he gagged a little. He recovered and drank down every drop that Raegan gave him. Yuuki suckled and licked Raegan's cock until it gave a final spurt and softened.

Yuuki crawled up onto Raegan's panting chest and rested his chin on his folded arms.

"Feeling better?" he asked with a satisfied smirk.

Raegan gave him a half-hearted glare before he shot forward and captured Yuuki's lips in a filthy kiss. He forced his tongue into Yuuki's mouth, and it traced every inch as if it were looking for some kind of treasure. Yuuki chased after Raegan's tongue, dancing alongside it until his lungs burned.

They broke away from the kiss, panting for air, and Raegan smiled up at Yuuki.

"Much, much better." He kissed the tip of Yuuki's nose.

Raegan rolled them onto their sides and hugged Yuuki to his chest like a teddy bear.

"You need to go get a bath before that cum dries." Yuuki tried to push away from Raegan.

"Later. Right now, I just want to hold you." Raegan's words sounded so sincere that it sent a sharp pain through Yuuki's heart.

He doesn't mean it like that. It's all pretend. Don't go getting things twisted; otherwise, you'll lose everything, Yuuki's inner voice warned him, but deep in his heart in the secret place where he kept his deepest desires, Yuuki wished it were all real.

Chapter 22

Raegan

Why won't Yuuki tell me what's going on with him?
Raegan thought as they climbed into his truck to head to his parents. It seemed like overnight a gulf had formed between them, and Raegan had no way of crossing it. Yuuki was quiet, which was out of character for him. Raegan knew that something had to be on his mind, but whenever he asked Yuuki about it, he would say it was nothing. Raegan wanted to call bullshit, but he worried that would just make the rift wider, so he let things be even though it was killing him.

The drive to the farm that was usually filled with talking and laughter was quiet and awkward. Raegan couldn't remember the last time there had ever been awkward tension between them. Even when they had first met, they had found things in common to talk about. Raegan needed to fix this before they got to the farm. It wouldn't do for the guests of honor to be out of sync.

“So, Mom tells me this is going to be quite the shindig. Dad had to haul out all the smokers and grills to cook all the food. She also said that each of the ladies in her book club made a

dessert and want you to judge them. You know give some pointers since you are a big-time pastry chef.” Raegan knew that if there was one sure-fire way to get Yuuki talking, it was to talk about baking.

“Yeah, I guess I could do that. It was fun helping Ellie with her cookies.” Yuuki’s tone was flat as he stared out the car window.

Raegan was dumbstruck. That was it? He wasn’t going to go into a whole spiel about how he could teach the book ladies all kinds of baking tricks or talk about giving lessons or... or... or something? Something major was going on with Yuuki, that was for certain if he wasn’t getting excited about baking.

“Yuuki.” Raegan took his hand off the wheel and put it on Yuuki’s knee. “You know you can talk to me about anything. I know something is going on, but I can’t help if you don’t tell me about it.”

Raegan glanced over and found Yuuki looking at him with the saddest, most regretful look in his eyes. Raegan had never seen him look so torn up. Not since his mom’s death.

“Yuu, please tell me what’s going on. Is it something to do with your dad being a bastard? Is something going on at work that I need to know about? You know I will move heaven and earth to help if I can.” Raegan’s voice was pleading as he clung to Yuuki’s hand.

Raegan felt Yuuki lay his hand on top of his and squeeze it.

“That’s what I love about you, Rae. You have the biggest heart.” Yuuki sighed and the sound made Raegan’s heartbreak. “Everything’s fine. I swear. There’s nothing for you to worry about. Let’s just enjoy this party with your family.”

Raegan wanted to argue, but there was something in Yuuki’s tone that let him know that wasn’t a good idea. However, to him, this discussion wasn’t over. He’d find out what was going on, one way or another.

“Okay, Yuu.” Raegan turned his hand over and brought their conjoined hands up to place a kiss on the back of Yuuki’s hand.

The rest of the drive was less oppressive but still not the easygoing atmosphere they were used to. As Raegan pulled his truck up to the house, he was blown away by the insane number of cars parked in front of the house and along the drive.

“Did she invite the whole county?” Raegan pulled his truck closer to the house. There, he spotted a space between John’s truck and Kennedy’s minivan with a sign that said *Reserved for the Grooms*. Raegan shook his head and huffed out a sigh. This was his mother’s typical over-the-top behavior that Rae loved and loathed at the same time.

Raegan maneuvered his truck into the space and hopped out of the car.

“They’re here! They’re here!” he heard Ellie shout before she burst out the front door and tore across the lawn toward them.

Yuuki rushed around the truck and latched on to Raegan's arm like a lifeline in yet another uncharacteristic move. Raegan was growing more concerned for Yuuki by the second as he continued to act so strange. Raegan wasn't able to do anything about Yuuki as, within seconds of their arrival, they were mobbed by a crowd of Raegan's well-wishing relatives and family friends.

"There you two finally are." Renata muscled her way through the crowd and grabbed Raegan's hand. "Come on. We've been waiting for your arrival before we kicked things off."

Renata began moving toward the backyard, pulling Raegan and Yuuki, who still clung to Rae for dear life, behind her. When they rounded the house, Raegan was gobsmacked at the massive number of people milling about.

She really did invite the whole county, Raegan thought as he caught sight of people he hadn't seen in at least ten years.

"The guests of honor have arrived!" Renata shouted as she released Raegan's hand, and every head whipped around to focus on Raegan and Yuuki.

Yuuki's grip on Raegan's arm tightened to the point it was almost painful. Raegan looked down at Yuuki and could see anxiety written all over his face. He needed to get Yuuki out of this crowd and talk to him. It was clear he was uncomfortable, and Raegan needed to find out what he could do to help.

"Yuu-oof," Raegan started but was cut off by Ellie slamming into his stomach.

“Uncle Rae! Uncle Yuu! You have to come try my cookies!” Ellie shouted while bouncing on the balls of her feet. When Raegan looked down into her big brown eyes, they were filled with pride and the desire for validation. Raegan was torn between giving Ellie what she wanted and caring for the man he loved. When he felt Yuuki shaking, his decision was made for him.

“We will, sweetie. I just need to talk to Yuuki for a sec...”

“Ellie. Give them some space, they just got here,” John cut in, appearing behind his daughter and placing his hands on her shoulders. “How about you go find Nana and G Daddy. I don’t think they’ve tried your cookies yet.”

“What? I made them with that special fake sugar just for G Daddy.” Ellie bolted off quick as lightning to fix this egregious oversight.

“Thanks, John.” Raegan gave John a grateful look.

John gave him a wink, then nodded his head toward the house, silently letting Raegan know he would run interference so that they could talk. Raegan nodded and started leading Yuuki toward the house. John walked along with them, diverting all the well-wishers in their path until at last, they reached the backdoor.

They slipped inside, leaving John at the backdoor as a lookout, and Raegan guided Yuuki upstairs to his old bedroom. Once they were in the room, Raegan locked the door and leaned back against it as he pulled Yuuki into his arms. They

just stood there for some time with Raegan holding Yuuki until he felt him relax.

Okay, time to get some answers, Raegan thought as he slid his hands up to Yuuki's shoulders and pushed him back just enough so that their eyes could meet. Yuuki's eyes were clouded with tears, and he looked miserable.

"Sugar." Raegan lifted his hand and cupped Yuuki's cheek. "Please tell me what is going on. You love parties and being social, but today you seem like you're terrified. This isn't like you, and it has me worried."

Yuuki's eyes fell shut, and he bit his lip as he turned his face into Raegan's palm.

"Why is it that when I try not to worry you, I end up worrying you?" Yuuki fought to keep himself under control.

"Because you're an idiot." Raegan chortled as he leaned in and placed a kiss on Yuuki's forehead. "What's going on, Yuu? We never keep things from each other."

Yuuki sniffled before opening his eyes and turning his head to face Raegan.

"I know this is all pretend, but it still hurts." Silent tears streamed down Yuuki's face. "It hurts that my relationship with my dad has become so shitty all he does is call me to let me know what a disappointment I am." Anger slipped in beside sadness as the words tumbled from Yuuki's mouth. "It hurts that I see your amazing family rallying around you and are actually happy you married a man." Yuuki pulled away

from Raegan, and he let him go without resistance, sensing that his touch was unwelcome at the moment. “The thing that hurts the worst is knowing that even if this was real, the only family I had who would have been happy for me is dead, and she’s never coming back.”

Yuuki came to a dead stop a few feet away from Raegan with his hands clenched into fists at his side. Raegan watched him for a moment just standing there, shaking, and then he heard the first sob. Pain like Raegan had never felt before stabbed his heart. It killed him that Yuuki was hurting like this, and he had no clue what to do to fix it. The only thing he could do was offer comfort.

Without hesitation, Raegan closed the gap between them and pulled Yuuki into another embrace. Yuuki went without protest and turned into Raegan, burying his face in Raegan’s chest. Yuuki’s entire body quaked with the force of his sobs as he soaked the front of Raegan’s shirt with his tears.

“She’s never coming back,” Yuuki croaked through his tears, causing more pain to clench Raegan’s heart.

“No, she’s not, Sugar.” Raegan held Yuuki tighter, needing some comfort as well. “But if she was here, she would be so happy for you. She and my mom would have been an unstoppable force, and there would be twice as many guests and food.”

A shaky laugh escaped Yuuki, and Raegan patted himself on the back for bringing Yuuki a bit of joy. “Only twice as many? My mom would have invited anyone who had ever smiled at

me. Then she'd have gone into town and rounded up anybody else she could find.”

They both chuckled because they knew it was true. Nomi Nakatani had been a force of nature. If Raegan's mom was a hurricane, then Nomi was a typhoon.

“She was pretty awesome. I'm sad she's not here, too.” Raegan lifted his hand and stroked Yuuki's hair.

They fell silent and stood there holding each other. As they did Raegan found that what he said was true. It was heartbreaking that Yuuki had no one from his family to be at the reception for one of the biggest events of his life. Even though it was all fake, the situation had still shed a harsh, glaring light on what things would be like. No wonder Yuuki had been off. He must have felt so alone and out of place. While Raegan's family adored Yuuki and treated him like family, there was just this unexplainable thing that made you crave love from your blood.

I have to tell him. I have to tell him I am madly in love with him and that I can love him enough to make up for all the hurt his family causes him.

Feeling more determined than he had in his life, Raegan pressed Yuuki back so that he could look him in the eye when he confessed his feelings. The words were there right on the tip of his tongue and ready to spring to life.

“Raegan Joseph, you get your tail out here this instant. I put this party together for you, and you will not hide in your room canoodling with your husband.” Renata's angry voice shouted

from the other side of the door, accompanied by several sharp knocks that had Raegan jumping out of his skin just like when he was a kid.

“We’re coming, Mrs... I mean, Mama.” Yuuki called back as he pulled out of Raegan’s arms and began wiping his eyes as he started for the door.

Raegan went to reach for Yuuki to stop him so that he could say the words he needed to, but the smaller man was quicker. Yuuki pulled the door open and dashed across the hall to the bathroom as if a pack of wolves were chasing him. A bewildered-looking John and Raegan’s mother looked after Yuuki’s retreating form before turning to look at Raegan.

“Raegan, what did you do to that poor boy?” Renata asked, giving Raegan an accusatory look.

Raegan rolled his eyes in exasperation.

“I didn’t do anything, Mama. Yuuki’s just feeling a little low.” Raegan walked out of his room, past his relatives.

“Feeling low? Why on Earth would he...” Renata gasped as understanding dawned on her, and her hands flew up to cover her mouth. “I completely forgot about his mother. Of course, the poor thing is upset.” Renata dropped her hands and grabbed Raegan’s before he reached the bathroom Yuuki was occupying. “Raegan, you tell him he can come down whenever he’s ready, and when he is, you send him to me. I’ll feed him and love him up good enough to make up for him missing his mama.”

For as frustrating as his mom could be, Raegan loved the woman more than anything and admired her generous heart. He knew he got that part of himself from her. Raegan leaned down and placed a kiss on his mother's cheek. "Thank you, Mama. I'll take care of him and send him right to you."

Renata released Raegan's hands and brought her own up to cup his cheeks.

"I know you will, baby. You're a good boy." Renata dropped her hands and started down the hall. "Now I have guests to go entertain."

"I'll go back to playing lookout." John clapped Raegan on the shoulder. "Y'all take your time."

"Thanks, John." Raegan looked to the bathroom with concern.

"It'll be okay, Rae. You'll see." John patted Raegan's shoulder again before walking off.

Now that he was alone, Raegan stepped up to the bathroom door and gave a light knock. "Sugar? You okay in there?"

The door opened a crack to reveal a puffy-eyed Yuuki. "I'm okay now, Bae." Yuuki gave Raegan a tiny smile.

Raegan wasn't convinced in the least that Yuuki had put himself together that fast. Not after seeing the soul-deep pain in Yuuki's eyes. "Are you sure, Yuu? If this is too much, I can take you home."

Yuuki's eyes widened in horror, and he grabbed the front of Raegan's still damp shirt. "No. Everyone worked so hard to

put this entire party together for us. It would all be a waste if I left.”

Raegan placed his hands over Yuuki’s and gave them a squeeze. “Everyone would understand, and if they don’t, then they can just deal. You being comfortable and happy is all that matters to me.” Raegan looked deep into Yuuki’s eyes, praying that Yuuki would see the love he had for him there.

Yuuki’s eyes got misty again, and Raegan watched as he blinked rapidly to keep the pesky tears at bay.

“What did I ever do to deserve to have someone as sweet as you in my life?” Yuuki asked, smiling up at Raegan.

“Nothing other than just being you.” Raegan leaned in and placed a soft kiss on Yuuki’s lips. “So what do you want to do?”

Yuuki was quiet for a moment before he gave a sharp nod. “I want to go to the party as long as you promise to not leave my side even once.”

Raegan’s heart did a backflip. “That’s an easy promise to keep because there is no other place I’d rather be.” Raegan had never said truer words. At that moment, wild horses couldn’t even drag him away from Yuuki.

“Well, all right then.” Yuuki grabbed Raegan’s hand and started down the hall. “Let’s go join the party.”

Raegan smiled as he followed behind Yuuki without protest and swore to himself that soon he would tell Yuuki his true feelings.

Chapter 23

Yuuki

“**F**uck this day with a rusty pitchfork,” Yuuki grumbled as he trudged to his apartment door. Work had been a non-stop nightmare from the moment Yuuki had walked in the door. Dallas had called out, which he never did, and that had concerned Yuuki. He hadn’t had time to worry about his friend, though, as he was now responsible for all the cake decorating that needed to be done that day.

Betha was there to help, but her piping skills were nowhere near the skill level that Sugar and Spice was known for. So Yuuki worked on one cake after another like a robot. Even skipping his lunch. Not that Arturo cared. That bastard had ridden Yuuki’s ass the whole day and not in the fun way. When Yuuki had a last punched out for the day, his hands were aching, and his mood was terrible.

Not that he had been in a good mood as of late. He somehow faked it enough that people, specifically Raegan, didn’t ask questions. He’d made sure of that after his break down at the reception party.

He hadn't been lying when he had said all the stuff about his family. That was true, too, and the party had driven that home. No, what had been bothering him and had him on edge was Ken. The fucker had tripled his harassing texts and voicemails, each one becoming more threatening by the day.

Yuuki had thought he could handle Ken. He'd thought that if he just ignored him at some point Ken would get the message and leave Yuuki alone. Yuuki realized, far too late, that belief had been naïve. Now every time that Yuuki heard his phone chime or felt it vibrate, he was filled with a nauseating dread. Just that morning, Yuuki had received over fifty messages from Ken and had turned off his phone to escape the incessant buzzing.

As Yuuki put his key in the lock, he remembered he hadn't turned his phone back on. He would do that once he was inside and safe with Rae. As Yuuki turned his key, he was surprised to find the door wasn't locked. He found that odd, but sometimes, if Raegan was tired or preoccupied, he forgot to lock the door behind him. Yuuki brushed it off and entered his apartment.

"I'm home," he called out as he locked the door behind him. He set his kit down and turned to toe his shoes off.

As he removed his shoes and slipped on his house slippers, Yuuki realized Rae wasn't home. His slippers were sitting there next to Yuuki's and his shoes were missing. Fear gripped Yuuki's heart as he picked up his kit and moved to put it in the closet. He hung up his kit and grabbed the bat that Raegan had

insisted they keep there for home defense. Yuuki had thought it ridiculous at the time. Now though, he was grateful for it.

With cautious steps, Yuuki crept further into the apartment with the bat raised at the ready. His eyes darted around looking for anything that was out of the ordinary. Every shadow was suspicious as he crept further into the apartment. The kitchen and living room came up clear when he checked them. He swallowed nervously as he moved toward Raegan's room.

“Welcome home, Yuuki-tan.” Yuuki froze at the sound of the one voice he wished he would never hear again. Before he could react, the bat was wrenched from his grasp and the momentum brought Yuuki spinning around to come face to face with Ken. Yuuki cried out in surprise and fear as he stumbled backward. Tripping over his own feet, Yuuki fell onto his ass, but he never took his eyes off Ken.

“Now is that any way to greet your loving boyfriend after he came all this way to see you?” Ken asked as he dropped the bat and started walking toward Yuuki.

The look on Ken's face was meant to be loving, but there was something off about it. There was a sharp edge to his smile, and his eyes were cold with a haze of mania to them.

“Wh-What are you doing here?” Yuuki stammered out as he scooted backward away from Ken.

“Why, I came to get you, remember?” Ken continued to advance toward Yuuki, forcing him to scuttle like a crab until his back hit the wall.

“Uh, no. I’m pretty sure I told you to fuck off and die.” Yuuki worked his way to his feet, using the wall for support and kept a cautious eye on Ken.

Ken’s smile faltered, and his eye twitched at the corner before returning to their previous state. “That’s a very mean joke, Yuuki-tan. Why would you say something so awful and ludicrous?”

Oh, fuck, he’s come unglued. How the hell do I get out of this? Shit, why didn’t I turn my phone back on? Yuuki thought as he panicked, and his heart rate doubled. He needed to be careful about what he said and did because he didn’t know if Ken had a weapon on him. He didn’t want to set Ken off and get himself killed. Yuuki wasn’t sure what Ken was capable of, and he didn’t plan to find out.

Damn it. He wished Ken hadn’t gotten the drop on him and taken the bat. There was no way he could make it to the knife block before Ken caught him. Yuuki, unfortunately, had to admit he was cornered. Should he just play along until he found an opportunity to call for help or run? Should he try to fight? Playing along seemed to be the safest option. “You’re right, Ken. That was mean. I’m sorry.”

Ken’s smile brightened, and the crazed look in his eyes dulled a bit.

“I forgive you, Yuuki-tan.” Ken was now in Yuuki’s space, and he lifted his hand to caress Yuuki’s cheek. “Now let’s go pack your things so we can get going.”

Yuuki tried not to recoil from Ken's touch, and he fought down the bile that rose in his throat. It felt like Ken was smearing pond scum on his cheek, and Yuuki wanted to wash the sensation away.

"Okay. I'll just go to my room then." Yuuki tried to move around Ken. This could be an opportunity for escape, so he didn't want to blow it.

"Hold on, Yuuki-tan." Yuu froze when Ken's hand locked around his biceps like a vise. "I'll come with you. After all, many hands make light work."

Ken's eye twitched again, and Yuuki's stomach twisted at the loss of his escape opportunity.

"Uh, yeah. Okay. That's smart." Yuuki prayed Ken couldn't hear the nervousness in his voice. He didn't want to clue the bastard into how scared he was.

"Let's go then." Ken adjusted his hold on Yuuki's arm and began walking to Yuuki's room.

Yuuki allowed himself to be led as his brain spun in frantic circles trying to come up with some form of a plan. He could make a dash for his bathroom and barricade himself in until he could call for help. But that plan left him cornered if Ken broke in. Did he have anything he could use as a weapon in his room? Did he have anything heavy he could hit Ken over the head with to knock him out? He didn't think he did, and even if he did, what if he accidentally killed Ken? He was so not going to jail over his asshole ex.

They entered Yuuki's room, and his anxiety rose. He was running out of options, and he didn't plan on walking out of here with Ken. That wasn't an option because he knew if he did, he'd never be free again. Or even alive.

"You keep your luggage in the closet, right?"

"What?" Yuuki asked, looking at Ken in confusion. He'd been so wrapped up in his thoughts, he'd forgotten to pay attention to Ken.

"Your luggage, Yuuki-tan," Ken's voice took on a hard edge. "You are so absentminded today." Ken tightened his grip on Yuuki's arm, causing him to wince in pain. "You need to focus. Otherwise, we'll be here all day, and I'd like to avoid that roommate of yours."

The amount of venom in Ken's voice as he alluded to Raegan was so thick it practically streamed from the corners of his mouth.

That's it! Raegan! Raegan had to be coming home at some point. If Yuuki could stall long enough Rae should come home, and together, they could get out of this nightmare. He had to be careful, though. If Ken realized he was stalling, then he might flip out, and Yuuki would be screwed. "Oh, yes. My luggage. I think it's in the closet. Let me just check."

Ken eyed Yuuki for a second before tugging Yuuki toward the walk-in closet. He cursed under his breath when Ken didn't release his hold on him, but it was okay. Yuuki knew his luggage was in Raegan's closet as it was part of a set that fit together. They'd waste some time rummaging in Yuuki's

nightmare of a closet for a bit, and then Yuuki would happen to remember he put it in Rae's room. When they went to get it, Yuuki would attempt to escape.

Yuuki opened the closet door and flicked on the light.

"You have got to be kidding me," Ken grumbled as he took in Yuuki's closet. Clothes, shoes, and accessories were strewn about everywhere. Yuuki may have been neat in the bakery, but at home, he was a bit of a slob.

"Yeah, it's a little bit of a mess." Yuuki scratched at the back of his head in a sheepish gesture.

"A little bit," Ken gritted out as his eyes narrowed and looked over the space with great disdain.

"I'm sure we'll find it. I vaguely remember it being in that corner." Yuuki pointed off to his left. "Let's start there."

Ken sighed before releasing Yuuki's arm. Yuuki had to resist rubbing the sore spot on his arm that he knew would bruise later. He was sure that if he showed Ken any weakness, it would only lead to more trouble for him. Yuuki walked over to where he had pointed and started rummaging around, faking that he was looking. Ken stood sentry at the door, watching Yuuki with more intensity than was warranted. It pissed Yuuki off he hadn't offered to help, and he was cutting off Yuuki's escape route. Well, Yuuki was going to make this as painful for Ken as he could.

"You know what would be smart? I should fold everything. That way, when I find the luggage, I can just put my things in

it right away.” Yuuki picked up a shirt and meticulously folded it.

“Never mind all that,” Ken stalked up to Yuuki and snatched the shirt out of his hand. “We won’t be taking everything all at once. You’ll just need the bare essentials. We’ll send for everything else later.”

Ken threw the shirt down like it was garbage, and Yuuki had to stop himself from getting up to start a fight. He was losing his patience with this whole situation. Fuck, he hoped Raegan came home soon.

“But don’t you want me to look cute for you once we are in California?” Yuuki looked up at Ken, using his baby doll eyes.

Something dark crossed Ken’s face, and Yuuki could feel his blood run cold. “Once we’re home, you won’t have much use for clothes since I’m going to fuck you morning, noon, and night for at least the first week.”

Yuuki was sure Ken had meant that to sound sexy, but it just made his stomach twist. All Yuuki could imagine was him locked up in some basement with a collar around his neck and chained to the wall like an animal.

Like in all those crime shows that Raegan likes to watch, Yuuki thought, causing his chest to ache. If he didn’t get out of this mess, he’d never again lie on the couch reading while Raegan massaged his feet as he watched those horror stories. Yuuki could feel his nose tickle, and he had to look away from Ken before he saw his eyes going misty.

Yuuki took a deep breath in through his nose and blinked several times forcing the tears back. He would get out of this. Raegan would come home, and together, they would deal with Ken. Then they would get some ice cream and snuggle on the couch like they always did. Things would be okay. He'd make sure of it.

With determination, Yuuki went back to pretending he was searching for his luggage. All too soon, though, he had worked his way through the small space with no luggage to be found. This stall tactic had come to an end.

"I'm such an idiot." Yuuki smacked his palm against his forehead as if he had just realized something. "Now I remember. The luggage is in Rae's room."

An angry growl sounded behind Yuuki, and as he turned to look at Ken, pain exploded on his right cheek, sending him tumbling to the ground. Dazed, Yuuki pushed up onto one arm as he lifted his other hand and tenderly ran it over his cheek.

"I am tired of these games, Yuuki. Get the fuck up. We're leaving now," Ken shouted as he loomed over Yuuki.

When Yuuki looked up at Ken, he didn't recognize the man standing over him. His face was curled into an ugly sneer, and his deranged eyes were hard as flint. Yuuki swallowed the lump of fear in his throat as he trembled, knowing that he was out of time.

"I said get up!" Ken grabbed Yuuki's arm and jerked up on it so hard Yuuki was surprised he hadn't dislocated it.

Yuuki stumbled to his feet. His head was still spinning from being struck but he had no time to steady himself. Ken was already dragging him out of the closet toward the front door. Any hope of Raegan showing up to save the day was dashed, and now Yuuki had zero options. With flight no longer on the table, it looked like all he could do was fight.

As they reached the front door, Yuuki mustered up all his courage and using all his weight threw himself into Ken. Their bodies slammed together and sent Ken crashing into the wall. Ken tripped on their shoes and released his hold on Yuuki. Yuuki had luckily kept his balance, and as soon as he was free, he went for the door. He reached the door and turned the lock.

Unfortunately, Ken had recovered himself and made a grab for Yuuki. Yuuki dodged his grasp and dashed toward the kitchen where he remembered Ken had dropped the bat. He spotted it lying on the floor and hope flared in his chest. If he could get the bat, he just might turn the tables.

He was just within reach when he was tackled from behind. Yuuki hit the floor hard enough that the wind was knocked out of him. As he tried to gasp for air, he was flipped on his back, and Ken pinned him down.

“You ungrateful little shit. I offered you the world, and this is how you repay me. You try to leave me and shack up with that filthy white man.” Ken’s hands wrapped around Yuuki’s throat, choking him as he continued to spew vicious words in Japanese. “You belong to me. Now and always. I will never let you go, but I see now that you are just going to keep trying to

run.” Ken’s hands tightened, making flashes of light dance in Yuuki’s vision. “If I can’t have you, then no one will.”

Yuuki clawed desperately at Ken’s hands as his lungs screamed for air, but it was no use. This was how he was going to die. He would never see Dallas or Betha again. He’d never have dinner with the whole Dietrich family again. Worst of all, he’d never get to tell Raegan that he loved him. That he had always loved him. He could see that now. It was always Raegan. As his consciousness faded, he took comfort in knowing he had accepted his true feelings. His only regret was that he would never get to tell Raegan how he felt.

Chapter 24

Raegan

A tired sigh escaped Raegan as he approached his apartment door. He'd nearly pulled a double at work to help the kitchen staff. They had been short-handed because Alfredo hadn't shown up to work on time. He'd laid into the asshole, letting him know that if he wanted to run things, he had to set the example. His bullshit could have fucked up service if Raegan hadn't stepped up to cover his ass.

Alfredo had come back with some weak excuse that Raegan didn't even acknowledge. Raegan had left right after that because he was tired and in no mood to deal with Alfredo. Things were going to bite him in the butt at some point, and Raegan hoped he was there to see it.

Now he was home at last and could spend a nice evening with Yuuki. A pang of guilt shot through his chest at the thought of Yuuki. He had yet to confess his feelings as he had resolved to do. He'd tried a couple of times, but every time, something had stopped him. Things like impromptu phone calls, surprise visitors, and even a random squirrel stealing his bagel when they grabbed breakfast one morning. It was as if

the universe was conspiring to keep him silent. Well, the universe could go fuck itself. Tonight, Raegan was going to speak from his heart no matter what happened. Phone calls, visitors, and squirrels be damned.

With determination, Raegan pulled his key from his pocket and slid it into the lock. He was surprised to find the door unlocked. Yuuki had taken up his habit of locking the door behind him, so it was rare for the door to be unlocked. The hairs on the back of Raegan's neck stood up as an odd sense of foreboding crept up his spine. In his gut, he knew something was wrong.

His heart clenched in fear as Raegan threw open the door and rushed inside. The scene he found inside made his blood run cold. Ken was sitting on top of a motionless Yuuki with his hands wrapped around his throat. When Raegan looked into Yuuki's lifeless eyes, he was suddenly filled with a deep, primal rage.

Raegan roared in anguish as he rushed Ken and tackled him off Yuuki. They rolled a time or two before Raegan pinned Ken, thanks to his having the element of surprise. Raegan's hands curled into fists, and he raised them intent on pounding Ken into pulp. Ken tried to fight back. Bucking and twisting in every direction to dislodge Raegan with his arms raised to protect his head from Raegan's impending attack. It would do him no good. Raegan was a man possessed, and he would have blood.

“Raegan! Stop!” a voice cried as powerful arms grabbed Raegan from behind and dragged him off Ken.

“Let me go! He killed Yuuki!” Raegan screamed as he struggled against whoever held him.

“He didn’t! Yuuki is okay!” the person shouted back, and Raegan went still. His eyes darted over to where Yuuki’s body was lying, and he found his neighbor Chelsea hovering over Yuuki. Raegan looked closer at the man he loved, and when he saw his chest rise ever so slightly, a sob of relief burst from him.

Raegan broke free of the hold the other person, who he assumed was Al, Chelsea’s cop husband, had on him and rushed to Yuuki’s side.

“Yuuki? Sugar, can you hear me?” Raegan asked as he moved to lift Yuuki in his arms.

Chelsea put her hands out, stopping Rae in his tracks. “You can’t move him, Raegan. We don’t know what kind of injuries he’s sustained. We don’t want to do anything to make things worse.”

Chelsea was a nurse, so Raegan knew that what she said was true, but it killed him not to hold Yuuki close to him. He settled on holding Yuuki’s hand. Needing to feel connected to him, somehow.

“Help’s on the way, and I’ve secured the other guy. Now we just have to sit in wait.” Raegan heard Al say, but he didn’t acknowledge him. His entire focus was on watching Yuuki’s

chest rise and fall. To him, every breath Yuuki pulled in was a blessing.

I could have lost him, and he would never know that I love him, Raegan thought, and his chest felt like it was caving in on itself. When he wakes up, I'm telling him how I feel. I'll swear to protect him and cherish him. Yuuki, please just wake up.



Hours later, Raegan dashed through hospital corridors on his way to be with Yuuki. When the EMTs had arrived, they were worried about potential brain damage, so they rushed Yuuki off in their ambulance. Raegan had tried to go with them, adamant that he was the only family Yuuki had, but he was detained by the police. They had asked him a million and a half questions about what had happened. He had to recount the entire thing at least ten times, and his patience had been thin the entire time. They had released him, and he had beelined for the hospital.

Not wanting to deal with the bureaucratic bullshit of the hospital, he had lied and told the ER receptionist that he was Yuuki's husband. It's what everyone thought, anyway. She'd told him where to go, and he had been off like a rocket. Now, he frantically read room numbers until, at last, he reached the one he was looking for. He didn't even hesitate as he grabbed the door and opened it.

When he found Yuuki sitting up in bed, he could have cried with joy. He rushed into the room and went straight to Yuuki's side.

“Oh, Sugar.” He bent over and gathered Yuuki into a gentle hug.

Someone cleared their throat off to the right, drawing Raegan’s attention away from Yuuki. He looked up and found an officer standing there looking quite displeased.

“And who are you?” the older Hispanic man asked, sounding disgruntled.

“Raegan Dietrich. I’m his—”

“Best friend and roommate.” Yuuki croaked out, sounding hoarse. Raegan looked at Yuuki with a mix of concern and a bit of hurt. He knew they weren’t actual husbands, but it felt terrible being demoted back to best friend and roommate.

“Oh, right. The one who stopped the ex,” the officer stated as he jotted something down on the notepad he held.

“That’s right.” Raegan wanted the cop to leave so he could talk to Yuuki in private.

“Hm. Well, I think I have all I need for now.” The officer snapped his notebook shut. “We’ll be in touch, Mr. Nakatani.”

The officer turned and strode out of the room which Raegan was glad of. Raegan turned back to Yuuki, and as he looked at him, he was filled with relief. He was alive. Worse for the wear evident by his voice and the terrible bruise circling his neck, but still alive. Raegan leaned in and pulled Yuuki into another hug, unable to resist touching him. “I was so scared, Sugar. When I came home and found Ken on top of you...”

Raegan trailed off as he swallowed down the lump that had lodged itself in his throat. He needed to be strong for Yuuki right now. Yuuki was going to need to lean on him, and he would always be there for him.

“I’m sorry, Rae-kun,” Yuuki whispered as he returned Raegan’s hug.

“You’ve got nothing to be sorry for. It’s all that bastard’s fault. I just don’t understand why he was in our apartment. I thought he’d gotten the message when you dumped him.” Raegan felt Yuuki flinch, and alarm bells rang in his head. “Yuu.” Raegan leaned back to look at Yuuki, who wouldn’t meet his gaze. “Has Ken contacted you since the break-up?”

Yuuki dropped his arms and chewed on his bottom lip nervously as he continued to avoid looking at Raegan before nodding a fraction. That single gesture felt like a slap in the face. He and Yuuki told each other everything. They leaned on each other when things were hard. So why? Why had Yuuki kept this enormous thing from him? And how long had it been going on?

“I was handling it,” Yuuki rasped as his hands toyed with the edge of the blanket that covered his lap.

“What do you mean you were handling it? How long has this been going on?” Raegan let go of Yuuki and stepped back from the hospital bed.

He could feel his anger rising, and he needed a little distance to keep it in check.

“Since Vegas. He’d get a new number or call from someone else’s phone. I’d ignore it all and block the number.” Yuuki picked up a cup of water from the bedside table and took a drink.

Raegan looked at him in disbelief. Why was Yuuki acting like this wasn’t a big deal? Again, why had he not confided in Raegan? They could have dealt with this together. “So this happened more than once?”

Yuuki shrugged as he set the cup down and looked at the other side of the room. “A couple of times.”

“Be more specific. How many times exactly? Ten? Twenty times? Was it once a day or multiple times a day?” Raegan was fuming now. Yuuki was being evasive on purpose and that wasn’t helping to ease Raegan’s ire.

Yuuki rolled his eyes and threw his hands in the air. “Fuck. Okay, it was sporadic at first, but then it got to be multiple times a day. I was handling it, though, so it’s not a big deal.”

Oh! That did it. Yuuki’s flippant words had pushed Raegan over the edge. He stormed up to the bed and took Yuuki’s face in his hands. He held him still so that their eyes would meet so that he could see just how Raegan was feeling. “Not a big deal, Yuuki? The son of a bitch broke into our apartment and laid in wait for you. Fuck, he nearly killed you. That is a huge fucking deal.”

Yuuki grabbed Raegan’s hands and tried to force them away from his face. “Yeah, I see that now, but I never thought he

would do something like this.” Yuuki’s eyes flared with anger when Raegan refused to be moved.

“Yuu, if he was sending you multiple messages a day, that is the sign of someone being unhinged. I still don’t understand why you kept this from me.” Raegan stared Yuuki down.

Yuuki’s eyes narrowed into a glare and that look was like a knife in Raegan’s heart. This wasn’t them. Raegan couldn’t remember the last time they had fought. They had disagreements and little spats here and there. Those were always resolved quickly. So the fact that they were having a full-tilt argument was unsettling.

Yuuki broke eye contact and chewed on his lip. “Because I couldn’t stand having you get dragged into this more than you already have been.”

Raegan blinked not understanding what he’d said.

“What do you mean?” he asked, relinquishing his hold on Yuuki and taking a step back.

Yuuki fell back onto his bed with a heavy sigh and threw his arm over his eyes. “The fake wedding, the pretending, the lying. All this mess that we’re in. I never should have agreed to any of it.”

Yuuki’s words had Raegan rearing back in surprise. Did Yuuki mean what he thought he meant? “Are you saying this is my fault?”

Yuuki’s arm flew away from his face, and he bolted back up in bed. “No! No, never. It may have been your idea, but I went

along with it. And it was my stupid drunk ass that plastered it online.” Yuuki’s tone was adamant.

Raegan was getting more confused by the minute. “You aren’t making any sense, Yuu. We’ve been in this together from the get-go, like always. Why did you suddenly decide to shut me out?”

Yuuki opened his mouth but snapped it closed again. A conflicted look crossed his face before he looked down at his lap and he chewed at his lip again. Raegan could see in his eyes that he was having an internal debate. Several minutes passed in silence until at last Yuuki’s eyes lit up with determination.

“Why did I shut you out?” Yuuki raised his gaze and looked Raegan directly in the eyes for the first time since they’d begun this argument. “Because I love you, and I couldn’t bring myself to burden you more than I already had.”

Raegan felt like a cannonball had just slammed into his chest, and he stumbled back until he met the wall. Raegan had wanted to hear those words so much, but now that they had been spoken, he was at a loss. Did Yuuki mean them the same way that Raegan felt? Or was this love between friends? He had decided on his mad dash to be at Yuuki’s side that he would share his heart but was now the time? They were fighting. Raegan was mad as hell that Yuuki kept this stuff about Ken to himself and it had almost cost him his life.

Raegan needed to take control of this conversation. They needed to clarify their feelings, but then they needed a break to

sort those feelings out. He hated to walk away from Yuuki, but he would hate himself more if he said something that hurt Yuuki. This sadly wasn't an instance where love could conquer all.

On shaky legs, Raegan walked back to Yuuki's bedside and went down on his knees. He took Yuuki's hands in his and looked deep into his gorgeous brown eyes.

"Sugar, relationships are all about shouldering burdens together. Your happiness and fears are mine, too. We're supposed to be in this together." Raegan pulled in a breath. It was do or die time. "For a while now, I've been wanting to tell you something." Raegan pulled in another deep breath. "I'm in love with you." Yuuki gasped and covered his mouth with a hand he pulled free of Raegan's grasp. "I'm hoping that when you said you love me, it was the same kind of love because I don't think I could go back to being just friends." It took all of Raegan's willpower to let go of Yuuki's hand and stand up. "But right now is not the time for us to be confessing feelings and trying to see where life goes from here."

"Rae-kun," Yuuki started but Raegan cut him off by raising his hand.

"I'm really mad at you right now. Our marriage may be fake, but to me, this relationship was real. The fact that you kept something so vital to your safety from me has me so twisted up that I can't think straight." Yuuki's eyes welled with

tears, and that weakened his resolve a bit. “I’m going to go stay with my parents for a couple of days.”

“No, Rae, please. We can’t end like this,” Yuuki pleaded as he scrambled to kick the bedsheets off him and climb out of bed.

Raegan stepped forward and placed his hand on Yuuki’s shoulder, stopping him from moving. “I’m not ending anything.”

“But?” Yuuki looked at him in confusion.

“We need time apart. I need to cool off, and you’ve just been through a traumatic event. If we’re going to have a relationship, it needs to be built on a better foundation.” Raegan removed his hand from Yuuki’s shoulder and turned to walk away. “I’ll call you.”

Raegan walked away, and it took all his strength to keep moving. His heart was raging at him to turn his ass around and pull Yuuki into his arms. It tugged on his chest, urging him to go back, but he ignored it. Love wasn’t going to fix this. At least not alone. They needed to get their feelings in order, and once they did, they could move forward. That’s what Raegan told himself as he stepped out the door to the sound of quiet sobbing coming from behind him.

Chapter 25

Yuuki

Yuuki felt like a ghost moving through his daily life. He got up and went about his business every day like he was fine. While in truth, he felt hollow inside. He couldn't even find solace at home because the apartment felt covered in a film that had Yuuki's skin crawling.

Everything was tainted with reminders of what had happened to him. He could hardly go into his own room because it was where the feeling was worst. He'd thought the kitchen would have been the hardest to handle but no. His room held the most memories of Ken.

Unable to bear being in that space he had moved most of what he owned into Raegan's room. As he had done so, he had been dismayed to find that he couldn't find the necklace Rae had bought him in Vegas. He remembered wearing it the day of the attack and thought it must have gotten lost at some point. That realization had sent him into a tailspin, and the one thing that had comforted him was lying in Raegan's bed, breathing in his familiar scent. He thought it was crazy that the

only thing that was holding him together was Raegan, given that he had walked out on him.

No, that wasn't fair. As much as Yuuki didn't want to admit it, Raegan had been right about them needing space. The therapist he'd started seeing so he could deal with what happened between him and Ken had even said so. Still, Yuuki didn't have to like it. They had confessed that they had feelings for each other. In the movies that should have been the magic key to fix everything.

This ain't a movie though, Sugar, a voice that sounded a lot like Raegan reminded Yuuki. He batted absently at the air near his head as if to ward off the unwanted voice. He hated this state he was in. Before Vegas, he and Raegan were in a happy place he wanted to get back to. The place where they were always together, and nothing was complicated. Except, now he wanted that with the addition of them being in love.

A tired sigh escaped Yuuki as he tried to get his mind off his problems. He needed to concentrate on the basket weave he was supposed to be icing on the cake in front of him. He'd already fucked it up once and wasn't in the mood to start a third time. He counted out the rows and started piping. As he worked, the memory of the day Ellie had come over to practice baking came to mind.

They had gone to pick her up, and the car ride had been filled with the excited girl's chatter. Yuuki had loved every second. While he had taught Ellie baking tricks, Raegan had sat at the bar acting as the peanut gallery and official taste

tester. The entire visit had been something out of a Hallmark movie. Yuuki had even imagined a day when the child in the picture was his and Raegan's. Would his fantasy ever come true now?

Yuuki heaved another sigh as he finished the first row of his work.

“Okay, that’s it.” Yuuki looked up from his work to find Dallas standing right beside him with an irritated but concerned look on his face. “Spill it.”

Yuuki blinked at his friend, confused by the sudden command. “Spill what?”

Dallas rolled his eyes and leaned his hip against the table. “Whatever it is that has you sighing every other breath.”

Yuuki arched his brow in disbelief. “I have not...”

“I’ve been keeping a tally.” Dallas held up a cake board covered in dots of icing. “One dot for every sigh after the first dozen.”

Yuuki inspected the board. “That’s...a lot of dots.”

“Precisely. Now,” Dallas set the cake board down and crossed his arms over his chest, “tell me what’s eating you.”

Yuuki could see that Dallas was going nowhere, and honestly, Yuuki wasn’t in the right headspace for piping. Maybe if he talked to Dallas a bit, he could get his head back on straight. Oh, who was he kidding the only way he could fix things was if he could get Raegan to come home.

“Raegan and I had a fight.” Yuuki set his piping bag aside.

“Okay. Some context would help,” Dallas coaxed.

Yuuki was unsure how much of the story he should share. When he’d returned to work, he’d started wearing a kerchief around his neck to hide the ugly bruises and said that he had an acute case of laryngitis. Where should he even start? With Vegas or the attack? Should he tell Dallas the whole truth? Would he be upset?

Uh, duh, Yuu. Why do you think I was mad? that voice from before chided.

Yeah, yeah. Shut up, Yuuki mentally flipped the voice off. Yuuki returned his focus to Dallas, who was looking at him expectantly. Well, he might as well start at the beginning.

“So when Raegan and I went to Vegas, I found out my then-boyfriend was cheating on me, and as a revenge prank, Rae and I sort of got married,” Yuuki explained, his eyes falling closed as he spoke in a rush. He hoped that if he said it all quick, it wouldn’t sound as ludicrous as it was.

When he met silence at the end of his confession, he cracked one eye open. He found Dallas’s jaw had dropped to the floor, and his eyes looked like they were in danger of popping out of his head.

“Wait.” Dallas shook his head in disbelief. “So your ex turns out to be a cheating douche and to get back at him, you marry your best friend, who you swear is just a friend. Do I have that right?”

“Um, sort of,” Yuuki replied, realizing just how insane the whole situation sounds.

“What do you mean sort of?” Dallas asked sounding perplexed.

“Well.” Yuuki reached up and absently rubbed the back of his neck. “We didn’t actually get married. The pictures just made it look like we did.”

“Pictures!” Dallas all but shouted. “There are pictures! How the fuck did I miss all this?”

“They were posted on accident!” Yuuki insisted as all the anxiety he had been bottling up spilled over. “They were only supposed to go to my ex, but I was drunk and fucked that up. Then my dad was a dick, so Rae was all ‘let’s keep pretending to piss him off’.” Yuuki was growing frantic as words continued to fall from his lips like a waterfall. “So I said yes, but then the guilt was getting to the both of us. And Ken was being a psycho calling me every day until he showed up at the apartment and strangled me.”

“Whoa. Pump the breaks and back up.” Dallas grabbed hold of Yuuki’s shoulders, and that firm contact helped recenter Yuuki. “What’s this about your ex strangling you?”

Fuck! Yuuki had meant to keep that little tidbit to himself. Well, the cat was out of the bag, so he may as well tell Dallas what happened.

“Yeah, so Ken broke into the apartment and was planning on abducting me to take back to California. Then when I tried

to run, he... um..." Yuuki reached up and touched the kerchief around his neck.

"Holy fuck, Yuuki." Dallas pulled Yuuki into a bone-crushing hug and held him tight. "I'm so sorry you went through that."

Yuuki returned Dallas's embrace. It wasn't with the person he craved comfort from the most, but beggars couldn't be choosers. Yuuki soaked in the feel of Dallas holding him and some of the hurt that had plagued him for days now eased. It reminded him he wasn't alone, and he felt a bit guilty that he hadn't told Dallas about any of this.

"Thank you, Dallas." Yuuki felt his words were inadequate, but they were all he had at the moment.

Dallas gave him one last squeeze before stepping back, but he kept one hand on Yuuki's forearm, which he appreciated. "So amid everything, what did you and Raegan end up fighting about? It seems like there was a lot going on."

The sheepish feeling from before was back, and Yuuki was hating it with a vengeance.

"Well, I didn't exactly tell Rae about Ken's harassment," He admitted and as the words left his mouth, he could see the error of his actions. He had kept them from Raegan with the best of intentions, but looking back, it would have been better to shoulder things together.

The look that Dallas gave him was all the confirmation he needed to see that he had made a mistake.

“Yuu. I’m going to share something with you, and I need you to swear that you’ll hear me out before you say anything.” Dallas’s face was a mask of seriousness, but his eyes held that old look of fear that had always clung to Dallas until recently.

Yuuki nodded, not wanting to say anything in case it caused Dallas to shut down. It was rare for Dallas to open up, so Yuuki wasn’t going to lose this glimpse of the real Dallas.

Dallas closed his eyes and drew in a steady breath. He released it slowly, and when he opened his eyes, there was a new vulnerability and strength that Yuuki had never seen before. “It probably isn’t going to surprise you to find out that Liam and I are a couple.”

Yuuki had to restrain himself from shrieking in delight. He had hoped that Liam and Dallas would get together. The minute Yuuki had laid eyes on Liam, he had read Daddy all over him, which was what Dallas needed.

“What you don’t know is that we had been in a relationship before.” Yuuki’s jaw hit the floor. That was one hell of a surprise, and Yuuki had a million questions. He held them all in, though, because Dallas had asked him to wait, so he would.

“I had walked away from him because I was scared of how he made me feel. Every time I have loved someone, they ended up leaving me. So with Liam, I decided to do the leaving.” Yuuki could see how that made total sense to Dallas. He’d picked up from some of their conversations that Dallas had been through some abuse and trauma. The way Dallas used to carry himself had been like he was always on guard.

Terrified that if he let anyone find a chink in his armor, then the world could hurt him again.

“Because of my past, I never have truly opened up to anyone and crazy suck at communication. Everyone gets a different version of me. I did that and didn’t talk to anyone to protect myself, which was a terrible thing.” An exceptionally guilty look crossed Dallas’s face as he paused his story and took a wavering breath.

“I lived this sort of half-life, where I was never myself, and it was killing me. I knew this yet I let my fear hold me hostage, and while I agreed to be with Liam again, I kept things from him. I didn’t trust him, and trust is supposed to be the foundation of any relationship.” Dallas’s words hit Yuuki in a weird way. He trusted Raegan. Hell, he was the one person who Yuuki could trust with all his heart and soul. So why the fuck had he kept the Ken thing to himself? Was he like Dallas? Wrapped up in fear to where it made him blind?

“Liam and I ended up in this huge fight, and I thought for sure that was it. I’d gone and fucked things up again like I always did.” Dallas laughed in a self-deprecating way as his eyes became distant. “Then Clarissa came in and smacked a little sense into me. I was still convinced that Liam and I were over no matter what she said. That was until Josh showed up with a note from Liam.” Yuuki watched as a tear trickled from Dallas’s eye. It was an odd sight to see someone look so sad and yet so happy at the same moment.

“He apologized to me and forgave me for what I did.” Dallas reached up and wiped his eyes. “What kind of man does that? I was so terrible to him. I lied and kept things from him. Yet there in that note, he was apologizing to me like he had done something wrong. The only thing he ever did wrong was fall in love with me.”

“Dallas,” Yuuki started not about to listen to his friend degrade himself so, but he stopped when Dallas smiled at him.

“I know. I shouldn’t talk about myself like that. My therapist and I are working on that.” Dallas drew in a breath and let it out slowly before he continued. “That was the wake-up call I needed. So I started therapy and went back to Liam. We had shit we needed to work out, but we both knew we were better together.”

Dallas’s face became stony, and his eyes conveyed he was about to say something important. “My whole point of that long story is that you have to talk to the people you love. You can’t keep things from them, and you need to have each other’s back. Always.”

A light went on in Yuuki’s head as understanding dawned on him like a sunrise. Raegan wasn’t only upset that he nearly lost Yuuki. His feelings were hurt because he thought Yuuki didn’t trust him. No wonder when he had confessed his feelings, they hadn’t been the magic balm everyone thought love to be. Yuuki had inadvertently broken Raegan’s faith in him, so how was he supposed to trust that Yuuki’s words were true? Damn, this was all such a cluster fuck.

Now Yuuki needed to regain Raegan's trust and show him that his feelings were the real deal. How was he supposed to do that, though? Put an apology on a billboard or something else insane like that? Could it be as simple as going out to the farm and talking? Yuuki smacked his hand on the table in frustration, and when he did, he heard a metallic clink. He looked down at his hand and saw his fake wedding ring. Yuuki had gotten so used to wearing it he often forgot it was there. He brought his hands up and fingered the cheap metal.

We did this whole mess completely backward. Isn't it supposed to be love before marriage? Ha, then again, when have we ever done things the way we were supposed to? Yuuki thought as he continued to fiddle with his ring. That was when it hit him. The perfect plan to fix things with Raegan.

Yuuki turned his gaze back to Dallas with a broad smile on his face. "Thank you, Dallas. For sharing your story and helping me figure out what I need to do."

Dallas smiled shyly. "Yeah, well. You tried to be there for me and I kind of locked you out. I needed to be a better friend. So I'm happy I could help."

Yuuki stepped up to Dallas and hugged him. "You are a good friend, Dallas, and I'm happy you have found the happiness you deserve with your Daddy." Dallas went stiff in Yuuki's arms as he sputtered an unintelligible protest, but Yuuki wasn't going to let him off the hook. "Dallas, I know, and it's okay." Yuuki looked up at Dallas and pinned him with a stern look. "I know a thing or two about that sort of thing. So I just

want you to know that I'm a safe person for you to talk to.” Yuuki winked at Dallas to emphasize his meaning.

Dallas had that look of fear in his eyes for a moment, but it soon dissipated. Dallas relaxed and returned Yuuki's hug.

“Back at ya, and the same goes for me.” Dallas squeezed Yuuki before breaking from the embrace.

“Good. Now,” Yuuki clapped his hands together and an impish grin curled his lips, “tell me all about Liam, and if he would mind me invading his kitchen for some baking?”

Chapter 26

Raegan

“I think I’ve made a huge mistake.” Raegan plopped down in the rocking chair beside John.

They had just finished dinner with the whole family and were now enjoying a beer as they watched the sunset. It had become a ritual to do this every evening since Raegan had come to stay on the farm. The quiet was nice and it gave Raegan time to think. Mostly, he thought about Yuuki and what a mess their lives had become since that fateful trip to Vegas.

“You seem to make a lot of those.” John handed Raegan a beer.

“Why are we friends again?” Raegan accepted it and twisted the cap off.

“Because no one else can put up with your dumbass,” John shot back before taking a sip of his beer. “So which mistake are we talking about today?”

Raegan glared at John for a second before letting his head fall back with a sigh.

“I shouldn’t have left him like I did.” Raegan took a sip of his drink. “I thought it was the right thing to do but now...” Raegan trailed off and stared at the fading sun.

He and Yuuki had barely exchanged more than a handful of texts since that night in the hospital and that had Raegan on edge. They had never spoken to each other this little or had this bizarre awkwardness. Not even when they had first met.

Raegan was also worried about how Yuuki was doing. Yuuki’d said he was healing fine and had started seeing a therapist to deal with the trauma, but Raegan was still concerned. He knew that the only thing that would settle his nerves was seeing Yuuki in person. He wasn’t sure Yuuki wanted to see him, though.

“Now what, Rae?” John prodded not giving Rae an inch. This was why he was friends with John. John never bullshitted or placated him. He made him take a good hard look at himself and his actions.

“Now, I’m thinking time is the enemy. I think I should rush back to the apartment right now and throw myself at his feet. Beg him to forgive me for walking away and pray that his words meant what I hope they do.” Raegan sighed before he chugged down several gulps of his beer.

Silence filled the air as Raegan waited for John to respond. This was another reason John was such a good friend. He took his time and thought about what he was going to say when it came to situations like this.

Raegan sat there, watching the sky fade and listening to the sounds of the evening. He loved the music of nightfall on the farm. It was a comforting old lullaby from his childhood and there wasn't anything like it to soothe him. He'd always hoped that in the future he'd build a house on his parents' property and live there with his own family. He wanted to share this magical time with the person he loved and the children they would have together.

An image of him and Yuuki sitting on a porch much like this one with matching rocking chairs popped into his mind. He and Yuuki were holding hands and, in each of their laps, was a small child curled up as they drifted off to sleep. It was such a beautiful dream that it brought tears to Raegan's eyes. He wanted that to be his reality so much. If only he could figure out what to do to make it happen.

"You probably don't know this, but Kennedy and I almost split up once upon a time," John said, snapping Raegan back to the present.

Raegan turned his head and looked at John in disbelief. "Say what now?"

Raegan couldn't believe what he was hearing. John and Kennedy had always been crazy about each other. Raegan remembered how, on Kennedy's eighth birthday, in front of all the guests, his little sister had declared that it was her birthday wish she would marry John one day. The then ten-year-old John had then made his declaration that girls were gross, sending everyone gathered into uproarious laughter.

John's tune had changed in high school. Junior year, he asked Kennedy to be his prom date on the first day of school. Raegan had done his *societal brotherly duty* and threatened to kick John's ass, only to have Kennedy tell him to fuck off. The pair had been inseparable since that day. Raegan had been thrilled to have his best friend dating his baby sister. He knew John would never break her heart like some random jerk would. Or so he thought.

"Yeah. It was the spring of Kennedy's senior year. Everyone was getting their acceptance letters, and you know how she always dreamed of going to App State." Boy, did Raegan know about Kennedy's dream of going to Appalachian State University. She'd talked about it almost as much as she did about marrying John.

"Yeah, and she did. I give y'all major props for being able to do a long-distance relationship." Raegan didn't see where this conversation was going but he knew John would get there, eventually. So he shut up and listened.

"Well, when she got accepted, I got this big idea that the best thing for us was to break up." John took a sip of his beer.

Raegan choked on the mouth full of beer he'd just swallowed and almost fell out of his chair at John's admission. "You did what?"

"I was the only guy she had ever dated, Rae. She was going to college clear across the state. There were all these experiences she was going to have but dating wouldn't be one of them if she was being faithful to me." John sat forward and

rested his elbows on his knees while cradling his beer bottle in his hands.

“I wanted her to be free to experience everything in life. If we were meant to be, then once she finished school, we’d get back together. It killed me to even think of her with someone else, but I wasn’t going to be selfish and hold her back.” Raegan could hear the pain in John’s voice, and it resonated with him right down to his soul. He’d walked away from Yuuki for a similar reason. He wouldn’t force his feelings on Yuuki when he was feeling vulnerable. Even though Yuuki had said he loved him, Raegan was still having a hard time swallowing that. Their emotions had been all over the place the night Yuuki was attacked. It wasn’t the time to be making any big emotional decisions.

“Yeah. I get that.” Raegan mimicked John’s posture and stared at his drink.

“So, with my mind made up, I took her out on this big date. Flowers, chocolates, fancy restaurant.” John paused and scoffed. “I even bought her this cheap ring as an apology gift.”

“Dude.” Raegan shot a dirty look John’s way.

“I know. Believe me, I know.” John sighed as he leaned his head down and tapped his bottle against his forehead. “So the date is winding down, and I’m nervous as a long-tailed cat in a room full of rocking chairs.”

Raegan chuckled. A nervous John was a sight to see. It was like watching a squirrel hyped up on caffeine. John couldn’t keep still and would become the clumsiest person on the

planet, all while talking a mile a minute. “I took Kennedy to our spot down by the creek and pushed her on the swing I hung there.”

A thought popped into Raegan’s mind, and he sat bolt upright. “Oh, shit, John. If I know Kennedy, she was thinking you were about to propose.”

John pointed his hand at Rae, curling it to look like a pistol and made a popping noise.

“Winner, winner. Give the boy a prize,” John said in what was meant to be a joking tone but came across as more depressed sounding. “I pull out the ring, and she starts crying. Before I can say anything, she’s yelling yes at the top of her lungs and hugging me so hard I’m surprised she didn’t crack my ribs.”

“Sounds about right for a Kennedy reaction.” Raegan fondly recalled many such moments with his sister.

“So there I am trying to get her to calm down and explain myself, but she’s just going on about a spring wedding. She’s right in the middle of flower colors, and I’ve lost all patience. I blurt out that I want to break up, and she goes completely silent.” John’s face is stricken, and Raegan can see how this memory is very painful for him.

Raegan reaches over and places his hand on John’s shoulder. “Hey, if you need a minute or want to stop, that’s fine.”

“Shut up, dumbass. I’m fine, and you need to listen all the way to the end.” John shot him a pointed look, and Raegan fell silent. “After Kennedy got past the initial shock of my words, she tears into me about how we aren’t breaking up and that I’m a bastard for leading her to believe I was proposing.” John snorted. “I thought for a minute she was going to throw the ring at me, but she didn’t. She stood there, crossed her arms, and demanded I explain myself.”

A look of pure adoration and love crossed John’s face. “How I ever thought I could walk away from a woman as amazing as your sister I will never know. I told her my reasons. Explained how I was setting her free, and you know what she did?”

John looked over at him, and all Raegan could do was shrug. “She laughed at me.”

“What?” Raegan chuckled at the absurdity of this entire story.

“She laughed and told me I was a selfish dumbass. Relationships involve two people and me going off deciding by myself was cowardly and selfish. Well, now I’m mad and hurt. I tell her I had thought hard about this and was putting her feelings first.” John stopped and shook his head. “She tells me I’m scared of a ‘what if’ instead of thinking of what is. She said we need to live for today and not tomorrow. We love each other today, and if tomorrow we don’t, there isn’t much we can do about it. The future will be what it will be.”

Raegan was dumbstruck. For only having been eighteen, his sister had been crazy smart and mature.

“Well, I’m guessing things worked out since, ya know, you’re married with two kids.” Raegan shrugged his shoulders.

“Yeah, but only because Kennedy wasn’t having any of my bullshit. After that, we talked about every damn thing. We run every decision past each other, and if we fight, I take a walk to cool off so we can come back to talk rationally.” John sat back and took a swallow of his beer.

“Hashtag relationship goals.” Raegan copied John’s posture.

“You have to fix your relationship to have goals, idiot. Why do you think I just told you that whole long-ass story?” John gave Raegan a sideways look.

“Um, was there supposed to be a lesson in there?” Raegan cocked his head to the side.

“Fuck sake. Deliver me from dumbass white boys.” John turned in his seat and looked Raegan square in the eye. “Are you really this dense or are you screwing with me right now?”

Raegan blinked at John a few times. “Um...”

John sighed and ran his hand back over his head. “Communication, Rae. That’s what I was trying to tell you. You can’t go deciding things for the two of you. I know your situation is miles away from mine and Kennedy’s, but the fact remains that you two need to talk to each other.”

“But he was vulnerable and had just been through this huge trauma. Plus, I was mad as hell that he kept something so big from me that nearly got him killed. If we had talked, it would have become this huge fight,” Raegan argued, feeling a bit like he was under attack.

“So you take a walk and calm down. You go with him to a therapy session so that you have a third party to help mediate, but leaving him all alone was possibly the worst thing you could do.” John’s tone was disapproving but it also carried an air of kindness to it. John was being hard on him because he cared. Because he wanted Raegan to get his shit together and fix things with Yuuki. John’s love language was tough love. His words stung but they were coming from a place of good intentions.

Raegan took a step back and chewed over what John had said. It all made sense if Raegan thought about it objectively instead of emotionally. Yuuki would need someone to lean on. Someone to help him with his troubles, and Raegan had walked out on him. Why? Because he thought he was doing the right thing? Maybe. Because deep down he was scared that Yuuki had only said the L word because he was distressed? Sounded a lot more like the truth. Raegan had turned tail to protect himself under the guise of protecting them both.

Fuck, he was an asshole. Now, he was more worried about Yuuki. Was he okay? He was alone in the apartment. The place where he was attacked. Was he doing all right there? Had he decided not to stay there? Where was he? Who was he with? Was he safe?

All these questions ran around in Raegan's head like a pack of chihuahuas on speed. He needed to go to Yuuki right now. He needed to see with his own eyes that Yuuki was okay. Then he was going to drop to his knees and grovel like the no-good bastard he was. He'd beg Yuuki's forgiveness and pray that they could somehow fix things.

Fix? That's it! Raegan thought as he bolted up to his feet and started for the door.

"Where the hell are you off to?" John called after Raegan.

"I'm getting off my mopey ass and going to get my man," Raegan said as he opened the front door.

"About damn time," Raegan heard John mutter as he stepped through the door and headed for the stairs. He needed to grab one thing, and then he would go straight home to the man he loved.

Chapter 27

Yuuki

“**H**ow the hell do we have this much food? There are only two of us.” Yuuki grumbled as he tried for the tenth time to rearrange their fridge to fit the cake that was waiting on the island. He couldn’t have one of the biggest elements of his plan melting before he could implement said plan. After chucking a bunch of stuff in the freezer drawer that he hoped didn’t get ruined by doing so, Yuuki finally had space to slide the cake in. He retrieved the tall cake box and slipped it into the refrigerator. It was a tight fit, but he made it work.

With the cake now chilling, Yuuki could take a second to relax. He’d been busy for the last several hours, working with Dallas in his and Liam’s kitchen to craft the perfect apology cake. He’d also ordered the second element of his plan online while amid all that madness. Liam had been all too happy to volunteer to go pick up Yuuki’s items just to escape the disaster zone that had become his kitchen.

If Yuuki’s plan to win Raegan back worked, he owed Liam and Dallas a huge thank you gift. While Yuuki had been

focused on his task, it had been almost impossible not to see the change in Dallas when he was with Liam. There was a lightness and freeness to Dallas that Yuuki had never seen before. It warmed his heart to know that Liam made Dallas feel safe enough to be like that. He'd made Dallas swear that they would have a double date at Icons if things worked out with Raegan. Yuuki wanted to see his friend as his truest self when he was in his little space. That tidbit of information hadn't been quite as surprising as Dallas had built it up to be. It made so much sense now that Yuuki knew about it.

While Yuuki was ecstatic to see his friend happy, he was also quite jealous. Every look Dallas and Liam shared was filled with love. A display of devotion in every touch. Every word, a declaration of unwavering affection. Yuuki'd had that. When he looked back over his and Raegan's long history, he could see that they had more or less been dating the entire time they knew each other. They were both just too idiotic to see it.

Yuuki was going to fix that, though. Tomorrow, he was going to drive to the farm and bring Raegan home. Even if he had to hogtie him to do it. Then he'd whip out the cake along with his other items and get his man back. Now though, he was going to shower and not jerk off in Raegan's bed as he sniffed his pillow.

Just as Yuuki started toward Raegan's bedroom, he heard the deadbolt unlatch. Panic gripped his heart, and he stood frozen in place from fear. Images of Ken breaking into the house to finish what he had started raced through Yuuki's mind.

It's not Ken. He's locked up and was denied bail, Yuuki told himself as he tried to remember the breathing exercises his therapist had sent him to help calm him. So, if it wasn't Ken, who the fuck was coming into his house? Only one person had a key...

Yuuki ran for the front door and came to a dead stop when he saw Raegan standing in the foyer, toeing off his shoes. Everything was moving as if in slow motion as Yuuki stood there watching Raegan slip into his slippers and turned to face him. When their eyes met, Yuuki swore the world stopped spinning and they were the only two people that existed. It had been just a few days since they had last seen each other but it felt like years.

Yuuki was running before he even thought to, and when he was a few steps away, he leaped into the air. Raegan rushed forward and caught Yuuki in his strong arms. Yuuki wrapped his legs around Raegan's torso and his arms around his neck. He buried his face in Rae's shoulder and clung to him for all he was worth, terrified that if he let go, Raegan would disappear.

Raegan must have been feeling the same way since his arms came around Yuuki like twin steel bands as he fell back against the door and slowly sank to the floor. They sat there wrapped around each other and the only sound was their breathing.

"You're real, right? Like, I haven't gone crazy and am sitting here hugging air," Yuuki said when his legs began

tingling.

“Oh, I’m real. Unless I’m the one hallucinating after getting drunk with John,” Raegan replied with a chuckle that sent a jolt to Yuuki’s heart. Fuck, he had missed Rae’s laugh.

“Okay, so we’re both real.” Yuuki leaned back so that he could look at Raegan’s face. “What are you doing here?”

“Um, last I checked I still live here,” Raegan teased as he loosened his hold on Yuuki.

Yuuki rolled his eyes and sighed. “Yeah, duh. What I mean is why are you here right now? And why didn’t you call to tell me you were coming?”

The smile that had been on Raegan’s face drooped a little, and he took a deep breath in through his nose. “Yeah, can we move this talk to somewhere other than the floor? While having a lap full of you is a dream, my ass is going numb.”

Yuuki nodded, and they separated before rising to their feet. An air of awkwardness now hung between them as they walked toward the kitchen. Yuuki desperately wanted to take Raegan’s hand, needing to feel connected to him but he was unsure if his touch would be welcome. So he refrained from touching Raegan and, instead, stayed as close to him as he could.

Once in the kitchen, they went straight to the island and sat at the bar. Yuuki turned to face Raegan. Raegan’s knee bounced, and he rubbed the back of his neck.

“So I was talking to John tonight, and he said some things that got me thinking.” Raegan lowered his hand and placed it on his bouncing knee. “Sugar, I owe you an apology.”

Yuuki hadn't expected that at all. What did Raegan have to apologize for? Yuuki had been the one keeping things from him. Raegan had been right about them needing to talk to each other, and while Yuuki didn't like this whole separation thing, he felt that had been good, too. “Um, shouldn't that be the other way around?”

“Other way around? Why?” Raegan gave Yuuki a confused look.

“Because I kept what was going on with Ken from you. I should have told you so that we could have figured out what to do about him together. If I had, then maybe what happened would never have...” Yuuki trailed off for a moment as he slowly reached up and touched his still bruised throat.

He'd taken off the kerchief that he had been wearing when he got home, so now, it was on full display for Raegan to see. Would he think it was ugly? Would seeing the evidence of Yuuki's poor choice just make Rae mad all over again?

Yuuki was startled when he felt Raegan touch his hand and move it away from his neck.

“Can I?” Raegan asked as he made a vague gesture toward Yuuki's neck.

Yuuki felt his heart rate kick up at the idea of someone else touching his neck. His mind was panicking but his heart

reminded him that this was Raegan. His ride-or-die best friend, who he had been through so much with and always treated him with care. Yuuki took several calming breaths until he felt himself relax.

“O-Okay.” Yuuki stammered out as he put his hands on his knees and steeled himself. He could do this.

There was a hesitance in Raegan’s eyes as he moved his hands toward Yuuki. His movements were measured and slow as if Yuuki were made of glass and Raegan was taking extreme care not to break him. At the first touch, Yuuki went still and had to beat back the new wave of panic that rushed over him. Raegan went still as well and didn’t move until Yuuki was at ease.

Yuuki kept his eyes trained on Raegan as he examined Yuuki’s neck. He watched an entire K-Drama’s worth of emotions play across Raegan’s face as he clinically went over every inch of skin he could reach. The strongest ones were rage and sadness. Yuuki’s heart ached that he had caused such ugly feelings to fester in Raegan. If he could go back and do everything over again, he would tell Rae everything. He couldn’t, though. All he could do was hope that they would move past this.

“Fuck, Yuuki.” Raegan’s voice was almost inaudible as his hands came away and he buried his face in them. “I am so sorry. I should have known something was going on. I should have been here to protect you. There are so many damn things that I should have done differently.”

Yuuki couldn't stand to hear Raegan go on as he was. This wasn't his fault. Yuuki grabbed Raegan's hands and jerked them apart. Raegan looked up at him, startled. Good, he had his attention.

"You listen to me, Raegan." Yuuki released Raegan's hands and took his face in his hands. "This whole mess starts with me. I should have just dumped Ken, and when he started harassing me, I should have gone to the cops. I want to say that I shouldn't have agreed to the fake wedding, but I can't. I know it probably just exacerbated things, and I feel awful for lying to your family but..." Yuuki trailed off as he took a deep breath to try to hold back the tsunami of emotion that wanted to escape him. "But if we hadn't done it, I never would have realized that I love you. That I have been in love with you possibly from the moment we met. I've just been too blind to see it."

Yuuki let go of Raegan and went to the fridge. He opened the door and pulled out the cake.

"What in the world?" Raegan sounded perplexed as Yuuki set the cake on the island and opened the cake box.

The cardboard fell away to reveal a gorgeous two-tier white cake decorated with magenta, lilac, and navy macarons. The top of the cake had an interlocked R and Y that was carved out of chocolate. Yuuki was proud of the work he and Dallas had put into the cake, and if Raegan's confused, astonished look was any sign, he was impressed, too.

“Don’t move,” Yuuki commanded pointing authoritatively at Raegan and dashed off to Raegan’s room.

He burst through the open door and went straight to the dresser. He snatched the two velvet boxes off the top and spun back around not slowing for a second as he dashed back to Rae. He was pleased that Raegan hadn’t moved an inch as he came to a stop by his side. He set the boxes on the countertop and then took Raegan’s hands into his.

“Raegan Joseph Dietrich, you are the most amazing, kind, and loving man I have ever met. You have such a giving nature, and I am so lucky that you are my best friend.” Yuuki paused and picked up the larger of the boxes. “I got this as an apology gift.” Yuuki snapped the box open to reveal a necklace that was an exact match to the one he had lost. “I lost the one you got me. Which I am crazy sorry and upset about. So we won’t match until I replace it, but I wanted to have something we could wear every day that didn’t interfere with work.”

Yuuki held the box out to Raegan and held his breath. He hoped he would take it because, if he didn’t, then the rest of his plan was shot. Yuuki’s heart fell when Raegan didn’t take the box but reached into his pocket.

Fuck! He knew it. He’d screwed up big time, and he’d stupidly admitted that he’d lost the special gift Rae had gotten him. He may as well hand Raegan his key to the apartment and see if he could stay with Dallas for a few days as he sorted out what he was going to do next.

Yuuki jumped when Raegan's hand appeared in front of his face and dangling from his fingers was a necklace. Not just any necklace but his necklace. Yuuki gasped and looked past Raegan's hand to his smiling face.

"Surprise." Raegan pulled his hand back and settled it on the island top.

"Where did you find it?" Yuuki asked as he set down the velvet box and took his necklace from Rae.

"The EMT found it lying on the floor beside you before taking you to the hospital. The chain was broken, and I worried about it getting lost, so I held onto it." Raegan reached out and fingered the charm that rested on Yuuki's palm. "I thought it was about time to return it to where it belonged."

There was a world of meaning in Raegan's words that went far beyond him returning Yuuki's jewelry to him. Yuuki was sure of it, and he realized this was his moment. He laid his necklace beside Raegan's in the box and picked up the smaller box.

"Rae-kun, you're so much more than just my best friend. I've realized that you're my entire world. I love you so, so much and want to be with you forever." Yuuki sank to one knee and popped open the box that held two plain platinum bands. "Will you be my husband? For real this time."

Yuuki's words were met with silence, and he could feel his heart drop into his stomach. Fuck! Why wasn't Rae answering him? Had he been too presumptuous with his plan? Was this

too much too fast? Had Raegan decided that he wasn't actually in love with Yuuki? Had he just made a total ass of himself?

“Are you sure?” Raegan’s question was like a blast of cold air on Yuuki’s feverish thoughts, bringing them to a dead stop.

“What? Sure about what?” Yuuki asked in confusion.

“That you really love me? That you want to saddle yourself with me? You’re sure this isn’t just the trauma talking?” Raegan’s face was stricken as the words fell from his mouth.

What the actual fuck is he on about? Yuuki thought as he stood up and slammed the ring box on the counter. “Are you fucking serious right now?”

“Yuu, I—” Yuuki cut Raegan off.

“Am I actually in love with you? You’re really asking me that? After all of this?” Yuuki waved his arm at the island covered in his displays of affection. “And this bullshit about trauma. What does that even fucking have to do with anything?”

Raegan lifted his hands and held them up in a placating gesture. “Well, sometimes, people think they have fallen in love with their rescuers. You hear about it with cops and firefighters...”

“Oh, for fuck’s sake,” Yuuki threw his hands in the air and took several steps back. “Did I just not say that I’m pretty sure I’ve been in love with you since college?”

Raegan stood up, and Yuuki could see in his eyes that he was starting to get irritated. “You could have put a rose-tinted

film over the past and just think that you loved me.”

Yuuki was good and mad now. He'd gone to all the trouble of preparing this proposal, and Raegan's response was to question him. Yeah, fuck that shit. Yuuki stepped up to Raegan and, going up on his toes, got right in his face.

“Don't tell me what I think, Rae. Don't act like you are in my head. Ken would do that shit, and I'm not having it anymore.” Yuuki poked Raegan in the chest hard. “If I fucking say that I love you like in the romantic, fucking on every flat surface sense, then I fucking love you. My word has always been enough for you. Why is that different now?”

Yuuki jabbed Raegan again and stared him down. They stood locked in a battle of wills for several minutes until Raegan sighed and sat back in his seat.

“I... Fuck...” Raegan ran his hand back over his short hair. “I wanted this. I wanted so bad for us to be together and now? Now, I'm being a damn coward. I'm just...”

Raegan trailed off and looked away from Yuuki. Yuuki sank back onto the flats of his feet and shook his head. They truly were made for each other. Just a pair of idiots scared of losing each other. Yuuki lifted his hand and cupped Raegan's cheek, applying pressure until Raegan looked at him.

“You're scared that if this is real and falls apart that we'll lose each other.” Yuuki's lips turned up in a tender smile.

Raegan's eyes widened in shock, and he nodded.

“You big dummy.” Yuuki leaned in and placed a kiss on Raegan’s cheek. “I feel the same way. I’m terrified of losing you, but now that I’ve been with you, I can’t go back to the way things used to be.”

Yuuki kept his eyes locked with Raegan’s and waited. This was the moment, and it was all up to Raegan. He either saw the truth of Yuuki’s words in his eyes or things between them were over. Yuuki didn’t know if he could live with going back to being just friends, but he also couldn’t give Rae up altogether.

Please, Rae. Please see my heart. Please take a chance on us.

Raegan lifted his hands and cupped Yuuki’s cheeks as a slow lopsided smile curled his lips. He leaned in and captured Yuuki’s lips in a searing kiss. That was all the answer Yuuki needed. He wrapped his arms around Raegan’s neck and kissed him back with everything he had.

“We’re a pair of fucking morons, aren’t we?” Raegan asked as he broke away from the kiss and rested his forehead against Yuuki’s.

“Yeah. Yeah, we are.” Yuuki replied as giddy laughter bubbled up inside him and burst from his lips. He wanted to cry. He wanted to scream. He wanted to dance and sing to the heavens. Yuuki was so happy that he thought he just might burst like a firecracker.

Yuuki untwined his arms and grabbed the ring box off the counter. He pulled out of Raegan’s grasp and sank back onto

one knee again.

“Let’s try this again.” Yuuki cleared his throat and held up the rings. “Rae-kun, will you marry me?”

Chapter 28

Raegan

Raegan was half-convinced he was dreaming. How was this his life? There was no way that this all could be real. Yuuki not only returned his affection but was on one knee asking to get married. This was the stuff of romance novels and Hallmark movies. Raegan discreetly pinched himself, the pain letting him know he was awake. He looked deep into Yuuki's adorable, pleading eyes, and his heart melted.

“Yes, Sugar.” He plucked the smaller ring from the box and bent taking Yuuki's left hand in his. “I would love to marry you.”

Raegan went to slide the ring on Yuuki's finger, but Yuuki pulled his hand away as he rose to his feet. Raegan gave him a curious look.

“Nuh-uh. You aren't stealing my thunder. I did the asking, so I get to put the ring on you.” Yuuki picked up the other ring and tossed the box on the island top. He grabbed Raegan's left hand, removed the turquoise ring, and slid the platinum one into place. He then lifted Rae's hand and placed a kiss on the new ring.

“There. Now, you’re mine for real.” Yuuki turned a triumphant grin on Raegan, and his heart did a back flip.

“I sure am. Now give me your hand so I can do the same to you.” Raegan reached for Yuuki’s hand only to have Yuuki dodge him and take several steps back.

“Maybe if you catch me, I’ll let you put that ring on me.” With an impish grin Yuuki spun and sprinted toward Raegan’s room.

“Oh, you little shit.” Raegan set the ring back in the box before bolting after his quarry.

Yuuki was quick as a rabbit, but he wasn’t quite as in shape as Raegan. He caught up to Yuuki easily and reached out to grab him. Yuuki, the little minx, ducked away from Raegan and changed his direction. Raegan had to skid to a halt before turning to pursue him. Yuuki laughed as he dodged around the couch and skirted the coffee table. Raegan, because of his size, couldn’t maneuver as well and smacked his shin against the table.

“Ow! Fuck!” Raegan cursed as he took a few hopping steps as pain radiated up his leg.

“You okay?” Yuuki asked with concern, coming to a stop just behind the couch.

The pain was already fading to a dull ache, but Raegan was sure he’d have a decent bruise tomorrow. “Yeah. I’m good.”

“Awesome because you still have to catch me.” Yuuki cackled as he took off running again.

“Why, you...” Raegan took off after him. “You just wait until I get my hands on you.”

“And what are you going to do, slowpoke?” Yuuki taunted as he ran into Raegan’s room.

Raegan was hot in pursuit, but he had lost a lot of ground in the living room. When he burst into his room, he found Yuuki standing on the far side of the bed, grinning.

“It’s over, Rae-kun. I have the high ground.” Yuuki altered the quote from one of Raegan’s favorite movies and laughed like a bad movie villain.

“We’ll see about that.” Raegan shot around the end of the bed, intent on catching Yuuki no matter what.

Yuuki laughed with delight as he climbed onto the bed and shuffled across it.

“Oh, no, you don’t.” Raegan dove onto the mattress and grabbed Yuuki around his middle.

Yuuki struggled a little in Raegan’s arms, but Raegan could tell that he was only playing at trying to escape. Raegan sat up, bringing Yuuki with him and settled him in his lap.

“Well, you caught me.” Yuuki walked his fingers up Raegan’s chest as he gave Rae a sultry look. “So, are you going to make good on all those threats you were making?”

Raegan felt his dick stir to life as he looked into those devious brown eyes, and he was filled with a single-minded desire. “You know it, but you need to answer one thing for me.”

“Yeah.” Yuuki leaned in and start trailing kisses along Raegan’s jaw. “What’s that?”

“Are you going to be okay if I restrain you?” Raegan held his breath as Yuuki paused his kisses and sat back to look at Rae.

Raegan could see some hesitance in his eyes. Raegan had been surprised that Yuuki had started the game of chase, given what had happened to him. Raegan was following Yuuki’s lead, though. Whatever Yuuki was comfortable with, he would do or not do.

“Could we... could we maybe keep it simple? Like maybe just my hands and use a quick-release knot?” Yuuki asked his words careful and measured.

Raegan could tell Yuuki wasn’t trying to upset him, which was sweet, but Raegan wanted Yuuki to be comfortable, first and foremost. “If you don’t want to be restrained at all, that’s fine by me.”

“No!” Yuuki exclaimed, cutting Raegan off. “I want that. It’s just that I’m not sure how I’ll react.” Raegan felt Yuuki’s hand fist into his shirt at his side. “I need to do this. If I don’t, I’ll feel like Ken wins. Like he’s still trying to control me.”

Raegan’s heart hurt at the pain that was in Yuuki’s words. That fucker had done more than damage Yuuki’s body. He’d left a wound on his mind, and only time would see if it would heal. Jail time was going to be too light a sentence for Ken, in Raegan’s opinion.

Raegan leaned in and placed a kiss on Yuuki's cheek. "As long as you are sure, Sugar. I'll set things up so that you can pull the ropes loose whenever you want." Raegan began trailing kisses along Yuuki's jaw just as he had done to Raegan before. "First, I'm going to love you up real good."

Raegan angled his head and captured Yuuki's lips in a possessive kiss. He pressed his tongue into Yuuki's waiting mouth mapping every inch and twining with Yuuki's tongue. His hands slid under the hem of Yuuki's shirt, tugging it upward. They parted just long enough to remove Yuuki's shirt before crashing back together. Raegan ran his hands up and down Yuuki's back, loving the feel of his soft skin under his rough hands.

Yuuki pulled Raegan's shirt up insistently, whining when it stopped under Raegan's arms. Raegan lifted his arms, and Yuuki jerked the shirt off so fast they almost didn't have time to separate from the kiss. A new sense of urgency washed over them as clothes started flying everywhere and hands and lips roamed over every new inch of exposed skin.

Now naked, Raegan rolled them so that Yuuki lay on his back with his head propped up on the pillows. Raegan sat back and drank in the sight of Yuuki sprawled beneath him.

Fuck, he's so damn beautiful, and he's all mine, Rae thought before he moved to the edge of the bed and opened his nightstand drawer. He grabbed the small bundle of rope he kept there, along with a newish bottle of lube. Bounty in hand, Raegan made his way back to Yuuki and straddled his hips.

“Hands above your head, Sugar.” Raegan’s voice was commanding but gentle.

Yuuki gave him a sexy smile as he lifted his arms and settled his hands on the pillows behind his head.

“Like this?” Yuuki purred as he fluttered his eyelashes.

“Minx.” Raegan shook his head as he scooted forward a bit. He set the lube down beside Yuuki and untied the rope. He laid the bundle aside and reached for Yuuki’s hands. He adjusted them to a position that would allow him to bind Yuuki but allow him to be comfortable.

“Color?” Raegan asked as he picked up the rope. He was giving Yuuki one last chance to call this off before things got down and dirty.

“Green, Rae-kun,” Yuuki responded in Japanese, his voice full of lust.

“Right, then.” Raegan set to work winding the rope around the specially designed headboard and Yuuki’s wrists. He created a secure knot that would hold Yuuki the way Raegan wanted, but if Yuuki tugged on the end that Raegan slipped into his hand, it would come apart without trouble. Reagan checked for a third time that the bindings were not too tight before he slid back and looked Yuuki in the eyes.

He had worried he would find panic there, but all he found was desire. Raegan’s dick throbbed at how delectable Yuuki looked all trussed up for him. Raegan leaned over and grabbed the lube. He popped the cap and poured a fair amount into his

hand. He felt Yuuki shift beneath him but didn't move from where he was straddling him.

“Rae, you have to move.” Yuuki insisted as he continued to wriggle.

“Do I now?” Raegan crooned as he tossed the bottle aside and reached behind himself. It had been quite a while since Raegan had bottomed, but tonight, he craved to have Yuuki inside him. He wanted to claim him as his in all ways.

Spreading his cheeks with his other hand, Raegan traced his slick fingers around his rim, sending a shudder up his spine. He closed his eyes as he teased and pressed on his entrance until it became pliable. Carefully, Raegan pressed his middle finger inside himself. He took in a sharp breath as the familiar discomfort of being penetrated coursed through him. Prep was Raegan's least favorite part of bottoming, but he'd learned the hard way that it was a necessary evil.

“Rae? Are you really...?” Yuuki trailed off, his voice full of astonishment.

Raegan opened his eyes and smiled at Yuuki. “Yeah, Sugar. I want to feel you inside me. I want to be yours in all ways. So, you just lay there looking pretty, and let me do all the work.”

Yuuki stared at him rapt in awe before an adoring smile curled his perfect lips.

“Well, if you insist.” Yuuki shifted until he was comfortable and winked at Raegan. “Have at me.”

Raegan chuckled before he worked in a second finger. The stretch burned, but he pressed on, knowing that it was worth it to be this close with Yuuki. Raegan pumped his digits, twisting and scissoring until his impatience got the better of him.

Good enough, Raegan thought as he stopped his prep and reached for the lube bottle. He grabbed it up and moved back so he had access to Yuuki's cock.

He poured lube into his hand and wrapped it around Yuuki's shaft. He slid his hand up the length and teased the uncut head. Yuuki moaned and the sound was music to Raegan's ears. He would have loved to stay there and jerk Yuuki until he came but he wanted to ride him more. Raegan released his grip with a protesting groan from Yuuki and shifted into the position he needed.

Reaching behind him, he held Yuuki's prick up and sank downward. The blunt tip met Raegan's entrance, and he pulled in a deep breath as he closed his eyes before he continued to press down. Raegan's body resisted at first, but he willed himself to relax, allowing Yuuki's cock head to move past his rim.

Hard part's over, Raegan thought as he removed his hand and let his hips sink, taking Yuuki in inch by inch until he bottomed out.

Raegan drew in a ragged breath as his body adjusted to having a cock inside him.

"Rae-kun, look at me," Yuuki ordered, and Raegan opened his eyes. When their eyes met, Raegan was struck by the look

of love in Yuuki's eyes. "You look so hot riding my dick, but if this is too much, we can stop."

Raegan's heart zinged at Yuuki's words. He was so used to catering to his partner's needs that he often forgot about his own. To have Yuuki put his needs first was so intoxicating that Raegan knew he would be addicted for life.

"Nah, Sugar. It's just been a while. Give me another minute to adjust, and I'll have you screaming my name in no time." Raegan snickered.

Yuuki nodded with a wink and that had Raegan's heart tripping over itself. Tentatively, Raegan raised his hips a bit before sliding back down. The friction of Yuuki's prick dragging along his slick walls sent a bolt of desire straight to his balls, and Raegan knew it was show time.

Raegan raised his hips until only the tip remained before he slammed down hard. Raegan liked it hard and rough, so he set a blistering pace as he canted his hips, trying to get the right angle to nail his prostate.

"Rae! Fuck!" Yuuki cried out as he tugged at his bonds and pumped his hips upward to meet Raegan stroke for stroke.

"Shit!" Rae shouted as Yuuki pegged his cum button.

"Yeah, Bae. Take what you want." Yuuki snapped his hips again, hitting that same spot, and Raegan saw stars.

Raegan had wanted to draw things out, but now, he was caught up in a lust frenzy. He brought his hands to his chest and tweaked his nipples. He was getting close as evident by

the telltale tingle in his balls, but he wanted to get Yuuki off first.

“AH!” Raegan screamed when he felt a hand wrap around his cock. He looked down and found that Yuuki had undone his restraints. His hand was wrapped around Raegan’s throbbing dick and flying over it at lightning speed.

“Come for me, Rae-kun,” Yuuki crooned as he gave Rae a devilish look. “Cover me in your cum and mark me as yours.”

That was fucking it. Raegan was done in, and his orgasm slammed into him like a wrecking ball. Raegan roared as his body went taut, and his cock shot strand after strand of cum. Yuuki’s stomach and chest were covered in jizz as he milked Raegan for every last drop. Raegan was spent but couldn’t slump over and relax like he wanted. Yuuki hadn’t come yet.

Without warning, Yuuki’s hands slammed into Raegan’s chest, sending him tumbling backward. Before Raegan knew what was happening, Yuuki had slipped free of Raegan’s hole, and he was now straddling Raegan. Raegan watched with hazy, post-sex eyes as Yuuki’s hand pumped his still hard cock until he stiffened and came all over Raegan’s chest.

Yuuki slumped forward to lie on Raegan’s chest and wiggled around mingling their cum together.

“There. Now you’re mine and I’m yours.” Yuuki chuckled.

Raegan laughed as he wrapped his arms around Yuuki and kissed his temple. “Yup, but we should probably shower soon. Unless you want to be glued together with cum.”

“There are worse fates.” Yuuki nuzzled into Raegan with a contented sigh that signaled he wasn’t going anywhere soon. “I love you.”

Raegan placed another kiss on Yuuki’s head. “I love you, too.”

Chapter 29

Raegan

Raegan felt like the king of the world as he strode into Sugar and Spice with a bouquet of roses in his hands. He had gotten the call he had been waiting on for six weeks and had promptly quit his job after getting off the phone. The look on Ted's face had been priceless when he delivered his verbal resignation. As he walked out the door, Alfredo had commented on him not hacking it, to which Raegan had flipped him the bird. He'd see soon enough what Raegan could do when he was doing things his way.

All the plans Raegan had been putting into motion were now falling into place, and he was taking Yuuki out to celebrate. He walked straight back behind the counter, past the flustered teenager, who was minding the store front and entered the kitchen. All eyes looked at him as he sauntered in, but he only cared about one set of eyes in particular.

“Bae? What are you doing here?” Yuuki asked as he set down his piping bag and wiped his hands on his apron.

Raegan walked right up to him and pulled him into a scorching kiss. Raegan heard someone, probably Dallas,

whoop as he broke from the kiss to look into Yuuki's dazed face.

"Hey, Sugar. I've got a surprise for you." Raegan handed Yuuki the flowers. "Think you could cut out a little early today?"

"Um... well, I need to finish this cake and close up." Yuuki looked adorably flustered, and Rae had to hold himself back from pulling him into a kiss.

"Yuuki," Dallas spoke up, drawing their attention to him. "Get out of here. I'll finish your cake and close."

"No, Dallas," Yuuki protested, but Dallas silenced him with a stern look.

"Consider it payback for when I flaked on you a while back. Besides," Dallas cast his eyes around before lowering his voice, "Daddy will be here soon, and I can sweet-talk him into helping."

Yuuki and Dallas broke out into a fit of laughter, and it warmed Raegan's heart to see the friends sharing an inside joke. Dallas had been through some shit not too long ago, so Rae was happy to see him smiling.

"You heard the man, Sugar. Get your stuff and let's roll." Raegan took the flowers back and waved his hand in a shooing motion.

Yuuki looked anxiously from Raegan to Dallas. "Are you sure, Dallas?"

“Yes, now get before I drag you outta here myself.” Dallas shook his piping bag at Yuuki in a playful threat.

Yuuki rushed over to Dallas and hugged him. “Thanks, Dallas.”

“No problem.” Dallas returned the hug before pushing Yuuki back with a fond smile. “Now, go have a fun time with your man.”

Dallas waggled his eyebrows suggestively, and Raegan had to suppress a snicker. He liked this freer version of Dallas. He was a riot.

“Yeah, yeah. Don’t forget you still owe me a double date at Icons,” Yuuki teased.

Dallas’s cheeks lit up, and he tapped Yuuki’s arm. “Leave already, jerk.”

A bright smile turned up Yuuki’s lips as he whipped off his apron and started gathering his things. A short time later, they were in Raegan’s truck and headed off to Raegan’s big surprise.

“Dallas is looking good.” Raegan needed to distract Yuuki so that he wouldn’t realize where they were going.

“You have no idea.” Raegan glanced out of the corner of his eye to see Yuuki grinning from ear to ear. “Ever since he and Liam worked things out, it’s like Dallas is a completely different person. I’m thrilled for him.”

“Love will do that to you. It makes you into a better person.” Raegan took his hand off the wheel and placed it in

Yuuki's.

“That’s the truth.” Raegan could hear the smile in his voice. “So where are you taking me?” Yuuki turned his head to look at Raegan with excited eyes.

Darn. I hoped he wouldn't ask that. I'm so damn close to just telling him, Raegan thought as he forced himself to hold back his excitement.

“That’s for me to know and you to find out.” Yuuki’s bottom lip came out in a pout at Raegan’s response, and he couldn’t help chuckling.

“So impatient.” Raegan fished his phone out of his pocket and put it on his car charger. He was going to need it when they reached their destination. “So, May called me today.”

“She did?” Yuuki’s pout disappeared and was replaced by a curious look. “What did she want? She okay?”

Raegan was struggling to suppress a smile. He was finding it hard not to give himself away. “She told me she and Blanche had been in the area recently.”

“And they didn’t come to see us?” Yuuki sounded the teensiest bit hurt.

“It was a short trip, but while they were here, Blanche apparently fell in love with Raleigh.” Raegan explained as he guided the truck onto the highway, and he willed his left leg to stop bouncing. With every mile, they were closer to Raegan’s big surprise, and he couldn’t wait to see Yuuki’s reaction.

“Did she now? It is pretty nice here. Probably why I decided to move here after graduation,” Yuuki replied as he pretended to study his cuticles, but Raegan knew he was watching him out of the corner of his eye.

“I thought you followed me,” Raegan pretended to sound wounded as he played along with Yuuki’s teasing.

“Oh, no. Chasing after a boy is the worst reason to move anywhere. It was all this lovely Southern charm that got me. You just happened to be here, too.” Yuuki turned his gaze toward Raegan and batted his lashes the way he always did when he was being a little shit.

“Oh, well. Lucky me.” Raegan rolled his eyes, but his lips betrayed him and curled into the barest of smiles.

“Yep.” Yuuki popped his lips on the P, and Raegan had to will himself to keep his eyes on the road. “So other than letting you know they are too busy with their amazingly extravagant life to visit and Blanche’s newfound adoration, what did May want?”

Rae bit his tongue and counted to ten before he replied so that he could curb his enthusiasm. “She let me know Blanche was looking to invest in a business here and offered to give me the start-up capital I need to open my own catering business.”

The car went silent, and as the silence dragged on, Raegan grew worried that he had said something wrong. He glanced over at Yuuki and found him staring slack-jawed at him. “Yuu?”

“Holy fuck, Rae. Are you serious? They’re just going to give you all that money?” Yuuki was practically climbing over the center console, and his glee was washing over Raegan like a wave.

“Well, I had to submit a business plan.” Yuuki smacked Raegan’s arm, causing him to flinch.

“Why didn’t you tell me any of this?” Yuuki asked his voice full of astonishment.

“I wanted to make sure it was happening first, and then I wanted to surprise you.” Raegan pulled off onto their exit.

“That’s one hell of a fucking surprise.” Yuuki reached across the console and laid his hand on Raegan’s arm. “I’m so happy for you, Rae-kun.”

Raegan’s heart did the mambo, and his entire body warmed at Yuuki’s loving touch. “Well, you should be happy for the both of us because I’m going to need to hire a head pastry chef. Know anyone who might be interested?” Raegan turned a bright smile on Yuuki.

Yuuki’s face lit up like a firework display, and Raegan was sure if they hadn’t been in the car, Yuuki would have tackled him to the floor with a hug.

“Where do I sign? I had given up on my dream of running my own pastry shop, but now, you’re making that come true.” Yuuki gave Raegan’s arm an affectionate squeeze. “Thank you.”

This man is going to be the death of me if he gets any cuter, Raegan thought as his chest puffed up with pride. “No thanks necessary. I want to make all your dreams come true, Sugar.”

“Sap.” Yuuki patted Raegan’s arm before resting back in his seat. “You know where I go, Dallas goes. I’m not leaving him alone to deal with Arturo.”

Raegan chuckled as he turned the car onto the road that led to his parent’s farm. “You know I could never leave baby boy behind. Although now that he’s got a Daddy, he seems to be doing much better.”

“For sure. Liam told me he had contemplated some pretty awful fates for Arturo. Then he reminds himself he can’t be with Dallas if he’s in prison.” Yuuki chuckled. His laughter stopped abruptly, though, when he looked out the window and took in their surroundings. Yuuki’s brow creased in confusion. “Are we going to the farm?”

Just a little longer, Rae. You can hold it together for just a bit longer, Raegan gave himself a mental pep talk to keep from spoiling things.

“Eventually. Mama is whipping up a celebratory dinner, but first, I want to show you something.” Raegan turned his truck down a dirt road that forked off from the main drive.

They drove on for several more minutes before Raegan came to a stop in front of a house frame. He turned off the car and tapped the camera on his phone before he climbed out of the car. Yuuki did the same, following Raegan as he walked up to the house.

“Watch your step.” Raegan took Yuuki’s hand as they started up the front steps that lead to a large, wrap-around porch.

“Rae, are we allowed to be here? Why are your parents building another house on the property? Is this going to be your sister’s house?” Yuuki asked as they crossed the porch and walked through what would be the front door.

“To answer your questions. Yes, they’re not, and no.” Raegan came to a stop at the center of the house and pulled Yuuki into his arms. “I’m building a house on my property. This is going to be our love nest.”

Yuuki’s eyes widened in surprise before looking around frantically at the space surrounding them. Raegan thought it was the cutest thing he’d ever seen.

“This is going to be our house? This place is enormous, Raegan. Isn’t it a bit much for only two people?” Yuuki asked as his gaze returned to look at Raegan.

“Well...” Raegan ran his hand up and down Yuuki’s spine. “I’m hoping that maybe one day, there will be more than just the two of us here.”

Raegan couldn’t stop the laugh that bubbled up in him as Yuuki’s jaw hit the ground. Raegan was full of surprises today, and Yuuki wasn’t prepared for any of them.

“You mean kids. You... You want to have kids together?” Yuuki asked his voice quavering, and his eyes grew misty.

Raegan hugged him a little tighter and kissed his forehead.

“I want to have everything with you, Yuuki. You’re my entire world. I want to run my business with you, share this house, have kids, visit Japan, and grow old together. Just everything,” Raegan said, his voice earnest and brimming with love.

He’d jumped the gun a little when he had put the money he’d been saving for his own business down to have the house built. Now though, he was glad he had. To be standing there with Yuuki, looking so beautiful, in what was going to be their home, filled his mind with so many possibilities. He saw them moving, bringing home babies, chasing kids down the halls, graduations, and eventually, two old men holding hands in rockers on the front porch. It was such a gorgeous dream that it brought tears to his eyes.

“Don’t start crying. If you do, then I won’t be able to hold back.” Yuuki’s voice was thick with restrained emotion.

“This is a moment worth crying over, Sugar.” Tears of joy flowed down Raegan’s cheeks.

A sob burst out of Yuuki, and he buried his face in Raegan’s chest. “I love you so much, Rae-kun. You’re my entire world, too.” Yuuki lapsed into Japanese, but his words were so muddled by his tears that Raegan almost couldn’t understand him.

“I love you, too, Sugar,” He responded as a cool breeze wafted through the house, carrying the scent of magnolia. “Come with me.”

Raegan released his hold on Yuuki and took his hand. He led them back to the front porch, stopping at the top of the stairs, and pulled a small fob from his pocket. “Since pictures started us on this incredibly insane path to each other, I figured we need one for this step, too.”

“Sounds perfect. At least I’ll be sober when I spam post this one,” Yuuki joked, his face lighting up with a smile.

“Yup.” Raegan shifted them to pose for the picture. “You ready?”

Yuuki went up on his toes and kissed Raegan’s jaw. “Always.”

“All right.” They turned to face the truck. “One.” Raegan shifted his weight. “Two.” He stooped down and caught Yuuki under his knees and behind his back. “Three.” Yuuki squealed in surprise as Raegan lifted him into a bridal carry.

Raegan tapped the fob a dozen times as he captured this moment, where all his dreams had finally come true.

Chapter 30

Yuuki

E pilogue: 1 year later...

“Ugh... Why can’t I get these damn buttons lined up right?” Yuuki grumbled as he unbuttoned his dress shirt for the seventh time to start from the beginning again. Today was his wedding day, and that meant he had lost all control of his senses.

He and Raegan had come clean to Raegan’s family about the whole fake marriage plan the night Raegan had taken him to see their house. The family had taken it a lot better than Yuuki had thought they would. Everyone except John, who had known about it the whole time. He’d gotten an earful from Kennedy for keeping quiet. They’d all been more disappointed than angry that the two of them would do something so ludicrous.

Once everything had been said and done, Renata and Kennedy had been thrilled that they could help plan a wedding. They had both insisted that the whole thing should be held at the farm. Yuuki had been okay with that since it ticked finding a venue off the list. Now, almost a year later, all

their planning, and hard work had come to fruition. That was if Yuuki didn't fuck things up because he couldn't dress his damn self.

“Okay, I was going to let you be a big boy and dress yourself, but I can't take this anymore.” Dallas batted Yuuki's hands away and began buttoning the dress shirt.

Yuuki sighed in relief and let Dallas take over. He was so happy, he had opened up to Dallas about everything. It had been nice to have someone who knew the truth, and he could talk to about things. Dallas had come up with the story of telling the guests they were holding a recommitment ceremony as a cover for the wedding. It was a stroke of genius that wrapped everything in a tidy bow.

“Thanks, Dallas. What would I do without you?” Yuuki gave him an appreciative smile.

“Not have an amazing best man or a mind-blowing wedding cake.” Dallas winked as he finished buttoning Yuuki's shirt.

Yuuki chuckled at the irony of Dallas's words. The man he had always pictured standing with him at his wedding was in truth the man he was going to marry. Fate was fucking weird like that.

“Knock, knock.” John's voice came through the door before he entered the room. “Well, I'm glad to see you are just as behind on getting ready as Rae is.”

Yuuki rolled his eyes at John's teasing as he tucked his shirt into his tux pants. “Har har. Shouldn't you be with my groom

instead of in here giving me shit?”

“Raegan insisted I bring you this.” John opened his hand, and Yuuki’s pendant necklace hung from his fingers. “You forgot it back at the house.”

Yuuki gasped and rushed toward John. “I knew I was feeling kind of naked today.” Yuuki carefully took the necklace from John and put it on. As the familiar weight of the pendant, along with his turquoise ring, settled on his chest, Yuuki felt a sense of peace wash over him. Those two items encompassed the entirety of his and Raegan’s journey to this day, and it would have been wrong for him not to wear them.

“All right, then. Mission accomplished.” John turned to leave. “I’m gonna go light a fire under your man to get his ass ready before he’s late for his own wedding.”

“Tell him that if he’s late, there will be no wedding night nookie.” Yuuki retrieved his socks.

“Ha! That should inspire him.” John laughed as he left the room.

“I’m going to run downstairs and check in with the crew.” Dallas started toward the door.

“Translation. You’re sneaking off to see your Daddy,” Yuuki teased as he sat down on Raegan’s old bed and slipped on his socks.

“If I happen to see Daddy while I’m doing my job, that’s just a bonus.” Dallas stuck his tongue out at Yuuki before he left the room.

Yuuki flipped him off before picking up his dress shoes and putting them on.

Now for the damn tie, Yuuki thought as he stood up and grabbed the baby blue tie from where it lay on the bed.

He went over to the mirror above the dresser and draped the tie around his neck, slipping it under his collar.

“Okay, cross them over, the big side goes through the loop at my neck, and through the knot,” Yuuki repeated as his actions followed his words. When he finished, he frowned at the end result. His tie was lopsided, and the skinny end was longer than the wide end.

Fucking tie, Yuuki stepped away from the dresser and grabbed his tux jacket. He’d get someone to tie it properly for him before he walked down the aisle. He slipped the jacket on and returned to the mirror. Minus his messed-up tie, Yuuki thought he cut a striking figure. He was sure to make Raegan’s mouth water. An image of Raegan cleaned up and in a matching tux flitted across his mind. All those yummy muscles and pudge wrapped up in all that lush black material. It was enough to make Yuuki drool. He was going to savor unwrapping his husband later that night.

Yuuki noticed that his hair was standing up a little funny on one side and went to fix it when something in the mirror caught his eye. Looking closer he saw that sunlight was bouncing off the picture frame that sat in a chair near the window. His hair forgotten, Yuuki turned and strode over to the chair. He picked up the picture and took the seat it had

been in. He stared at the woman in the photo and tenderly stroked the glass following the curve of her cheek.

“Did you see it back then, Mom? Did you know all along that Raegan and I were in love?” Yuuki smiled at his mother’s grinning image. “I’m sure you did. That’s why you pushed so hard for us to be friends. You liked Rae from the minute you met him.”

Yuuki felt his throat get tight, and his eyes itched.

“I bet if things had gone differently, you would have made me see I loved Rae a lot sooner than this. Ever since I came out, you always said how much you wanted a big, burly son-in-law.”

Yuuki chuckled as he recalled sitting with his mother at a cafe, chatting about what type of men Yuuki liked. His mother had been so goofy and struck poses like a bodybuilder. She had told him she wanted Yuuki to be with a man who would give rib-cracking hugs and could lift her off her feet. Raegan met those qualifications.

While the memory was a happy one, Yuuki was overcome with sorrow. He brought the picture to his chest and hugged it as he swallowed the sobs that wished to escape him. “It’s not fair, Mom. You should be here. You’d walk me down the aisle and sit beside Renata, crying your eyes out during the vows. But you’re not, and that leaves me alone on my wedding day.”

Yuuki leaned the picture back as he looked into his mother’s loving eyes. His mother’s eyes were the one detail he

remembered best. No matter what trouble he'd gotten into or accomplishment he had achieved, those eyes had always held love above any other emotion. When he had mustered the courage to come out, his mother's eyes were the first thing that had let him know things were going to be okay between them.

Yuuki closed his eyes against his tears and held the picture to his chest again. Fuck, he wished his mother were here. He needed her desperately.

Silly boy. I am always with you, and you're not alone. You're surrounded by people who love you, and you're about to marry a man who adores you. I'm so happy for you and love you so much.

Yuuki startled, and his eyes snapped open. He had sworn he had felt someone touch his cheek and that he had heard his mother's voice. He looked around the room but found no one there. He relaxed his hold on the picture and looked once more at his mother's countenance. Nothing had changed but Yuuki almost swore that her smile had grown brighter.

Yuuki's lips curled up in a smile, and his sadness washed away. "You're right, Mom. Thanks for reminding me I'm loved. I have Dallas and Liam, the whole crazy Dietrich family, and most important of all, I have Raegan." Yuuki traced his mother's smile. "Love you, Mom."

Yuuki set his mom's picture on the small table beside him and wiped his misty eyes. A knock at the door drew his attention, and a moment later, Dallas came into the room with Liam right behind him.

“Are you ready, Yuu?” Dallas asked, pausing just a second before rushing over to Yuuki’s side. “Hey, are you okay? Your eyes are a little puffy.”

Yuuki smiled at his friend as he rose from his seat. “Yeah, I’m good, Dallas. I was just talking with my mom.” Yuuki looked at the picture, and his smile brightened.

Yuuki turned his gaze back to Dallas and clapped him on the shoulder. “Let me go see what I can do about this puffiness, and then Liam, do you think you can help me with my damn tie?”

“Sure thing.” Liam gave Yuuki a knowing, friendly smile. Yuuki liked that about Liam. He had this total Dad vibe that helped you feel seen and at ease.

“Thank you,” Yuuki said as he walked past Liam, heading for the bathroom. “Can’t get married with a crooked tie now, can I?”



“All right. Are we ready to get this wedding procession underway?” Carmelo, the wedding planner they had hired, asked as he came in the back door of the farmhouse.

“Daddy had to take Lincoln to the bathroom. Again.” Eleanor rolled her eyes as she made her rose-pink dress skirt swish back and forth. She had been doing that for the last ten minutes, delighted by the way it flowed around her.

Yuuki snickered at her adorableness. She was so excited to fulfill her role as flower girl and, it would seem, any delays

were a personal affront to her.

“We’re back. We’re back.” John sounded flustered as he came into the room carrying Lincoln, who looked smart but uncomfortable in his tiny tux.

Britt, the Dom that Rae knew and owner of the formal wear shop they had gotten their outfits from, grimaced as he watched John set Lincoln on his feet. He’d been doing all he could to keep everyone unwrinkled but was failing with the little boy. Yuuki wasn’t sure why Britt was even there. He’d arrived with Carmelo, and Yuuki suspected there was something going on between those two.

He’d had no time to speculate, though, as the house was a hive of activity all leading up to the ceremony, and now, the time had finally arrived for him to join his groom.

“Good. Everyone’s here. Let’s get lined up.” Carmelo consulted the tablet he held for a moment. “Lincoln goes first. Little man, can you stand over here?”

Carmelo pointed to the spot just in front of him. Lincoln looked at his dad nervously. Yuuki stepped forward and crouched down, pulling Lincoln’s attention to him.

“Hey, buddy. You feeling scared?” Lincoln nodded. “I’m a little scared, too, but we’ve practiced this a lot, right?” Another nod. “And we know Uncle Rae is waiting for us.”

“Yeah, cause he loves you bunches, and that means you gotta be husbands,” Lincoln said, looking more confident.

Yuuki smiled and nodded. “That’s right, and once Uncle Rae and I are husbands, we get to have a big party.”

“I want a huge piece of Dallas’s cake.” Lincoln spread his arms wide to show how big a piece he wanted.

“You can have as big a piece as you want, but we have to be brave and get through the ceremony first. Think you can do that?” Yuuki asked, loving how Lincoln’s face lit up.

“I sure can.” Lincoln stepped into Yuuki and hugged him. “I’m so happy you’re my family, Uncle Yuu. I love you.”

Yuuki pressed his lips together and held back the happy tears that tried to break free. He hugged Lincoln back, giving him a firm squeeze. He was so fortunate to be joining this amazing family. “Love you, too.”

They let go of each other, and Lincoln dashed over to where Carmelo wanted him. Yuuki stood up and smiled at the little boy.

“You’re going to make a great dad one day.” John clapped Yuuki on the shoulder. “I’m looking forward to lots of nieces and nephews, brother.”

John walked off to stand behind Lincoln with Dallas. Eleanor dashed over and hugged Yuuki too. “I love you, Uncle Yuu.”

“Love you, too, princess,” Yuuki said, stooping to hug her.

“Make sure you have all girls when you and Uncle Rae have babies. Boys are so gross.” Eleanor stepped back from their hug.

Yuuki chuckled at his niece's request. "I'll be sure to tell Uncle Rae."

Eleanor smiled and scurried over to stand behind the groomsmen with her basket of flower petals clutched in her hands.

Yuuki picked up the picture of his mother and moved to stand behind Eleanor. Slowly, Carmelo ushered each person out on their turn until Yuuki was the only one left.

"Feeling nervous?" Britt asked as he stepped up to Yuuki and fussed with his tux.

"Not in the slightest." Yuuki stared at the back door and resisted the urge to run out of it.

Britt arched a well-manicured brow at him. "Really?"

"Why should I be nervous? He's my best friend. The man I love more than life itself." Yuuki turned a glowing smile on Britt. "And he has always catered to my every whim. I don't expect that to ever change. So, what do I have to be nervous about?"

"Your turn, Yuuki." Carmelo opened the door and indicated for Yuuki to exit.

Yuuki focused his gaze forward and walked out the door. He blinked against the bright afternoon sun as he stepped outside, and after a moment, his vision cleared. He'd been able to see the yard from his window while he got ready, but now, as he stood there soaking it all in, he was overcome with how breathtaking it all looked.

There were bundles of pink and blue balloons. Every white folding chair was filled with someone that loved him and Raegan. Then there, under the lattice arch covered in hanging jasmine, was Raegan, looking striking in his tux. Yuuki's first impulse was to run to Raegan and leap into his arms as he loved to do. He resisted, though. Renata would have his head if he didn't do this right. His mother-in-law was a force to be reckoned with.

Taking measured steps, Yuuki made his way down the aisle, carrying his mother's picture proudly. It didn't make sense, but he was certain he could feel her walking beside him to his future. When he reached the end of the aisle, he turned to his right and sat his mother's photo in the seat reserved just for her beside Renata.

"I'll look after her. Love you, sweetheart," Renata whispered, her eyes misty with tears.

"Thank you. Love you, too, Mama." Yuuki straightened and walked up to stand beside Raegan.

The officiant greeted them before starting their address to everyone gathered.

"You look amazing, Sugar," Raegan whispered as he leaned into Yuuki.

"You, too. I almost ran up that aisle to get to you," Yuuki replied, looking over at Raegan and batting his lashes.

Raegan mouthed the word "flirt" at him just as the officiant addressed them to exchange their vows. They'd written their

own, and Raegan had lost the coin flip that decided who had to speak first. They turned to face each other and took each other's hands.

“Yuuki, you've been my best friend for what feels like forever. We've been through many adventures together. From the greatest of highs to the deepest of lows.” Raegan glanced at Yuuki's mother's picture. “We endured it all because we had each other.” Yuuki gave Raegan's hands a squeeze, and the guests all awed. “But it wasn't until that trip to Vegas that we realized what we had was more than just friendship. We were also crazy, madly, deeply in love with each other.” Yuuki bit his tongue to keep from snickering. Oh, if people only knew the truth about Vegas. It was going to make a fun, slightly edited story for their future kids. “So now, as we stand here before our friends and family, I make you this promise. We'll start every morning talking and end every day still talking. There will never be a moment where you doubt my love and devotion. You're my family and my world. I love you, Yuuki. Now and forever.”

Sounds of crying and sniffing rose from the crowd, and Yuuki himself had to fight back his own emotions so he could speak.

“Raegan, on the day we met my mother.” Yuuki swallowed the lump of emotion in his throat, and he felt Raegan squeeze his hands. “She told us we would be lifelong friends. I think, somehow, she knew that one day we would be more than that.” Yuuki glanced at his mother's picture and a single tear trailed down his cheek. “If she were still here, I'm sure she would

have gone mad from how long it took us to realize our feelings.” Peals of laughter rang out, warming Yuuki’s heart. “As you said, we have been through so much and only endured it because we have each other.” Yuuki watched tears stream down Raegan’s cheeks, and it made him love Rae even more to see this display of vulnerability. “You have always catered to whatever crazy whim struck me, but now, I promise to cater to your wants and needs. My heart is yours always. I love you, Rae-kun.”

There were more sounds of affection from their guests, but Yuuki heard none of it. As he looked into Raegan’s eyes, everything around him melted away until it was as if they were the only two people left in the world. He would have been happy to stay trapped in that moment forever.

“Raegan, do you take Yuuki to be your husband?” the officiant asked.

“I do.” Yuuki didn’t think it was possible, but at those words, Raegan’s eyes somehow filled with even more love.

“Yuuki, do you take Raegan to be your husband?”

“I do,” Yuuki answered, feeling as if he were going to burst from all the love that welled up inside him.

“Then by the power invested in me, I pronounce you wed. You may kiss your groom.” The words had barely left the officiant’s mouth before Yuuki had gone up on his toes and captured Raegan’s mouth in a scorching kiss. He poured all his love into that kiss, and he could feel Raegan’s love in return as he kissed him back. While their marriage had started as a lie,

Yuuki knew now that the love they felt had always been true and would stay that way always.

The End

About the Author

Freesia lives in North Carolina with her husband and two kids. At her day job, she deals with the idiocy that is the American health insurance system. In the evening after caring for her family she finds the time to weave tales of men falling in love. When she has spare time she spends it crocheting or cross-stitching inappropriate things, busting out her classically trained culinary skills, and getting into various fandoms. She can often be found at local anime/comic book conventions dressed in cosplay with her family.

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The Beau Ties Series

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