



Love
COMES
IN THREES

— *lll* —

MARIE SINCLAIR

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ABOUT THE BOOK

Love Comes in Threes

A single phone call changes the perfectly-balanced V-relationship husbands Elliott and Luc, and Luc's Dom/boyfriend, Leo, have maintained for several years. If they're brave enough to take the chance, they could build something even stronger for all of them together.

Elliott thrives on routine: teaching college literature, caring for his dogs, and unconditionally loving his husband, Luc. Whether that means building a recording studio for Luc's burgeoning career as a pet care influencer or supporting Luc's love for his Dom, Elliott is there for him no matter what.

Luc is the luckiest man in the world. His pet care YouTube channel is poised to launch into a real career, Elliott gives him the solid foundation he needs, and Leo provides the domination and structure he craves. Wherever the winds of

fame take him, he's secure in the knowledge that both his husband and his lover will be his wings.

Leo knows no one would look at his wheelchair and think "Dom," but frankly, he doesn't care. He survived the accident that paralyzed him, as well as the health crisis that almost killed him, and his reward is Luc, kneeling at his feet in complete devotion and perfect submission.

These three men have balanced work, home, love, and play in an open V-relationship for several years...until a single phone call rocks their world. Once the shock wears off, the new dynamic between them could destroy everything or build something stronger if they're brave enough to take the chance.

Notes: *Love Comes in Threes* is an emotional, somewhat angsty MMM romance featuring a consensual V-relationship (i.e., no cheating), and an HEA for all three men. It contains a Dom on wheels, Really Big Floofy Dogs, and mouthwatering Greek pastries, as well as light kink and a D/s relationship.

CHAPTER ONE

Elliott

The day everything changed began the way all Elliott's days did. He woke first, started the coffee, then showered. By the time he was dressed, his husband, Luc, was downstairs taking care of the dogs and getting breakfast ready.

Today, the table held bagels and schmears from an excellent bakery that had opened up a few weeks before. The dogs, Beowulf — who Luc had nicknamed Bey as soon as he met the Neapolitan Mastiff — and Jericho — who Luc adopted after its owner abandoned the dog at the vet where Luc worked — were happily eating in the corner of the kitchen.

Elliott poured mugs of coffee for himself and Luc, lightened them with half-and-half, then added three sugars to Luc's and brought both mugs to the table. He kissed Luc good morning, then settled into the chair opposite his spouse. They'd been together five years now, married for four, and Elliott could honestly say he loved his husband more today than when they got married.

Usually, Luc started their morning conversation with a rundown of everything he needed to accomplish that day. In addition to working as a vet tech, Luc had a successful dog care YouTube channel and podcast. He had more than seventy-five thousand subscribers and was on the cusp of gaining sponsorship with a major brand, so he was always busy.

Today, though, Luc tapped at his phone and frowned.

“What’s on your agenda for this Thursday?” Elliott asked as he spread a thick layer of salmon cream cheese on his bagel. Elliott taught literature at Berkeley and specialized in medieval and Renaissance literature. His days weren’t nearly as varied as Luc’s. Once the semester started, each week was pretty much the same schedule of classes, office hours, and meetings until finals were over and his grades submitted.

Luc looked up from his phone and seemed startled to see Elliott sitting across from him. “Leo wants me at his doctor’s appointment this afternoon.”

“Is everything all right?” Elliott asked. Leo had been Luc’s boyfriend for two years. Even though Elliott and Luc were consensually non-monogamous, and Luc was poly, and Elliott knew all about his husband’s relationship with Leo, he and Leo didn’t know each other well. The three of them had dinner occasionally, and Elliott talked to Leo when he came to pick Luc up for their dates, but they were more acquaintances than anything else. Still, if Luc was worried about Leo, then Elliott was worried about Leo too.

“I don’t know,” Luc said, concern etched on his face. “He went in for some tests last week. I guess the results are back.”

Jericho, who had an incredible instinct for knowing when Luc was in distress, came over and put his head in Luc’s lap. Luc idly stroked the dog’s head while he continued to stare at his phone. The two were so much alike. Jericho was a Mudi, a Hungarian herding breed, with a solid black coat that mirrored Luc’s mop of dark curls. They both had boundless energy and

a joie de vivre Elliott sometimes envied. That joie de vivre had led Jericho's owners to abandon him, but it was what had drawn Elliott to Luc from the moment they met after Luc had taken a picture of Elliott's dog and posted it to Instagram. The post went viral, and Elliott had messaged Luc to ask if he could get a copy of it. They'd met for lunch, and that was it. Both of them just knew they'd found their forever person.

It didn't hurt that they frequented the same Greek bakery in Presidio Heights, and the owner had been trying to set them up for almost a year because she thought they'd be perfect together. Turned out Mrs. Castellano had been right, and they'd had her do the cake and all the desserts for their wedding. The vet Luc worked for was right down the street, so he was always bringing home samsades, loukoumades, baklava, and decadent slices of galaktoboureko, to which Elliott swore he'd become addicted.

"Leo wouldn't want me to be there if it was good news, right?" Luc asked, bringing Elliott's attention back to the matter at hand.

Elliott wanted to reassure his spouse that it meant nothing, that everything was likely to be fine, but he knew medical issues could be complicated for Leo. The man had been in a wheelchair since he was sixteen, the result of a collision with a drunk driver, and even things like a cold or flu could become serious health risks for him because of his body's decreased circulation.

“Not necessarily,” Elliott said carefully. “Do you know what the tests were for?”

“He wouldn’t tell me.”

“Then I guess you’re going to have to wait until you see him.” Elliott smiled at his husband. “I know that’s sometimes difficult for you.” Jericho chose that moment to whine and paw at Luc’s arm. “And your shadow.”

The comment brought a smile to Luc’s face, which was what Elliott had hoped to accomplish. He got up from his seat and rounded the table, pulling Luc into his arms. “Whatever you need from me, you have. You and Leo both.”

He leaned in to kiss his husband, but Luc pushed him back and made a face. “Ew. Fish breath.” But then he pulled Elliott in close and laid his head against Elliott’s chest. “Thank you.”



Elliott was on campus by ten. He had a faculty meeting at eleven and office hours from one until three, then a graduate seminar on Dante at three thirty. Elliott knew he was lucky to be teaching at a university as prestigious as Berkeley. At thirty-seven, he was one of the youngest tenured professors as a result of luck from hitting the job market at just the right time and having his degrees from Oxford, courtesy of his British father and grandfather, who had also attended that institution. Elliott was still new enough to enjoy the students and young enough to remember what it was like to be one of them.

When he taught undergrads, he made a point of giving them time at the end of each class to talk about what was going on in their lives and spent time in his lessons and during office hours helping them be successful students. It was one of the reasons why he had a four-point-five-star rating on Rate My Professor. Before they'd done away with it, he'd also had a five-pepper rating for hotness, something that Luc had found hilarious when he found out. Not that it was underserved, he'd said.

Thoughts of Luc kept surfacing throughout Elliott's day. During the faculty meeting, he found himself scrolling health risks for paraplegics and could barely stay focused during office hours once it turned two, the time of Leo's appointment.

He'd hoped Luc would call or text before his seminar started, but by the time he left his office, he still hadn't heard a thing.

Hope all is well, he texted Luc while he walked to his classroom. When there wasn't a response, Elliott tucked his phone into his messenger bag and entered the classroom where his students were already waiting for him. Graduate seminars were limited to ten, and surprisingly, his class on Dante always filled up even though it was a two-part class. Maybe it was because they read the entirety of the *Divine Comedy*, concentrating on the *Inferno* and its influence on literature in the fall term and *Purgatorio* and *Paradiso* in the spring.

Ordinarily, Elliott loved the intimacy of the seminars, but today, he knew his face betrayed his level of stress. As the

class got underway, several of his students cast worried looks his way, especially when one of them had to repeat a question to him a couple of times before they got his full attention.

They took a break at four thirty, and Elliott immediately reached for his phone.

Leo's cancer is back

Luc's text had been sent a little over fifteen minutes before, so Elliott immediately texted back.

I'm so sorry. Please let Leo know if there's anything I can do, he's got my full support.

Elliott wasn't surprised Luc hadn't responded before class resumed.

I love you, he tapped out on his phone and sent the text as the last student took their seat.

CHAPTER TWO

Leo

Leo was sure his entire world had just ground to a halt. Perhaps hearing that his cancer had returned after more than a decade had killed him because he definitely felt like he was floating above his body. Yup, there he was, the hand he had clenched around Luc's turning the man's skin white around Leo's fingers. There was Luc, looking as shell-shocked as Leo felt, and there was the doctor, looking like he was sympathetic but waiting for Leo to say something before he continued.

The problem was, Leo couldn't. He had no words; his mind was blank and his body numb.

"What's...what's the prognosis?" Luc asked, his voice a mere whisper. Anemic, drained of both life and breath.

The doctor's gaze flicked toward Leo, then back to Luc. "We caught it early, which is good. The fact that it's come back after remission makes things a little more challenging and urgent. We need to do more testing before we figure out the next steps, but I think Leo should be prepared that treatment this time will need to be more aggressive and start as soon as possible."

If Leo were the fainting type, that would have done it. He'd have fallen out of his chair and onto the floor. As it was, he didn't want to hear any more, but Luc kept talking, kept asking questions. He'd extricated his hand from Leo's and was taking notes. Thank God. It was why he'd requested Luc to

accompany him. Doctors always thought they were being so cagey when they refused to tell you test results over the phone and required you to make an appointment to discuss the results. Please. And when they asked that the appointment happen within twenty-four hours? Leo had known what he was walking into. Didn't make it easier to hear. But at least he had Luc by his side. *Thank God for Luc.*

When the doctor finished talking, Luc looked to Leo, then told the doctor they were done for now but would probably have more questions tomorrow.

“That’s completely normal. It is important that Mr. Galvan schedule the additional testing as soon as possible so we know what we’re dealing with and can get treatment started.”

“We understand. Thank you, Dr. Reyes.”

All Leo could do was nod. He put his hands to the wheels of his chair, but he didn't have the strength to make them turn. Once again, his body was betraying him. Dammit!

He was dimly aware of Luc and the doctor talking, the sound of the office door opening and closing, and then Luc was kneeling in front of him. Luc placed his hands on Leo's knees and looked up.

“What do you need, Sir?”

Leo shook his head. He had never felt less like a Dom in his life and had no business asking Luc for anything right now.

“You wanted me here to take care of you,” Luc said. “What can I do, Sir?”

Luc was so beautiful in his submission; Leo couldn't help but stare at him. On his knees, hands resting on top of Leo's, eyes up and watching Leo, content to remain in that position until told otherwise. He was simply stunning.

"You're too good for me, boy," Leo said, and Luc cracked a smile.

"We both know that's not true, Sir."

Leo reached out a hand and drew Luc to his feet, then pulled him closer so Luc had to lean over, and still Leo pulled him until Luc was climbing into Leo's lap, putting his arms around Leo's neck. He leaned in but waited for Leo to close the distance and kiss him.

"I love you, boy."

"I love you too, Sir."

"Take me home."

As much as he hated it, Leo let Luc push his chair. Ordinarily, he was adamant about doing as much as he could for himself, but today? This was a shit show, and he wasn't too proud to accept help.

Fortunately, Luc had driven today, and they'd had the valet park his car, so it was simply a matter of handing over the ticket and waiting for the car to be brought round. Luc knew enough to let Leo maneuver himself into the car, waving off the attendants when they moved forward like they were going to assist. As if Leo hadn't been doing this for the past

seventeen years and knew better than they did how to move his body without injuring himself.

Once he was situated in the car, Luc collapsed the wheelchair and stowed it in the trunk. He took his keys from the attendant, handed him a tip, then got into the driver's seat, waiting until Leo nodded to start the car.

Leo was silent the entire way home despite the worried looks Luc kept casting his way. Was he being an ass? Probably. But he didn't know what to say. He was used to parts of his body being numb — his legs had been unresponsive since he was sixteen and woke up battered and sore in a hospital bed — but he wasn't used to his heart being that way. *Twelve years. Twelve fucking years of remission.* It wasn't fair. He was supposed to be safe.

Leo still hadn't said a word by the time Luc pulled into the parking garage underneath his building. He lived in one of the downtown high-rises and had two parking spaces assigned for his use. Luc pulled into the empty spot next to Leo's Tesla and turned the car off. Without saying anything, he got out of the car, retrieved Leo's chair from the trunk, and brought it around to the passenger's side. He set the brakes so the chair wouldn't roll away, took a step back, and waited.

Inside the car, Leo tried to will himself to release the seat belt, to open the car door, to tell Luc everything was going to be okay, but he couldn't do it. Even though he knew it was his imagination, he felt the cancer growing, multiplying, taking over more of his body. He'd been down this road before and

knew what was going to happen to him over the next several months. In spite of his best efforts, Leo bent his head and let the tears fall.

In an instant, Luc was beside him, holding him, telling him he was loved and that Luc wasn't going anywhere, that he would do whatever Leo needed him to. Leo let himself rest in Luc's arms and accept the comfort of being held. It wasn't something that came easily for him, and Luc was the only one from whom he would accept it.

Once Leo had himself under control again, he sat back up and told Luc he was ready to go upstairs.

"I'm sorry," he said as he maneuvered his body into the chair and lifted his legs so his feet were situated properly on the footrests.

"Leo."

It was rare for Luc to use his name, and the way he said it, Leo knew he was in for a lecture.

"You have nothing to be sorry about. I'd be more concerned if you weren't upset."

"What? Like a pissed-off toddler?" Leo slammed the car door shut and spun the chair in the direction of the elevators.

Luc grabbed him and spun the chair to face him again. He knelt in front of Leo. "Stop it." Leo raised an eyebrow, and Luc smiled. "You are all about being able to handle whatever comes into your life, about having control. If you'd reacted any other way, you wouldn't be my Leo, my Sir."

“I shouldn’t be taking it out on you.”

“You aren’t. If anything, you’re doing exactly the opposite and taking it out on yourself, and I am not going to stand for that.”

“You’re not?”

“No.”

Leo arched another eyebrow at Luc and pushed himself up so he was sitting straighter in his chair, shoulders squared. “What do you intend to do about it, boy?”

“Anything you tell me to do, Sir,” Luc said with a wickedly sly smile.

Leo couldn’t help but laugh. God, he did love this boy. He reached out and cupped Luc’s chin in his hand, drew him to his feet and then forward so he could kiss those sweet lips. With his hands lightly balanced on Leo’s legs, Luc leaned in so he could open his mouth and draw Leo inside. He went willingly, his tongue flicking against Luc’s, his hands rising to tangle in the hair at the back of Luc’s head, which he pulled lightly to make Luc moan. The sound filled Leo with warmth and made him want Luc despite the events of the day.

Unbidden, a thought about how frequently that would happen once he started treatment made Leo pull back. He’d been through this before. The way cancer tainted everything, made its presence known no matter what he was doing.

He kissed Luc with one last light touch. “Let’s go upstairs,” he said and then moved his hands to the wheels and turned

toward the elevators.

The building in which Leo lived had been built on Rincon Hill, San Francisco's original high-rent district where the city's wealthy lived during the Gold Rush years. The opulent homes were destroyed in the 1906 earthquake and the fire that followed, and the wealthy took the opportunity to rebuild farther from the morally questionable activities of the bars and brothels that populated the nearby waterfront.

In the past decade, that same area of San Francisco had become home to luxury condo high-rises and then the Salesforce Tower that loomed over the city like Sauron's tower. While Leo wasn't a fan of the building, he did appreciate that his condo now overlooked the beautiful rooftop garden that had been built over the Trans-Bay terminal.

His home was on the eighteenth floor, a modern four-bedroom with an open floor plan that Leo had modified to meet his needs. He'd turned one bedroom into the home office for his software development company. Another bedroom had become his playroom. The master he'd kept for himself, and the fourth bedroom was his guest room. It might seem like too much space for one man, but Leo liked to keep things orderly. Each room had its own function, its own purpose, and that was how he liked it.

He'd also had the interior modified for his wheelchair by enlarging doorways, lowering cabinets, and making sure counters always had space to accommodate his chair. The décor of the living room might be considered Spartan or

minimalist, but it allowed Leo complete mobility in his own home. And while he'd left the guest bathroom and the spare room's en suite untouched, his own bathroom had been adjusted for ease of showering and taking care of his personal needs. Everything in Leo's home had been designed with one idea in mind: to make it possible for him to live independently. And for the past eight years, he'd been doing exactly that.

Now, the space he'd been so proud of felt like it mocked him. What was the point of being able to live on his own if his body was going to keep betraying him like this?

“What would you like, Sir?”

Luc's quiet voice brought Leo out of his head. “Come here, my boy.”

Without hesitation, Luc came to him and knelt at his feet, hands resting lightly on his thighs, back straight, shoulders square. He looked up at Leo with complete devotion, willing to wait for as long as it took for Leo to name what he wanted in this moment. Leo swallowed hard. As comfortable and confident as he was, this was one of those times he could scarcely believe Luc had agreed to be his submissive.

“Would you...do you think...” Leo took a deep breath and started over. When he spoke this time, his voice was firm and under control. “This isn't one of our regular nights, but, if Elliott agrees, I'd like you to stay with me.”

“I'm sure he will. Would you like me to call him?”

“Yes, please. I’m going to make us some coffee while you speak with him.” He held out his hand, smiling when Luc took it and stood.

Leo turned and went into the kitchen while Luc took his phone from his back pocket and walked to the floor-to-ceiling windows that overlooked the garden.

“Hey, El,” Leo heard him say before he busied himself with setting up a pot of coffee.

The normalcy of measuring beans and grinding them, pouring water, and setting the coffee maker to brew settled something in Leo. He began to breathe easier for the first time since the doctor announced that his cancer had returned. Luc’s voice came to him from the living room, and a thought occurred to Leo, so he returned and motioned for Luc’s attention.

When Luc saw him, he asked Elliott for a moment and turned his attention to Leo. “Yes, Sir?”

“Would Elliott like to come over for dinner?” Leo asked. “I know I’m asking a lot from him to give you up for an additional night, so if he wants to come here, I’d be more than happy to have him.”

“Are you sure? He’d need to bring the dogs, and after the day you’ve had...”

Leo waved Luc’s objections aside. “I’d like the company. And I’d love to have the dogs here too.” It was an unusual move on his part, but the way Luc looked at him told Leo he’d

made the right decision in asking Elliott to join them. He listened with half an ear as Luc made the request and saw the joy on his face as Elliott accepted the invitation.

“He’ll be here in about forty-five minutes,” Luc said as he ended the call with his husband. “Thank you.”

With a shrug, Leo brushed Luc’s thanks aside. “It’ll be nice to get to know Elliott better.” He turned away and headed for the kitchen to pour the coffee he’d made.

CHAPTER THREE

Luc

Luc watched Leo head back to the kitchen and didn't know what to think. On the one hand, Leo seemed to be doing better, though he really couldn't have been much worse than the zombie he'd become in the doctor's office. On the other, the offer to have Elliott join them for dinner was unusual.

By unspoken agreement, Elliott and Leo kept themselves separate in his life. They knew each other and the role each of them played, but aside from the negotiations when Luc and Leo had first gotten together, their contact was minimal. It wasn't that Luc didn't want them to know each other or that Elliott was uncomfortable with Luc having a boyfriend — they'd both recognized that Elliott was not able to provide the kind of D/s relationship Luc needed to feel grounded, nor was Elliott interested in BDSM, even as he recognized how important it was for Luc — it had simply been easier to put a fence around each of his relationships and keep the areas of overlap to a minimum.

Perhaps Leo's request was simply his way of making sure Elliott was aware of what the next several months were going to look like and that he wouldn't resent the amount of time Luc was going to be spending away from him. Luc wasn't ignorant of the toll Leo's treatment was going to take on all three of them. He might not have a concrete idea of what was going to happen — knowing Leo was processing the

diagnosis, the doctor had only given Luc a broad outline of how treatment was likely to proceed — but he knew enough to know it was going to limit Leo’s ability to live the independent life he cherished.

Luc was still pondering what it was going to be like to have Elliott in Leo’s home when Leo returned, two mugs of coffee on a tray resting across his lap. He waited while Leo made his way to the couch, moved the tray onto the table, and then maneuvered himself from his chair to the couch. When he was settled, he placed Luc’s cushion on the floor and motioned for him to come over. “Back to me,” Leo said.

With a sigh, Luc settled on the plush cobalt pillow at Leo’s feet, his back resting between Leo’s parted legs. Finally, something that was normal in this fucked-up day. He sighed again when Leo’s fingers tangled in his curls. Leo touching his head was one of his favorite things, and he all but purred at the gentle strokes as he leaned into Leo’s hand and closed his eyes.

They sat like that for several minutes until Leo leaned forward and handed Luc his coffee. Part of their protocol was that Luc never offered assistance. If Leo wanted help, he would tell Luc what he needed. So, Luc waited until the mug was placed in his hands and then waited for Leo to take his first sip before raising the mug to his lips.

He genuinely felt at peace, which was one of the things that had attracted him to Leo when they’d met at a D/s munch. The get-together had been held in a wine bar that had a private

back room for meetings and parties. Luc noticed Leo the moment he entered the room. It was hard not to because of the wheelchair, but that had quickly faded from his conscious thought as he watched Leo circulate through the room. The man had an air about him, a presence that spoke of control and competence. At the time, Luc was feeling none of those things.

His Instagram following had exploded after the pic he'd taken of Elliott's Neapolitan Mastiff, Hrothgar, looking out of the back window of his Honda. It was the photo that led to him meeting Elliott, falling in love, and then getting married. All of which added to the story that had captured the hearts of his followers and made Luc's dreams of becoming a social media influencer a possibility. He got his YouTube channel up and running, but between IG and making videos and working for the vet, he was a scattered mess.

Elliott had tried to help, but they quickly realized he wasn't cut out to play that kind of role in Luc's life. Luc wanted a Dom — someone who could keep him in line, take care of him, make sure he stayed organized, and keep him focused. He'd had a relationship like that while he was in college, and it was one of the reasons he was able to graduate magna cum laude. Elliott, who Luc loved with his whole heart, was simply too willing to accept Luc's repeated shrugs and *I didn't get to it* when he failed to post something like he said he would or didn't follow up with a sponsorship inquiry. He knew Elliott loved him and wanted him to succeed, but Luc also knew he needed the structure a Dom could offer him, not to mention the release he got from a play session. Their discussions had

led him to the munch, and when he saw Leo, he just knew he'd found the right person. The same way he'd known when he saw Elliott the day they met.

It hadn't taken much negotiation for Elliott to agree to Luc's relationship with Leo. From the moment he met Elliott, Luc had been up-front about being poly, and Elliott was comfortable with that. Luc wasn't promiscuous by any means, but all his encounters with others were discussed and acknowledged and any issues dealt with immediately. Since meeting Leo, Luc hadn't had any other lovers.

"What's wrong, love?" Leo asked. His hands were back stroking Luc's hair, and Luc sighed. "Tell me."

Leo's voice had shifted into the deeper register of his Dom voice, which Luc adored. He shivered, but he also felt the deep well of sadness rise in his chest.

"Boy. Tell me."

"I don't want to lose you, Sir," Luc whispered, and that was all it took for the tears to roll down his cheeks.

Leo took Luc's mug and placed it on the table, then pulled him up until Luc was sitting on the couch next to him, held tight by Leo's arms. Those arms were incredibly strong — the result of the weights Leo exercised with daily and seventeen years of using them to power his wheelchair — and they held Luc tight while Leo kissed his cheeks and forehead and whispered that he didn't want to lose Luc either.

They were still holding each other, the coffee long forgotten and cold, when the intercom buzzed to let them know Elliott had arrived. Leo pressed the touchpad on the table next to the couch and told the front desk to let him up, then nudged Luc to get up so he could answer the door when Elliott arrived.

After a quick kiss, Luc did as Leo requested and went to wait by the front door. He was halfway across the room when an idea occurred to him, and he turned back to Leo.

“Would it be all right to show El the playroom, Sir?”

Leo nodded. “That would be fine.”

Luc nodded. “Yes, Sir.”

A few minutes later, the front bell rang, Luc opened the door, and a very excited Jericho flew into his arms. Luc laughed as he tried to control the dog. As usual, Bey took everything in stride, his dark brown eyes taking in his surroundings and his silver-gray jowls swaying as he looked from side to side and leaned down to sniff Luc’s bare feet.

“Come on in,” Luc said. He took Jericho’s leash, told the dog to sit, then leaned close to give Elliott a kiss. “Thank you for coming.”

“How are you doing? How are both of you doing?” Elliott asked.

Those questions shattered all the composure Luc had managed to gather. The tears rolled again, and Elliott wrapped his arms around Luc’s shoulders, pulling him close.

“I’m sorry,” Luc whispered.

“Oh, honey, there’s no need to be sorry. This wasn’t what you wanted for Leo, and it’s not what I want for either of you.”

“It’s just...I don’t want to lose him, El.”

“Of course you don’t. You love him, and I love you, and I meant what I said. Anything either of you need from me, you have. You are not dealing with this alone.”

Luc drew in a rough breath and nodded. “Thank you. We should let these monsters say hello to Leo.” He looked down at Jericho. “And you need to behave yourself.” The dog cocked his head to the side and seemed to give Luc a toothy grin. “Yeah, that’s what I thought.” With a resigned sigh, Luc took hold of Elliott’s free hand and led him to the living room.

“Ah. Welcome,” Leo said as they entered. His gaze moved from Elliott to the two dogs. “They’re...ah...a bit bigger than I remembered.”

Elliott laughed. “Yes. Bey is a big softie, though. It’s that one” — he nodded toward Jericho — “that you have to watch out for.”

“I’ll bear that in mind. Please, sit.”

As soon as the words were out of Leo’s mouth, Luc realized he had a dilemma. The pillow on which he’d been kneeling was still at Leo’s feet, but Elliott had taken a seat on the living room’s other couch. They were in Leo’s space, but Elliott was his husband. Which man was his primary right now? Elliott knew Luc was a sub — he’d watched Luc at play parties, but

that was a different thing from seeing your husband in his sub role with his Dom.

When he and Leo first got together, all three of them had negotiated such details as how Luc split his time between the two relationships and what roles they played if they met randomly in public. The agreement they'd reached was that Luc would respond as appropriate for which primary he was with that day. But this was different. It was an Elliott day, but they were in Leo's personal space. Leo had asked Luc to stay with him for the night but then asked Elliott to join them. Luc didn't want to disrespect his Sir, but he also didn't want to distance himself from his husband.

He looked to Leo for guidance and was grateful when the man gave him a subtle nod toward Elliott. He sat on the couch, holding tight to Jericho's leash in case the dog decided he had to say hello to Leo. Strangely, the dog sat beside Bey and watched Leo without his usual frantic need to greet every person he met. It seemed as if Leo's Dom powers extended to dogs as well. Luc would need to examine that further.

"Thank you for letting Luc stay the night," Leo said, bringing Luc's attention back to the two men. "I know it's not our usual routine, but thank you."

"It's fine," Elliott said. "When Luc told me about the test results... I'm so sorry, Leo. Anything you need from me, from us, it's yours."

"Thank you," Leo said again. "And thank you for coming over. We haven't often had a chance to get the three of us

together, so while I wish the circumstances were different, I am happy to have an opportunity to get to know you better. Is there anything in particular you'd like for dinner?"

At that moment, Luc's stomach rumbled loudly. "I'm sorry. I was too busy taking care of things so I could get to the doctor's I forgot to eat lunch."

"Luc!" Both men said his name at once, and Luc couldn't help but grin as his gaze swiveled from one to the other.

"We've talked about this," Elliott said at the same time Leo fixed him with a steely glare and a raised eyebrow.

"We will discuss this later, boy."

Luc bowed his head. "Sorry, Sir."

"I can't believe you didn't eat," Elliott said, then clapped his hands on his thighs. "All right. Dinner. If it's up to me, I'm going to suggest Italian."

"Excellent. Alexa? Please display the menu for Tommaso's."

The flat-screen TV across from Leo lit up with a menu. Once everyone made their choices, Leo had Alexa place the order for delivery. When that was done, Leo looked at Luc.

"Why don't you show Elliott the playroom while I find us a nice bottle of wine."

CHAPTER FOUR

Elliott

Elliott hadn't known what to expect when he got the call from Luc inviting him to Leo's, but if Luc wanted him to be there, he wasn't going to refuse. When Luc answered the door, Elliott immediately saw how devastated he was by the news of Leo's cancer. Luc was normally as boisterous as Jericho and nearly as irrepressible, but the man who opened the door to him looked like it had been years since he'd slept. His face was pale and gaunt, and the animation that usually made his eyes dance with mischief was completely absent.

By contrast, when Elliott saw Leo, the man looked...if not fine, at least resigned, but then he'd been through so much in his thirty-three years Elliott supposed there wasn't much that could faze him.

The same couldn't be said for him when Leo suggested Luc show him their playroom.

"Leave the dogs here," he said. "We'll get to know each other better."

It wasn't that Elliott was uncomfortable or unhappy about his husband's relationship with Leo, nor was he ignorant of the D/s dynamic the two of them had or their kink play. While he knew many people would think being open or poly meant he didn't love Luc or Luc didn't love him or their marriage was in trouble, the truth was, he'd never been happier in a relationship with anyone or felt more certain it was for keeps.

Luc had been up-front about being poly on their first date, explaining that people never got everything they needed from a single person, no matter what the relationship. *We have multiple friends, multiple groups of friends, even, because they all give us something different, something that we need, so why should we insist that we get everything we need from a single romantic or sexual partner?* Luc had asked him that day.

While Elliott hadn't made the V-dynamic common knowledge out of concern for how some of his colleagues would react, he did recognize the hypocrisy since many of the authors they taught had maintained unconventional love lives. The famously entangled relationship between Lord Byron, Percy Bysshe Shelley, and Mary Shelley, not to mention Virginia Woolf's enduring love for Vita Sackville West while married to Leonard, or Simone de Beauvoir and Jean-Paul Sartre's tempestuous union that included frequent affairs and long-term lovers of which they kept the other intimately informed, or the scandalous relationship between George Eliot and George Lewes, were just a few examples of how matters of the heart were seldom straightforward or uncomplicated.

Still...there was a difference between knowing and seeing. Despite his trepidation, Elliott followed Luc down the hallway toward the only closed door at the end.

Luc opened the door, then stood to the side to allow Elliott to enter first. As he took in the contents of the room, Elliott could honestly say it was nothing like he'd thought it would be. He'd been to play parties and dungeons, and there was always an attempt to make the rooms feel dark and dangerous,

more like medieval torture chambers than spaces where loving and sensuous acts occurred.

This? This was light and airy, the walls painted a soft blue, the deep-pile carpet on the floor a gorgeous dove gray. Alongside the floggers and paddles Elliott had expected, there were feathers and fur-lined handcuffs; various gloves whose palms were covered with nubbed rubber, leather, and rich fabrics; long braids of what Elliott assumed was silk from the sheen. Several silk scarves hung on the wall next to a coiled whip. Along one wall was the most comfortable-looking bed Elliott thought he'd ever seen. The mattress was thick, the bedding almost sinful in its decadent abundance of pillows and silk sheets. The bed frame was solid wood with slats on the headboard and, Elliott noticed, hooks for attaching restraints at all four corners. There was also a pulley system attached to the ceiling, but Elliott had no idea if that was to give Leo more mobility or for suspension. He suspected it was probably used for both.

Luc came up behind him and wrapped his arms around Elliott's waist. He was too short to put his head on Elliott's shoulder, so he rested a cheek against Elliott's right shoulder blade.

“What do you think?”

“It's...beautiful.” Elliott felt compelled to whisper as if he were standing in a sacred space. “Not at all what I expected.”

“That's why I wanted you to see it. I know we talk about what Leo and I do, but I needed you to see what he created for

me.”

Elliott turned in Luc’s arms and embraced him. “That bed looks amazing.”

Luc grinned. “You should see what’s underneath.”

“Show me.”

As Luc started to separate from him, Elliott pulled him back and kissed him. He’d meant for it to be quick and playful — they were, after all, in a playroom — but as soon as Luc’s lips met his, the man melted against him. Luc pulled him closer, opened his mouth to Elliott, and drew him inside. It was everything Elliott loved about his husband in one moment: a little flirty, a little filthy, and one hundred percent all-in. Elliott gave as good as Luc did, his body responding to the lithe frame he held in his arms.

They would have stayed entwined for some time longer, but the buzzer sounded, and Jericho let out a yelp.

“I better go help Leo,” Luc said as he broke away. Then he grinned at Elliott. “Take a peek under the bed.” He placed a quick kiss on Elliott’s cheek and was out the door.

Elliott was surprisingly curious about what Luc wanted him to see and immediately pulled the silky, dark blue bed skirt aside to find a thickly padded bench. Elliott wasn’t sure, but he suspected he was looking at the spanking bench Leo had gotten Luc for his birthday last year. He ran his hand over the surface and shivered. BDSM might not be his thing, but the feel of that soft leather was warm and sensuous. He could

easily imagine Luc stretched over it, his naked body open and vulnerable, awaiting the first smack of Leo's hand or a crop or any of the paddles displayed on the walls.

The whole room was a revelation to him, built more for sensual play than pain, from the color of the room to the luxuriousness of the rug to the implements hung in aesthetic as well as practical arrangements on the wall. Everything was easily within Leo's reach, Elliott noted. And everything was exactly what Luc loved when playing.

"El? Food's here."

Elliott left the comfortable space understanding more fully how much Luc meant to Leo. He hadn't ever doubted it, but it was nice to see Luc being taken care of so well.

The food smelled great, and Elliott followed his nose from the playroom to the dining table. The dogs were circling but keeping a respectful distance as Luc and Leo went back and forth from the kitchen with plates, silverware, and wineglasses to set the table.

"Can I do anything to help?" Elliott asked.

"Just sit," Leo said, indicating a chair on the side facing the windows. There was no chair at the head of the table, Elliott noticed as he took his place.

Luc appeared with an open bottle of red and poured him a glass. "Old vine zin Leo and I found up in Oregon last year." He poured wine for himself and Leo, then waited for Elliott to take a taste. It was very good. More complex than he would

have expected, which seemed to be the way of things this evening.

When Elliott nodded, Luc beamed, then kissed him on the cheek and all but skipped back to the counters to get the food, with Jericho on his heels. Bey sat stoically by Elliott's side, seeming to pull himself into a more regal pose when Elliott glanced his way, as if to say, *Do you see what I have to put up with?* Elliott reached down and stroked one of Bey's sleek ears. The two dogs were surprisingly good friends, and Bey accepted Jericho's antics with a great deal of restraint. Elliott suspected Bey had missed Hrothgar, who'd been his companion since he was a puppy. As much as he loved these gentle giants, they didn't live much longer than eight or nine years, and Hrothgar was six when he'd gotten Bey. Luc had come into their lives about three months after that, and though Bey adored him, he was still Elliott's dog through and through.

All through dinner, the humans talked, and the dogs waited patiently. Mostly. Bey stayed resolutely by Elliott's elbow, his soulful brown eyes watching every bite Elliott raised to his mouth. Jericho planted himself under the table, equidistant from everyone, his sharp, foxlike ears alert to the smallest morsel falling to the floor.

Leo asked about Elliott's classes and his students, his time at Oxford, and his childhood growing up in both San Francisco and London, and Elliott asked how Leo's latest projects were going. They both asked Luc how his videos were performing, and Leo made some SEO suggestions that Elliott couldn't follow but Luc seemed to understand. It was homey and

comfortable, and if it weren't for the circumstances, Elliott would have been quite happy.

When Luc offered him a second glass of wine, Elliott very nearly said yes. The wine was delicious, and the meal and conversation had been perfect, but he needed to drive back over the Bay Bridge that evening, so he declined.

"You could stay here," Leo offered. "There's plenty of room for you and the dogs."

"Yes! Stay." Luc turned pleading eyes in Elliott's direction, which made him laugh.

"You've been taking lessons from Bey," he said. "But no, you and Leo need time together tonight. I'm fine heading back to our house. You can keep Jericho if you want."

This time, it was Luc's turn to laugh. "Bey would be heartbroken if Jericho stayed behind."

"That is true. So, I guess you're keeping both of them," he said, but he was smiling. Elliott knew the dogs would be coming home with him. "Before I go, though. I thought we ordered dessert."

"Yes!" Luc was up in a flash and heading for the kitchen.

"Boy," Leo called after him, and Luc immediately stopped and returned to the table. "Please clear for us."

"Yes, Sir." Luc began gathering the dirty dishes and silverware and waved Elliott off when he asked if Luc needed help.

Elliott had never seen Luc fully in his submissive role with Leo, and it surprised him that he didn't feel uncomfortable watching his husband respond to another man's commands. It was quite the opposite, actually, and that made him smile. Leo took care of Luc as much as he, Elliott, did, and the affection between the two men, the love they had for each other, seemed to encompass him as well. It was a dynamic he hadn't anticipated.

It wasn't that he didn't care or hadn't known, nor was it that he wanted to be able to take care of Luc this way and felt that Leo took something away from him. Quite the opposite, actually. It wasn't in him to impose the kind of order and restrictions on Luc's behavior that seemed to come so naturally to Leo. It was one of the reasons Luc had asked to find a Dom after Elliott had tried and failed to step into that role in the way Luc needed.

The time management, rules, and protocols helped Luc keep his rapidly turning mind under control and made it possible for him to focus on growing his YouTube channel and IG presence while still keeping his full-time job as a vet tech. He loved his job and didn't want to give it up until his career as an influencer was rock solid. When Luc had tried to do both at once, he'd ended up stressed and exhausted, more like a kitten tangled up in a ball of string, and Elliott hadn't been much help.

With Leo's assistance, Luc had been able to put together a schedule of posts and videos that was manageable. His audience grew by leaps and bounds, and now he was looking

at a sponsorship opportunity that would make it possible to fulfill his dream. Leo had made that happen. But even as Elliott thought about it, he knew that, no, it was the three of them working together that had done it, which made the warm spot in the middle of his chest spread throughout his body as he watched Luc carry the stack of used plates to the kitchen.

Luc cleared the table quickly and efficiently, Jericho on his heels as he trekked back and forth from the table to the sink while Bey remained by Elliott's side. The big dog was following Luc's movements just as much as the smaller one, alert to anything that might fall or be offered; he just wasn't as active about it. Elliott reached out and rubbed the dog's ears.

"I understand Beowulf isn't your first Neapolitan Mastiff. What attracted you to the breed?" Leo asked.

Elliott turned Bey's face and scrunched up his jowls. "Who wouldn't fall in love with that face?" he asked, pleased when Leo laughed. "Initially, it was because my grandmother raised them, but then, when I chose my specialty as medieval and Renaissance literature, it seemed right. They have a history that goes back to the fighting dogs that accompanied the Roman legionnaires, the Molosser, and then were used as guard dogs in Renaissance Naples. I also love their temperament and color."

Elliott nodded toward Jericho, who was leaping into the air as Luc plated their desserts. "Unlike that one."

"They suit each other, though."

"They do."

They watched Luc carry the plates from kitchen to table, setting a perfect square of tiramisu at each of their places, then return to the kitchen for the coffee. As usual, Elliott was taken with the graceful way his husband moved. He'd been completely bowled over by the man from the moment he'd seen him, halfway in love with him by the time they finished their date at the Castellanos' bakery and found out Mrs. Castellano had been trying to set them up for over a year.

When Elliott turned to look at Leo, he saw the same expression on the man's face and couldn't help himself from remarking, "He's amazing, isn't he?"

To his surprise, Leo blushed. "He is."

"He is what?" Luc asked as he resumed his seat at the table.

Elliott stretched across the table and snagged one of his hands. "Amazing," he said and stood up so he could lean over and pull Luc's hand to his lips.

"Well, naturally," Luc said. He intertwined his fingers with Elliott's, then held out his other hand for Leo, who took it at once. "How could I not be with such amazing men in my life?"

They all laughed, and Elliott found himself reaching for Leo's free hand and giving it a quick squeeze before they tucked into their desserts.

Half an hour later, Elliott admitted defeat with a good third left of his tiramisu and said he really should be going.

"I still have to feed and walk these two."

“You’re sure you won’t stay?” Leo asked.

Elliott was tempted, *so tempted*, to take him up on the offer, but he shook his head. “I really think the two of you should be alone tonight. And I meant what I said earlier, Leo. Anything you need from me, it’s yours.”

“I appreciate that. Thank you.”

Luc rounded up the dogs’ leashes and walked Elliott to the door while telling Jericho to be a good boy for Daddy Elliott. “I’ll be home tomorrow, so don’t drive him nuts, okay?” The dog gave a yip as if he’d understood and was agreeing, and Luc handed the leashes over to Elliott.

As soon as they were in his hands, Luc crowded against him, wrapping Elliott in his arms. “Thank you,” he whispered.

Elliott kissed the top of Luc’s head. “I love you. Take care of him, and I’ll see you tomorrow.”

“I love you too.” Luc tipped his head back so Elliott could lean down and kiss his lips, and then he opened the door.



As he crossed the bridge back to the East Bay, Elliott played through the evening’s conversation and his memories of standing in the playroom with Luc. A couple of times, he found himself flexing the hand in which he’d held Leo’s for that brief moment at the table. The man’s hand had been warm, and Elliott swore he’d felt a slight...something...before the circle had broken, and they’d settled into their desserts.

At home, he fed the dogs, then walked them. He locked the front door, shut off all the lights, and headed upstairs with a book he needed to review for a peer journal. His intention was to read for about half an hour before going to sleep, but as he brushed his teeth, Elliott's thoughts turned to Luc and Leo. His right hand, the hand Leo had held briefly, tingled again, and Elliott stared at it, then ran his fingertips lightly over his palm the way Leo's had grazed his skin as he withdrew from Elliott's grasp. Had that actually happened, or was Elliott's brain revising reality and filling in a detail to explain why he still felt the warmth of Leo's touch on his skin?

Elliott settled into bed. Bey took advantage of Luc's absence and curled up on his side of the bed while Jericho tucked nose to tail in his dog bed. When he closed his eyes, it was almost impossible to tell which part of the black lump was the head, something that amused Elliott to no end.

He turned to Bey and smiled. "Luc will be back tomorrow. Don't get too comfortable."

The big dog's tail beat against the mattress a few times before Bey let out a huff and rolled onto his side, taking up more than half of the bed. It was a California king, bought when Elliott only had Hrothgar because he was a sucker for having a dog sleeping on his bed. Something about it felt right, comfortable, soothing.

Try as he might, Elliott couldn't keep his mind on the book he was reading. It was a re-examination of the Welsh Mabinogion, a collection of eleven medieval Celtic tales that

drew on myth, folklore, and history, and included some of the earliest references to King Arthur in literature. Ordinarily, Elliott would be fascinated, but time and again, he realized his mind had drifted to thoughts of Luc and Leo. The fourth time he found himself staring into space, he closed the book with a sigh and put it on his nightstand.

Unfortunately, he still wasn't ready to go to sleep, and furthermore, his cock definitely wanted some action. Even as he thought about jerking off, blood was rushing south and making him hard.

With a sigh, Elliott rolled over, turned off the bedside light, and got the lube he and Luc kept tucked beneath the pillows. Bey raised his head at the click as Elliott opened the tube, then flopped back on his side with a resigned *harumph* that made Elliott laugh.

Sometimes, having a dog on the bed was inconvenient, like when they let you know your sex life was disturbing their sleep or, worse, when they decided you were doing something that needed their participation. The first time Elliott and Luc had sex after Jericho joined their family, the dog had jumped on the bed, licked Elliott's ear, and tried to get between him and Luc. The second time, Elliott had been...*engaged*...when Luc started laughing because Jericho was peering over Elliott's shoulder with a distinct *can I help?* expression on his face. After that, Luc trained Jericho to stay in his dog bed, though more often than not, they found the Mudi curled up at the foot of the bed in the morning.

Squeezing a generous amount of lube into his palm, Elliott recapped the tube, settled back under the covers, and grasped his dick in his now slick hand. The dull ache that had been nagging at him and preventing him from going to sleep immediately flared into a heat that spread from his balls to his chest as soon as he began to stroke himself. He formed a fist and tunneled his cock inside.

“Fuck,” Elliott breathed out as he thrust into the tight, warm space made by his hand.

A bead of precum formed on the tip of Elliott’s dick, and he swiped it with his fingers, teasing at his slit until it was weeping. He groaned as he remembered the way his hand had felt for the brief moment he’d held Leo’s and then sucked in a sharp breath as his hips thrust his cock into his fist once more.

Elliott wasn’t prone to fantasizing as he jerked off, but as the sensation built in his body, his thoughts drifted back to the playroom. To Luc showing him the playroom. To visualizing Luc and Leo in the playroom. He’d seen them together once — a session at Catalyst so Elliott could see what Leo was like — and had Luc’s descriptions of what he and Leo did together, but seeing the objects in Leo’s home, seeing the bed, Elliott could now imagine Luc, naked, leaning over it, Leo tracing the lines of his body with the feathers, the crops, his fingers. The thought of Leo’s hands on his husband’s body was surprisingly erotic, and Elliott needed to grab hold of himself to keep from coming.

He lay back, panting lightly and willing his body to retreat from the edge. Usually, when he jerked off, it was for utilitarian purposes, a way to relax or dispel tension, but tonight, he wanted to savor the way his body felt for as long as he could. He kept his movements slow, languorous, stroking himself down to the base and then back to the tip, teasing his body from a bright flame to a roaring fire. It didn't take much for him to be grabbing hold of himself again to stave off his orgasm. A few strokes and letting his mind drift to the playroom and thoughts of what Luc and Leo would look like together.

The marks Luc sometimes came home with both fascinated Elliott and turned him on. He loved mapping them with his fingers and tongue, tracing Luc's bruises and reddened skin as if claiming them for his own. Sometimes, he sent Luc to his lover with marks of his own and was delighted when Leo sent a return message for him to find.

Elliott groaned, his hand moving faster along his shaft as he thought about Leo making those marks, about watching Leo wielding one of the crops and bringing it down across Luc's ass, about hearing the crack of it, listening to Luc's sharp intake of breath. Did he whimper? Elliott wanted him to whimper.

"Fuuuuuck," Elliott gasped as he imagined the red lines forming on Luc's creamy skin.

As his orgasm built, Elliott let his mind go, picturing himself standing in the playroom, comforting Luc when Leo

was done, cleaning him up, kissing him, soothing those marks. He was rock hard now, thrusting his cock into his fist with an intensity that surprised him and only served to spur him on. Elliott rolled over, got to his knees, hand clasped tight on his dick as he leaned his free arm against the headboard and fucked into his fist even harder, thrusting until his body tightened, teetered, then fell into a blazing climax. Tipping his head back on a silent scream, Elliott milked his orgasm, his cum running hot over his fingers, and let sensation overwhelm him.

He stroked himself until he grew too sensitive, then reached for a couple of tissues. After cleaning himself up, he flopped back down to the mattress and pulled the covers to his chin. With a contented sigh, he rolled onto his side, put a hand on Luc's pillow, and whispered, "Good night, love."

CHAPTER FIVE

Luc

After Luc closed the door behind Elliott, he headed back to the kitchen with the intention of doing the dishes, but Leo called him into the living room. Leo had dimmed the lights throughout the apartment, setting them for the evening, which gave the room, with its floor-to-ceiling view of the Ferry Building and the Bay Bridge, a relaxed and intimate feel. After the chaos of the day, Luc welcomed the quiet moment and the chance to settle, especially when Leo indicated the pillow at his feet.

Luc knelt on it, tucking his heels beneath his ass as he sat. He rested his palms against his thighs and straightened his back but kept his head bowed until Leo reached out and lifted his chin.

“Thank you for everything today, love,” Leo said, stroking his fingers along Luc’s jaw and up into his hair.

“You’re welcome, Sir.” Luc closed his eyes and leaned into Leo’s touch.

“Thank you also for sharing Elliott and the dogs with me.”

“Always, Sir. Whenever you want.”

“Be careful what you promise me, boy. You know how greedy I can be.”

The low rumble of Leo’s voice caused a shiver to run through Luc’s body, as did the way Leo gripped his hair and pulled him closer. Luc had to put his hands on Leo’s knees to

keep from falling face-first into Leo's lap. Not that Luc would have minded, but it had been an exhausting day, and Luc had no expectations. He would be content if all Leo wanted was to touch him and keep him near tonight.

“Look at me, boy.”

Luc opened his eyes and focused on Leo. His features were sharp, the lines of his face cast into shadow or gilded with silver, but in the dim light, his blue eyes seemed to glow. Tears threatened Luc again, so he bowed his head and tried to hide them.

“I said, look at me.” Leo's voice was gentle, and he didn't make a move to lift Luc's chin, waiting until Luc responded to his command and met his gaze again. “I'm not going to sugarcoat this for you. I've been down this road before. There will be many times I won't be able to do the things we like, when I will be angry or depressed, when I won't want to see you.”

“Sir...no.” Luc couldn't help the words that sprang from his mouth. “Please let me help you, Sir.”

Leo placed a finger over Luc's mouth, stilling him. “I will. I'm just telling you. If you need to stop...if I'm not...meeting your needs, I understand.”

Instead of saying anything, Luc got to his feet and gently placed himself on Leo's lap, wrapping his arms around the man's neck and kissing him when Leo opened his mouth to speak. “You are my Sir. Whatever you need from me is yours.” He stared into Leo's eyes. “If you need to hear it a thousand

times to believe me, then you'll hear it a thousand and one. I love you. I'm not going anywhere."

"I'm stubborn," Leo said, but he was grinning as his hands encircled Luc's waist. "I might need to hear it more than that."

"Then you will." Luc tucked his head under Leo's chin. "What do you need tonight?"

Leo sighed, and Luc knew him well enough to keep silent. This was Leo thinking through the possibilities, weighing where he was emotionally and physically, where Luc was. They might end up in the playroom or cuddling in bed, and Luc would be happy with whatever Leo decided. All he wanted was to make his Sir happy by obeying whatever commands he was given.

"I think," Leo said slowly, "I would like you in the playroom. On your knees. Waiting for me." He kissed Luc lightly on the lips. "But you were so good today you deserve a reward. So, you may choose which toy you'd like me to use. Does that suit you tonight?"

"Yes, Sir."

"Good." Leo kissed him once more, then patted him on the ass. "Up you go. You have fifteen minutes to get yourself ready."

"Thank you, Sir."

"Go."

Luc was off Leo's lap in a flash and hurrying down the hallway. He was thrilled Leo was letting him choose and knew

what he wanted. It wouldn't be something overly taxing for Leo, but it would give both of them a chance to get out of their heads and forget about the events of the day for a bit.

In the playroom, Luc made short work of stripping out of his clothes. He folded them neatly and placed everything on a small table by the door, then turned to the implements on the wall to consider his options.

One of the things that had reassured Luc the first couple of times he'd observed Leo at play parties after they met was that the man used a lot of gentle touches, taps, softer-impact toys. Leo had plenty of upper-body strength, but his paralysis limited the amount of rotation he could get with heavy or long-tailed floggers, whips, and single-tails. To compensate, he concentrated on sensation play, building up layers of touch until the sub's skin was so sensitive even the lightest pressure felt overwhelming. Leo also played with a sub's expectations, fucking with the body's perception of pain, pleasure, heat, cold, and sharpness by combining different sensations in the same area of skin. Sometimes, Leo combined sensory deprivation and physical manipulation or engaged in predicament bondage, tying a sub's body in such a way that they had to choose between two different but uncomfortable sensations.

The first scene they'd done at Catalyst, Leo had strung Luc's arms up so he was almost on tiptoe, then used a series of gentle touches to make Luc move into his hands or sharp pokes to make Luc move away. It had been so relaxing, so mesmerizing, Luc slipped into subspace without realizing it,

floating for nearly an hour while Leo manipulated his body with a series of precisely timed touches and sensations.

When Leo had let Luc down, allowing him to collapse into Elliott's waiting arms, Luc had felt a wave of euphoria unlike anything he'd ever felt before. And when Leo got down on the floor to hold him, the three of them — Elliott, Luc, and Leo — fit together so perfectly Luc knew he wanted more. That had been nearly two and a half years ago, and it had been two years since Leo agreed to be Luc's Dom with a full-time D/s relationship when they were together. It was easily one of the best decisions Luc had ever made, ranking right up there with the picture he'd taken of Hrothgar and saying yes when Elliott had asked Luc to marry him.

With a smile, Luc selected a small crop from the wall and laid it on the bed before lowering to his knees. Unlike the moment in the living room, Luc held himself in a presentation pose with his knees apart, hands behind his back, head bowed, and eyes closed. He loved this moment, loved sinking into the headspace of his submission, waiting for Leo to arrive without expectation of when that would occur. Sir would arrive when Sir was ready to arrive. All Luc had to do was wait and trust that Sir wouldn't leave him on his knees for long.

“You look beautiful, boy.” Leo's tone was reverent, as if he were looking at something precious.

Luc's body flushed with pleasure at the praise. “Thank you, Sir.”

He heard the soft rustle of the bedspread as Leo maneuvered his wheelchair close to the bed, the mechanical clicks of Leo engaging the brakes, then the sounds of Leo shifting from his chair to the bed and moving so his back was against the wall.

“Interesting choice,” Leo said and chuckled.

“Do you approve?”

“I do.” Luc heard Leo slap the crop’s soft leather flap against his palm. “Such a cute little toy. What would you like me to do with it?”

“Whatever you wish, Sir.”

“Anything sore or off-limits tonight?”

“No, Sir.”

“Good. Open your eyes and come lie across my lap, facedown, legs spread, your cock between my thighs.”

Luc opened his eyes and held back a gasp of pleasure at finding Leo, completely naked, sitting with his back against the wall, legs extended in front of him. He kept his movements mindful and deliberate as he got to his feet and climbed on the bed. It was how Leo preferred it when they were in a scene. Part of it was Leo’s control over him, but most of it was so Luc didn’t inadvertently hurt Leo by rushing. Without being able to feel his legs, Leo was always at risk of bruising or sores if he sat wrong or if Luc didn’t pay attention to a fold of skin or fabric that got trapped beneath his body.

Once Luc was in position, Leo caressed his ass. “Such a beautiful boy,” Leo murmured as he ran his hands over Luc’s

body — back, thighs, between his legs. There wasn't anything overtly sexual in Leo's touch; it was his way of checking in, observing where Luc was most sensitive, most responsive, which touches made him move away and which made him shiver or catch his breath.

“Safe words?” Leo asked.

He always started a scene this way, even though they'd been together long enough that Leo could read his reactions like a book, but the check-in was part of their ritual, and it made Luc hard in anticipation.

“Green, yellow, red,” Luc responded.

“And you're at?”

“Green, Sir. Bright green. Almost neon.”

Leo laughed, and Luc felt his cock twitch against his side. It wasn't a reaction to being turned on but rather to the friction of Luc lying across his lap. Because of his injury, Leo didn't get hard enough for penetrative sex, but he often got reflex erections from the contact between his body and Luc's, so Luc always made sure Leo's dick wasn't trapped when he positioned himself. He hoped Leo would ask to be sucked off at the end of their scene because Luc loved to come down from subspace with Leo's dick in his mouth.

“You were very helpful today, boy,” Leo said. His right hand tapped against the sensitive skin where Luc's ass and thigh met. “I loved having you with me.”

“Thank you, Sir.”

The tapping continued, a rhythmic series of touches that caused Luc to shiver and fight to keep his body still. Until he'd played with Leo, Luc had had no idea that soft touches could send him flying, that repetition of touch in the same part of his body could become as overwhelming as the most brutal flogging, that the intimacy of a small lavender bruise could be more arousing the next day than red welts on his thighs.

Luc took a deep breath as Leo's taps continued, increasing in frequency, then decreasing, verging on a slap or spank, then backing off. His trust lay in knowing that Leo would take care of him and teach parts of his body to become erogenous zones so sensitive Luc could come from the gentlest of strokes. All Luc had to do was relax and feel. And trust.

With his mind drifting, Luc wasn't aware when Leo picked up the short crop, but he felt the variation, the switch from the softness of Leo's hand to the crisp touch of the leather. Leo still tapped against his skin, but the crop touched between Luc's legs too, tapped against his inner thighs, ran down the crease between his cheeks, and teased at his hole, making Luc gasp and fight not to thrust against Leo's legs, even though he was hard and felt the slickness leaking from his cock. It was so tempting to rock forward...push his hips down...just a bit... but, no, Sir hadn't told him he could. Luc drew in a shaky breath and let it out slowly.

Leo chuckled, the taps becoming soothing caresses again. "That's it, boy," he praised. "Let me take care of you."

“Yes, Sir. Thank you.” Luc’s voice was a huff of breath. He was rapidly losing the distinction of Leo’s touches as smacks from the crop merged with a tap that fell next to it or on the same spot or...Luc lost the thought as Leo rained a smattering of flicks from the crop on his ass and his thighs, then soothed the skin with the lightest of caresses from his fingertips.

“Open your legs wider, boy.” Leo’s voice was dark and rough, almost physical in the way it wrapped around Luc, and he complied at once, spreading his legs so his feet were touching the edge of the mattress. It exposed his hole, his taint, his balls, and a portion of the underside of his dick — his most sensitive flesh — to Leo’s attention. “Such a good boy for me,” Leo sighed as his fingers followed the line of Luc’s ass.

“I love you, Sir,” Luc said, or tried to say. The words were lost in a cry as Leo flicked his fingers at Luc’s hole, which made him clench, then release the muscles. Leo was there immediately, delivering another touch — *was that the crop?* Luc couldn’t tell. He let the thought go as another touch made to the same spot made him squirm and arch his back as he tried to move away from and into the smacks and taps that Leo was now raining down on him at a merciless pace.

There was a spot on his taint that Leo kept brushing over, his precision in hitting the place that was between Luc’s hole and his balls too exact to be chance. It made his balls draw up and his hole clench, made Luc want to thrust his hips forward, to rub his dick against Leo’s thighs. Leo kept tapping it with his fingers, flicking it with the crop, caressing it with light touches until it grew warm, began to feel raw, the heat and

slight pain a counterpoint to the delicious sensations Leo continued to paint across his ass and thighs.

Luc was past the point of knowing or caring what part of him Leo touched. His entire body was lit up, all his nerves on fire, and he sobbed into the mattress, floating on desire and pleasure.

“Do you want to come for me, boy?” Leo asked, and Luc nodded, beyond the point of being able to form thoughts, let alone words. “Tell me. I need you to say it, boy.”

“Yesssss,” Luc gasped, then took in a deep breath so he could get himself under control. “Please, Sir.”

“Good boy,” Leo said.

But he didn't utter the magic words, only continued to play with Luc's ass, the crop landing tiny smacks against his hole, Leo's fingers teasing at his rim until Luc cried out. He was shaking with the effort of holding back his orgasm.

The precum leaking from his cock made the slide between Leo's thighs a special kind of torture, especially as Leo's fingers rested against Luc's entrance. He wanted to thrust his hips forward, but he'd come that way from the friction. If he moved away, he'd impale himself. And then there was that crop flicking away at his taint and balls. It was the sweetest kind of torture, and Luc was in heaven.

“Please, Sir,” he begged. “Please let me come.”

Leo — *the bastard, no, my wonderful Sir* — hummed as if he was doing nothing more interesting than scrolling through

his phone.

“Please.”

“Come for me, boy,” Leo said as his fingers slipped past Luc’s rim.

They grazed his prostate, teased at the bundle of nerves, and Luc’s back arched. He was gasping for breath, time and sensation suspended as his body tightened, reached, and then toppled over into an explosion of ecstasy that turned his vision white. Sobbing, he collapsed against Leo’s legs, floating above himself, at once feeling as if he had no body but feeling every nerve ending singing with pleasure.

He felt himself turned, gathered against Leo’s chest, and had the strangest sensation that Elliott held him as well. The feeling of his husband’s body snuggled against his back, nuzzling his neck even as Leo kissed his lips and throat, was so real, Luc could almost believe Elliott had returned. A part of his brain knew it was a product of subspace, and Luc let himself float in the feeling of being held between the two men who meant more to him than he ever thought possible.

CHAPTER SIX

Leo

Leo played with Luc's curls while he watched the man slowly drift back to consciousness. He loved how easily Luc fell into subspace, how pliable he became, how responsive, and he loved how his own body flushed with pleasure as he brought Luc to climax. One of the blessings of his injury was that it had happened before he'd had much experience sexually. While it didn't seem like something to be happy about when he was sixteen, at thirty-three, he recognized it had left him free to explore and develop his own sexual and sensual language without any sense of loss for what he could no longer do. At the time of the accident, he'd just discovered his preference for men and been able to experiment a few times, but it was only after he'd gone to a BDSM club as an adult that an entire new world opened for him.

He'd just turned twenty-one, and a friend suggested they go to a club. BDSM wasn't something Leo had considered before. Sure, he'd watched the occasional porn video, but that always seemed so...fake. Not to mention that the videos concentrated heavily on impact play or things Leo would never physically be able to do. Being submissive held little appeal because his injury cut off any sensation below his waist, so there didn't seem to be much point. In addition, any kind of impact play on his back ran the risk of causing additional harm to his body, and he wasn't into pain at all. So, he'd never investigated BDSM further.

Then he went to the Top Up, and his entire world changed.

And then, two and a half years ago, his world had changed again when this adorable submissive asked to do a scene with him.

Leo pushed a stray curl off Luc's face and smiled. The man was so beautiful like this, so perfect. There had been many times since that first trip to a club that Leo despaired of finding someone who saw him rather than his limitations. So many times, he'd been someone's experiment or attempt to be open-minded or inclusive or...whatever. But then Luc came along. Even after two years as partners, Leo had a difficult time believing Luc wanted him, that Elliott was generous enough to share his incredible spouse, and that Luc's heart was big enough for both of them. And the dogs.

Another smile broke across Leo's face as he remembered the way Luc talked about Jericho and Bey or the dogs he took care of at the vet clinic.

"You're a very special man, Lucian Butler," he whispered and leaned down to place a gentle kiss on Luc's lips.

Luc stretched, and Leo feared he'd disturbed him, but Luc just rolled tighter against him. Leo was content to sit here until Luc recovered from their scene. He'd cleaned them up with baby wipes and pulled the blanket from the foot of the bed, so there was no reason to leave. And truthfully, Leo wasn't in any hurry to get to bed. He wasn't going to be sleeping much this night or for the next couple because his head was full of everything he needed to do before treatment started.

Even as he considered his work schedule and how to delegate responsibilities and tasks to his employees, Leo found his mind drifting back to dinner with Elliott. That he found Elliott attractive was no surprise. Elliott was tall and slender, with sandy-blond hair and lively hazel eyes. His jawline was always dusted with scruff, and he dressed with an eclectic European flair that reflected his bi-continental upbringing. He was elegant in an effortless way that Leo admired. The few times Leo had spoken with him, he'd had a slightly chaotic air about him, as if he was about to remember something he needed to do and dash off. It was charming in an absent-minded professor kind of way. When combined with the touch of the Oxfordian accent Elliott still retained, Leo had no doubt he'd been the star of many student fantasies over the years.

So, no, recognizing that Elliott was *attractive* was not a surprise for Leo.

What *was* a surprise was the *attraction* that had flared to life when Luc joined hands with both of them at the table, and Elliott had reached out to him to complete the circle. Elliott's touch had been surprisingly arousing, a quick clasping of palms that had sent a jolt up Leo's arm. His skin retained the memory of it all through dessert and provoked him to ask Elliott to stay.

When Elliott declined, Leo had been genuinely disappointed, even though he recognized that it was probably for the best. As far as he knew, Elliott was not interested in being part of the kind of relationship he and Luc had. He knew Luc told Elliott about their time together, just like Luc told

him what went on with his husband, but Luc had never told him Elliott found BDSM arousing or expressed interest in experiencing it for himself. Luc and Elliott's experiments in that area had not been mutually satisfying, nor had Elliott's attempts to be the D in a D/s relationship been what Luc needed. The V they had established, with Luc the link between them, was more than Leo had ever hoped for.

Luc shifted again and opened his eyes. He smiled up at Leo.

"How long was I out?"

"Long enough for me to lose feeling in my legs." It was Leo's standard response to the question Luc always asked.

"Funny."

"I think so. Are you good to get up?"

Luc nodded and lifted himself off Leo's lap before shifting his position.

"There's water for you," Leo said, nodding toward a small utility bag that hung from one of the armrests on his chair.

"Thank you, Sir." Luc reached for it, opened the bottle, and offered a drink to Leo, who declined, before raising it to his lips.

Leo watched Luc tip his head back to drink, admiring the lines of his throat as he swallowed. His fingers ached to touch, but he waited until Luc capped the bottle and returned it to the bag.

“Did you enjoy tonight?” he asked, fingers stroking along Luc’s jaw.

“Mm-hmm.” Luc closed his eyes and hummed, leaning into Leo’s touch as he tried to stifle a yawn. “Thank you, Sir. Did you enjoy yourself?”

“I did. But now I think it’s time for both of us to get some sleep.”

This time, as Luc attempted to agree, he couldn’t keep himself from yawning, and he laughed. “Guess I couldn’t argue with that even if I wanted to. It’s been a long day.”

Luc scooted off the bed and gathered his clothes as Leo shifted himself onto his chair. He had his weight balanced correctly, but just as he lifted himself from the bed, the brake released, and the chair moved away from him. For a sickening moment, Leo was falling. His hand grasped air as he tried to get himself back on the bed or grab the chair, but he ended up on his ass on the floor, a frustrated and embarrassed growl leaving his mouth as he hit the ground. He’d known the brake needed tightening and hadn’t taken care of it, so this fall was completely his fault.

Without a word, Luc caught the chair and maneuvered it back to Leo. He set the brake but didn’t offer to help Leo into it, knowing Leo would ask if he needed assistance. This was an inevitable part of his life. He’d fallen before, and he’d fall again.

To Leo, as long as he didn’t injure himself, it was no big deal — and he’d have to be sure to ask Luc to check for any

signs of redness or bruising in places he couldn't see when they got to bed — but many times, the way people reacted made it worse. He could never tell if they yelled questions at him because they thought he couldn't understand them or because they wanted to attract attention for helping the disabled guy. And then their blundered attempts to help him into his chair as they ignored his protests that he could do it himself. It embarrassed the hell out of him and frustrated him. Especially when he knew he was expected to thank these idiots for their help.

Luc had never done any of that. The first time Leo fell in front of him, Luc had asked if he needed help, then stood aside when Leo told him he was fine. If Leo hadn't already been gone for the man, that would have pushed him over the edge. Maybe it was because he worked with injured and sick animals, but Luc stayed calm in the face of mishaps, never treated Leo as if he were less capable simply because he was in a wheelchair, and had an innate understanding of Leo's waist-high worldview.

Once Leo was in his chair, he looked up at Luc. "Come here, boy." He crooked a finger at Luc, who grinned in response and leaned down so Leo could kiss him. "Let's go to bed."



Sleep did not come easy to Leo, which was not a surprise. He had a million things running through his head and spent the

wee hours of the night making detailed lists of what he needed to do, information he needed to research, and the people to whom he could delegate pending projects. Securing the services of a competent home care nurse would make things easier since Luc wouldn't be with him every night.

Leo looked at the man sleeping beside him. No matter how much Luc's presence would comfort him, he couldn't ask that of either Luc or Elliott. The only way this relationship worked was by not causing issues between the husbands, and the best way to keep that from happening was to stay within their negotiated boundaries. Leo had been in a similar relationship a few years before he met Luc, and it had blown up spectacularly when his boyfriend cheated on both his spouse and Leo.

Trust, honesty, consent, and respect were the keys to keeping what he had with Luc, and Leo would do anything to hold on to it for as long as he could.

Up until today, it hadn't even occurred to him that it might be out of his hands, but now, it was all he could think of. Did he really want to put Luc through what the next year was likely to bring? Could he ask that of not only his lover but his lover's husband? And if the outcome was less than positive, what would that mean for his long-term relationship with Luc? Would Luc want to stay with Leo if he were even more disabled? Would Elliott be okay if Leo asked for more of Luc's time?

Leo knew very well that life didn't come with a guarantee, and the only thing you could count on was your ability to play the hand you were dealt, but he was used to having things more in his control. The prospect of losing his independence might worry him, but the chance he might lose Luc as well had him absolutely terrified.

These thoughts continued to rabbit about in Leo's brain despite his best efforts to distract himself by reading, counting backward from five hundred, and listing animals in alphabetical order from A to Z and then mythological creatures from Z to A. Nothing helped.

With a final glance at Luc's peacefully sleeping face, Leo shifted himself from the bed to his chair, which was always left close enough that Leo could grab it. Insomnia wasn't a stranger, but usually, it was because he was on a deadline or trying to solve a tricky coding issue, not because he was staring his own mortality in the face.

Another glance at Luc and a silent wish he'd thought to give him a kiss before exiting the bed, and Leo was heading down the hall to his office. He spent the next hour transferring the notes from his phone to his computer, putting together emails and setting up meetings, as well as researching home care options. Only when he'd exhausted all other options did he open the email he'd been avoiding all evening. It was the after-visit notes from his doctor, and they'd been waiting for him when he checked his email while Luc walked Elliott to the door after dinner.

The email outlined a preliminary diagnosis of non-Hodgkin lymphoma based on the results of Leo's most recent physical and bloodwork. More extensive testing was needed to determine the type of tumors, how aggressive the cancer was, and how far it had spread in his body, but given that this was a reoccurrence, the doctor urged Leo to schedule his tests immediately and prepare for the possibility of both radiation and chemotherapy.

Reading those words brought reality crashing down on Leo. Hearing them spoken in the doctor's office was one thing, but seeing them written made everything real. The cancer was back. From this moment on, the idea he had any control over his life was an illusion.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Luc

The setting sun bathed the kitchen in golden light as Luc tasted the stew he had simmering on the stove. He reached for the salt just as Jericho and Bey picked up their heads. Jericho yipped, and Bey gave off a couple of gruff barks before the dogs got to their feet and headed for the front door. With a shake of his head at the way the dogs always knew Elliott was home as soon as his car pulled into their driveway, Luc stirred the contents of the slow cooker, then tasted it again. It was still bland, but he didn't want to add any more salt because he had a sneaking suspicion it was him that was off, not the food. He'd leave it for Elliott to tell him what was missing.

The timer dinged, and Luc bent to retrieve the bread from the oven just as the front door opened. With half an ear, he listened to Elliott fending off the greetings from Jericho and Bey. Ordinarily, the sound of his husband coming home made Luc smile, but he hadn't been able to shake the funk he'd been in since leaving Leo's place earlier in the day. Hence the cooking and baking and the endless scrolling through medical sites and articles about non-Hodgkin lymphoma. While the cooking helped, he couldn't say the internet had.

From what Luc had found, NHL had a good survival rate, but he couldn't find statistics for people who had been in remission and developed it a second time, nor could he find any information about complications for people with paralysis

and physical disabilities. He'd taken notes for Leo in the doctor's office, and a lot of the terms were familiar to him from working with the animals at the clinic, but there was a world of difference between discussing treatment for a German Shepherd and what your boyfriend was likely to need.

Luc's glasses steamed up as soon as he opened the oven door. He hadn't bothered with his contacts this morning because he wasn't going into the clinic. Dealing with masks and glasses was no fun, so Luc usually wore contacts when he was at work.

Lifting the bread pan from the heat, Luc used his knee to close the oven door. He settled the pan on the counter, then lifted the loaf and tapped a knuckle against the bottom, nodding when it sounded hollow. As he put the bread on the cooling rack, a bouquet of flowers appeared in front of him. Calla lilies, daisies, and lavender roses — a beautiful combination of white, yellow, and purple. And knowing Elliott, Luc knew there was a meaning attached to each flower. Elliott's gifts often had a romantic or historic subtext, something Luc had learned as soon as they started seeing each other.

“Hello, beautiful,” Elliott whispered and kissed Luc's neck. “Welcome home.”

Luc took the flowers and laid them on the counter before he turned in Elliott's arms and looped his own around his husband's waist. “Hello, yourself, handsome. How was your day?”

“Good. At least until Becks talked to me about a conference he wants me to attend in Edinburgh at the end of summer.”

With a grin, Luc placed gentle kisses along Elliott’s jawline. “But you love going to conferences. And you love Scotland.”

“True. But I told him I’m not sure I’ll be able to put together a paper and a panel and get a proposal together by the deadline. Not with...” Elliott shifted his weight. “How’s Leo doing?”

“When I left, he was scheduling meetings with his teams for next week. He also scheduled a video call with his doctor for Monday to discuss oncologists. It’s at one, so I can join in on my phone when I have lunch.” Luc pulled Elliott closer. “Thank you for last night. Leo really enjoyed getting to know you better, and I think it helped keep his mind off the diagnosis. God, I have never seen anyone look so devastated. He almost tried to break up with me, but I put an end to that. I told him I’m not going anywhere no matter what happens.”

Elliott leaned back without breaking contact and brushed a curl from Luc’s face. “That is one of the many reasons I love you.”

“You love me, huh?” Luc asked. Elliott was several inches taller than him, so when they were standing this close, Luc had to tilt his head back to make eye contact, but the amusement in Elliott’s hazel eyes was worth it.

“I do.” Amusement gave way to heat as Elliott leaned forward and claimed Luc’s mouth.

They lost the next several minutes in a make-out session worthy of teenagers. Luc whined as he felt Elliott pull back, thinking his husband was about to end their kiss, but Elliott was only getting himself into a better position to grind against Luc. He was hard, and so was Luc, so he put thoughts of dinner and Leo out of his mind and gave himself over to the moment.

When the deep kiss dissolved into a series of quick brushes of their lips, neither of them in any hurry to stop, Luc hummed against Elliott's mouth. In spite of everything, he felt...happy, content, peaceful.

"I love you, Elliott Porter," Luc murmured.

"And I love you too."

They would have continued making out, but Jericho let out a sharp yip, reminding Luc that the dogs hadn't been fed yet. The previous night — with Elliott bringing the dogs to Leo's — had been enough of a disruption in their schedule that Jericho would get anxious with too many other changes in his regular routine, so Luc wasn't going to make the dog wait for his dinner. Elliott knew it, too, and was already moving toward the bowls while Luc got the container of kibble from under the sink.

"How are you doing?" Elliott asked as he put the dogs' dishes on the counter.

Luc shrugged as he measured kibble into the metal bowls. "Okay. Nervous. Worried." He nodded toward the slow cooker and the bread. "I've been stress cooking because I couldn't

concentrate on anything today except Leo's diagnosis, and I was trying not to freak myself out by spending too much time online. Except that's difficult when being online is part of my job." He shrugged again. "I tried working on a new post, but I kept finding myself on WebMD and searching for information on how to care for someone going through cancer treatment. That's why we have bread to go with the stew I made."

"I'm not going to complain about homemade bread." Elliott picked up the bowls and carried them across the kitchen. He made both dogs sit and wait before he put their dinner on the floor. "How about if we take a walk after we eat? That might help with your stress."

Luc agreed, and after dinner, they put leashes on the dogs and went for a walk around their neighborhood.

They lived in a quiet, residential part of Berkeley that was close enough to the university for Elliott to walk or ride his bike to work when the weather was nice but far enough away — and with high enough property values — that they weren't overrun with students. The houses surrounding them were all from the early 1900s, most of them Craftsman homes like the one they lived in. Luc had loved this area since moving in with Elliott almost five years before. He loved their house with its dark blue shingles and stained-wood door, and he loved the office he and Elliott had created over the garage in the back so he had a space in which to work. Their neighbors were friendly, and most of them were academics like Elliott or tech workers. A few were hybrid like Luc, working a traditional job while building up their influencer following.

Much to Jericho's dismay, they stopped several times to catch up with some of their neighbors who were enjoying the pleasant spring evening on their porches or getting some yard work done, but eventually, they made it to the local dog park, where Jericho was overjoyed to be able to run and play with the other dogs. Bey followed them as they made their way to a bench and sat down. Luc idly stroked Bey's ears, loving the silkiness and the sheen of his silver-gray coat. He'd noticed the big dog was slowing down recently. They needed to bring him in for an exam to make sure there wasn't anything besides age causing it, but the thought of Bey having health issues brought Luc's mind right back to Leo.

"I've never known someone who was sick like this," he said quietly. "Who could die."

Elliott reached for Luc's hand, maintaining contact while Luc worked through his thoughts, for which he was grateful. Elliott's grandmother had passed the year after they'd gotten together, and Elliott had spent a great deal of time with her before that, but it wasn't quite the same thing. Leo was only thirty-three. Death shouldn't be something that was a real possibility for him for several decades.

"I'm worried I won't be able to cope with it," Luc said. "And I'm worried Leo will push me away."

The grip on Luc's hand grew tighter. "From what I saw last night, I don't think Leo's going to do that." Elliott pulled Luc closer and kissed the side of his head just under his hairline. "Leo loves you."

Luc nodded. “But he might try to do some stupid noble thing like he did last night.”

“And what did you do when he did that?”

“I told him I wasn’t going anywhere.”

Elliott put his arm around Luc’s shoulders. “That should tell you all you need to know. We’ll deal with it as best we can because I’m not going anywhere either.”

Luc settled against Elliott’s side. “Thank you.”

“Anytime.”

Elliott pressed a soft kiss to Luc’s temple as Jericho came bounding up. The dog sat in front of Luc and barked at him.

“I think someone wants you to play with him,” Elliott said.

Luc grumbled, but he got to his feet, found a ball, and heaved it as far as he could so Jericho could take off after it. The dog was a black blur, intent on his target. He pivoted around a couple of slower dogs that were in his way, leapt over a Corgi that wandered into his path seemingly unconcerned about the torpedo speeding toward it, then grabbed the ball without slowing down and flipped around to return to Luc.

His speed and agility always amazed Luc, and he vowed once again to get Jericho into some training classes. This was a dog who needed a job, needed physical activity, needed interaction with humans, which was part of the reason Jericho’s original owners abandoned him at the vet clinic after Jericho destroyed an antique sofa. They’d bought him because of how he looked without doing any kind of research about the

breed. Recognizing that not all breeds were a good fit no matter how beautiful they looked or how well-behaved they were with an experienced trainer was one of the recurring themes in Luc's social media posts.

Jericho trotted back to Luc, sat in front of him, and dropped the ball at Luc's feet. He waited until Luc threw the ball and gave him the retrieve command before he took off again.

Luc almost regretted that he had no interest in training Jericho to herd. The dog's instincts were spot-on; he watched Luc intently, learned commands almost immediately, and was quick as a whip. Luc had no interest in spending hours around livestock, but agility was something Jericho would probably excel at. Luc made a mental note to look up some classes before he remembered how up in the air his schedule was going to be for the next couple of months as Leo started treatment.

Back at Luc's feet, Jericho barked when it took too long for Luc to pick up the now soggy tennis ball and heave it back toward the other side of the dog park. "Go," Luc commanded, and Jericho bounded off.

When he'd first brought the dog home, Luc had thought about training him as a service dog for Leo. Jericho learned so quickly Luc thought it would be a good idea, but then the dog's limitless energy made it clear he'd never be able to sit at Leo's feet during a meeting. But maybe a calmer dog...Luc had seen videos of dogs trained to call 911.

Luc watched as Jericho was stymied in returning the ball by a Labrador who'd picked it up, lain down, and was mouthing it. Jericho circled the other dog, darting in every time the Lab put the ball down, but every time, he was thwarted by the Lab grabbing it back.

Would Leo want a service dog? And three dogs are a lot. Luc frowned because it wasn't like the three dogs would be in the same place that often. Two of them would be in Berkeley, and another would be in San Francisco. And why was he thinking about another dog to begin with?

Bey ambled over to Jericho, who was frantically yipping at the Lab. With his usual calm, Bey lay next to the Lab and rolled his gigantic head onto the Lab's paws. Luc started toward the trio, intent on retrieving the ball before the Lab freaked out.

Even though Bey was a gentle giant, his size and wrinkly skin sometimes made other dogs — and their owners — assume he was aggressive. He wasn't, though he was protective of both Elliott and Luc and had actually thwarted a break-in when he was nine months old simply by giving out a single loud bark and low growl as the back door opened. The guy had thought better of it and took off over their backyard fence before they could turn the lights on to get a description.

Elliott intercepted before Luc got to the dogs. He clipped Bey's leash to his collar and called Jericho to follow him as he made his way over to Luc.

“You okay?” he asked, looping his free arm around Luc’s waist. “You seem kind of out of it.”

Luc shrugged. “A bit. I’m tripping down some weird avenues in my head.” He called Jericho over to him and attached his leash when the Mudi sat in front of him. Luc could almost see the dog deflate when he realized they were leaving.

“Like what?” Elliott asked as they exited the dog park.

“Like...you remember the time that guy tried to break in, and Bey scared him off?”

“Of course. That’s not something I’m likely to forget. I didn’t think Bey could bark that loud or sound so ferocious.”

Luc reached down and patted the big dog’s head as they walked. “Yeah. He’s such a good boy.” Jericho gave a yip, so Luc ruffled his ears as well, having to lean down to do so. “And you’re a good boy too.”

“Is that all you were thinking about?”

“No. I was also thinking about Leo. Wondering how he’s going to cope with the next couple of months. How *I’m* going to cope.” Luc grimaced and looked away. “I’m being such a baby about this. It’s not like I’m the one who has cancer.”

“In a way, you do,” Elliott said. “Leo’s not going through this alone. He’ll have you by his side, and me too if he wants me.”

“You keep saying that. I’m going to think you’re serious,” Luc said, attempting to sound like he was teasing, but, really,

Elliott's repeated offer of support and assistance made it difficult for him to breathe.

"I do mean it."

Luc stopped walking and threw his arms around Elliott. He loved this man so much and was so grateful they were together. As Elliott's arms encircled him, Luc began to cry. Crying wasn't even the correct word. He was sobbing. He buried his face in Elliott's shoulder, hugging him fiercely, and felt Elliott's arms cinch tighter around his shoulders. God. He was bawling in the middle of their street like a little kid whose favorite toy just got broken. Why couldn't he get his shit together?

"Come on, sweetheart, let's get Bey and Jer home. I'll make you some tea, and we can watch a movie or something." Luc nodded against Elliott's chest. "And, you know, there's no right way to feel about this except how you feel."

"I know. I just want to be strong for Leo and take care of him."

"You will. Once you figure out what he needs, you'll be all over it. I have no doubts because that, Luc Butler, is who you are."



They spent the evening watching *Birdcage*, a movie they both knew well enough to recite their favorite lines. Luc had initially been tempted by *Moonlight*, but Elliott suggested they

should watch something to make them laugh, and that turned out to be a very good idea. By the time they were ready to head upstairs, Luc felt much lighter and more relaxed, maybe even a little bit hopeful. Leo had beaten this thing once; he'd do it again. If there was one thing he'd learned about his boyfriend in the two and a half years they'd known each other, Leo didn't quit. If there was a way to beat this thing, he'd do it, and he wouldn't stop fighting for as long as it took to overcome it.

As Luc brushed his teeth, Elliott came up behind him and snaked an arm around his waist. He kissed up the side of Luc's neck and nuzzled into the hair behind Luc's ear. It tickled and made Luc squirm, which was why Elliott did it, holding Luc tighter around the waist and pulling him closer.

"Don't make me laugh," Luc said, or tried to say, around his toothbrush. "Or I'll spit all over you."

Somehow, Elliott managed to interpret his various sounds, even though he sounded more like one of the dogs than a human. "That could be fun. We've never tried watersports."

Luc laughed, a bit of toothpaste spraying onto the mirror in front of him. "See!" He glared at Elliott's reflection, but he let himself be held and rocked, humming as Elliott's lips skimmed his neck again and teased at his earlobe. He finished brushing his teeth, rinsed his mouth, then turned and looped his arms around Elliott's neck.

"Are you trying to get lucky tonight, Mr. Porter?"

“I didn’t know I had to try.” Elliott bent forward to kiss Luc, but Luc put his hand on his husband’s chest and leaned away.

“You think I’m just going to give it up without you making an effort?”

Elliott narrowed his eyes. “Do I need to call Leo?” He chuckled at Luc’s shocked expression. “What? Leo usually keeps your brat tendencies in line, and it seems like I might need to pick up the slack.”

“Leo did just fine last night. And you like my brat.”

With a chuckle, Elliott kissed Luc on the nose. “I do.”

He held out his hand and led Luc back into the bedroom. The dogs were in their respective dog beds, and Elliott chuckled as he looked at Bey. “He hopped right up on the bed last night, curled up on your spot, and wouldn’t move.”

“Traitor,” Luc said to the big dog, then looked back at Elliott. “At least you weren’t alone.”

“True. But he snores a lot louder than you do, and he also hogs the bed.” Elliott turned down the covers, stripped, and climbed into bed. Instead of lying down, he sat with his back against the pillows.

Luc followed suit, sliding between the covers but not lying down yet. They had one more thing to accomplish before Elliott — and Luc — got lucky.

When Luc and Leo first got together, Leo had insisted that Elliott and Luc establish a processing protocol so everyone

knew what everyone was doing. The key to a successful poly relationship, Leo told them, was that there be no secrets.

Elliott, ever the literature scholar, commented on how these post-Leo processing conversations created a space for Luc's relationship with Leo to be part of his relationship with Elliott, as well as combining their experiences of Luc's time away so their narrative was still continuous. Initially, it had been a bit awkward to tell Elliott about the play sessions he had with Leo, but after a few months, Luc realized, these reconnection moments had become part of their foreplay. They could be intensely arousing or initiate another round of aftercare, depending on how Luc told it and what they needed from each other that night.

Tonight, Luc suspected Elliott wanted to take care of him, wanted to hold him and reassure him, but Luc was more interested in taking care of Elliott. He sat next to his husband on the bed, holding his hand and gently running his fingers over Elliott's palm in a way guaranteed to make Elliott shiver, and told him about his time with Leo.

"He did that tapping thing on my ass," Luc said and grinned when Elliott chuckled. Elliott had been the one to discover how much that turned Luc on.

"What? This?" Elliott put his arm around Luc's shoulders and pulled him closer so Luc had to lean against him, one butt cheek exposed. Elliott promptly leaned over Luc's lap, kissed his hip, and landed a couple of soft swats on Luc's ass.

"Not quite."

Luc extricated himself from Elliott's grip, then repositioned himself across his husband's lap. He made sure Elliott's dick wasn't pinned and that his own was tucked between Elliott's thighs.

"It was more like this," Luc said. "And Leo used a small crop. He let me choose, and that's what I wanted last night."

Their processing conversations weren't normally this interactive. Most days, Luc simply said what they'd done. If Elliott was interested or aroused, he'd ask for more details. Tonight, though, Luc wanted Elliott turned on, and he wanted to make love to his husband.

Elliott's hands traced the curve of Luc's ass, skating across his crease, then touching the sensitive skin where buttocks met legs. "No marks," he said quietly, then sent a shiver through Luc as he tapped his fingers against that responsive bundle of nerves just above Luc's hole. The skin was still a bit raw, even if it wasn't marked with Leo's stripes, and he felt even the gentlest of Elliott's touches.

As Elliott continued to tap his fingers against Luc's ass, Luc squirmed. The tip of his dick rubbed against Elliott's thighs, and the friction was making him hard, but this wasn't what he wanted tonight, so he sat up and straddled Elliott's lap. He put his arms around Elliott's neck and drew him forward into a sweet kiss that turned sensual when Elliott licked the seam of Luc's lips, and Luc opened for him.

They kissed for several minutes until they were both panting and moaning, hands roaming each other's bodies as if it had

been months since they last touched instead of only a day. Luc was the first to break away, leaning back slightly so he could stare into his husband's stunning hazel eyes. He could so easily lose himself in them as they truly reflected Elliott's heart. Everything he felt — from the joy of their wedding day to the pain of losing his grandmother — was visible in those expressive, deeply intelligent eyes. At the moment, they showed Luc nothing but devotion and love, which made him close the distance between them again as the same emotions welled up in his body. Sometimes, how much he loved this man left him breathless.

Luc rested his forehead against Elliott's. "I want to take care of you tonight."

"Honey, you've been with Leo all day. How about if we take care of each other?" Elliott ran his hands down Luc's sides, fingers lightly tracing the skin over his ribs, his hips, then sliding to his back and playing with the dimples at the base of his spine. He raised his knees slightly, tipping Luc forward so his cock rested between the globes of Luc's ass.

With a groan, Luc rocked back against Elliott's erection. Elliott's hands kneaded Luc's ass. His cock, aided by the slick precum leaking from his slit, rubbed against Luc's hole.

"That feels so good," Luc sighed.

Elliott lifted his hips so the length of his cock slid between Luc's cheeks and brushed the sensitive skin around his opening. "It does," he agreed. "God, Luc, I want to be inside you."

Instead of answering, Luc rocked back a few more times, thrusting against Elliott and making sure the crown of his dick caught on the edges of his hole. Not enough to enter him — not yet — but the friction made both of them shudder in anticipation. A few more times, and then Luc reached out for the lube they kept on the headboard. He pumped some into his hand, then gave some to Elliott, who immediately took hold of Luc's cock and stroked it slowly.

Luc closed his eyes, hips starting to follow the movement of Elliott's hand of their own accord. "Fuck." His voice came from deep in his chest, guttural and rough with need.

Elliott chuckled. "You're so easy to please."

"No," Luc said, thrusting into Elliott's tight fist, "you just know how to please me." He reached behind himself and slid a finger into his own ass, then coated Elliott's erection with lube.

"Years of practice. And you know what they say..."

Luc opened his eyes and grinned at his husband. "Practice makes perfect." He lifted up on his knees a bit — not enough to break the connection between his dick and Elliott's hand — and positioned Elliott's cock against his hole, then sank down on it slowly. It was torture for both of them, but the best kind of torture as their simultaneous exhales attested.

"I love your cock," Luc said as he rose up, then took Elliott back inside himself.

“I love yours too.” Elliott added a twist around the head of Luc’s dick.

Their lovemaking was slow, sensual, a gradual build rather than a headlong race toward orgasm. Luc lost himself in the sensations: the tightness in his balls as they drew closer to his body, the sound of Elliott panting as he fought to keep his climax at bay, their groans and the slap of their bodies, the scent of sweat and musk, the flush that crept up Elliott’s chest, and the way Elliott watched him, alert for every indication of Luc’s pleasure.

Luc came first, succumbing to Elliott’s relentless strokes and teases with a shout and searing cascade of cum all over his husband’s hand. As soon as he climaxed, the tightening of his muscles around Elliott’s dick pushed him over the edge. Elliott bucked his hips upward, trying to get deeper inside Luc’s body. He tensed, gasped, then took hold of Luc’s hips to stop his movement, and Luc felt Elliott’s cum fill him.

They held still, catching their breath, and then Luc rolled off. He grabbed tissues and cleaned them both up, then lay next to Elliott, head on his chest, hands entwined. “Thank you. That was just what I needed,” he said.

Elliott ran his free hand through Luc’s curls, then leaned over and kissed him. “Anytime, sweetheart.”

They talked for a bit, not really about anything in particular, then Elliott turned off the light, and they snuggled under the comforter, Luc the little spoon feeling the warmth of Elliott’s body against his back. Despite feeling sleepy, Luc’s brain

started up as soon as Elliott's breathing deepened. Thoughts about Leo, about what would happen both with his health and their relationship and how that would impact Elliott and him, what it would feel like if Leo died...Luc couldn't keep his mind from rabbiting from one thing to another.

Even though he and Elliott were married, Luc didn't think of it as being his primary relationship and the one with Leo being secondary. In his mind, both Elliott and Leo were his primary relationships. He loved both men, needed both of them and the things each relationship offered him, and it didn't matter which one had the government's stamp of approval. Or society's, for that matter.

But what was he going to do if both his men needed him to be there for them? It would be like choosing which side of his heart he wanted to keep beating.

He'd already texted Leo good night as per their usual protocol when they weren't together — texts in the morning when he woke up and another text when he went to bed — but Luc grabbed his phone from the nightstand to send another text asking how Leo was. After he sent it, he scrolled through his social media accounts, checked the views on his latest videos, and then opened up his email. His eyes were immediately drawn to a message from Zoomies.com. They wanted to schedule a meeting with him for the coming week to discuss sponsorship details.

Luc stared at the screen for a good five minutes before he closed out of his email app and shut down his phone.

A week ago, getting that sponsorship and what it would mean for his future was all he could think about. Now, his first thought was whether he wanted to take on something so time-consuming when this year might be all the forever he'd have with Leo.

CHAPTER EIGHT

Elliott

The next two weeks were filled with doctors' appointments and tests. The results were promising, but Elliott worried Luc was running himself ragged between his jobs and his relationships. Every time he suggested that Luc consider taking some time off, Elliott's opinion was met with resistance, anger, or stone-cold silence. He wasn't used to that kind of reaction from his spouse, but he recognized the kind of pressure Luc was under and the emotional distress Leo's diagnosis was causing and tried not to take it personally.

Elliott wasn't even the one in a relationship with Leo and he was preoccupied with Leo's health and survival, wanting to know the latest news and making a mental note when the first treatment was scheduled for mid-May. Though he told himself most of his concern was on Luc's behalf, he acknowledged a fair and growing portion was for Leo himself. Ever since that dinner, he'd found himself thinking more and more about Leo, and not always in the most platonic way.

At the moment, though, he was concerned about his husband. He had a feeling Luc wasn't telling him something, and that was troubling. With Luc being poly, part of their agreement was complete honesty and openness. But Elliott also knew sometimes people needed time to work through something in their own head before they voiced it to a loved one. It was a delicate balance between processing and

withholding, and he stayed alert to Luc's reactions, gauging which side Luc was falling on.

In the end, it was an off-handed question about when Luc was going to be filming another episode for his podcast that uncovered the truth.

Since becoming Leo's sub, Luc had been meticulous about maintaining his posting schedule, something that had paid off in the growing popularity of his social media channels and Patreon account. He always put together new videos on Thursdays, did post-production work on Fridays, and uploaded Friday night so the videos were ready for Saturday mornings. Luc had found his pet care videos did best with that schedule. But he hadn't done any of that in the past two weeks, and on Saturday afternoon, when Elliott asked if he'd changed his schedule, Luc got angry.

"I didn't feel like it," he snapped. "You're not my parent or my Dom."

Elliott raised an eyebrow. They were in the kitchen, and he was preparing a marinade for the steak they were going to grill that evening. "Okay," he said slowly. "I was just curious. Usually, you tell me what you're doing, but I know you've had a lot going on recently."

When Luc didn't respond, Elliott looked over his shoulder to find his husband staring at his phone, which was another thing that had been happening frequently over the previous days. Luc wasn't usually a glued-to-his-phone kind of guy, even though so much of his life depended on the internet and

staying ahead of issues — both good and bad — on his accounts.

“Luc?”

A head nod was the only indication he’d been heard.

“Luc?” Elliott said his name a little louder, and when Luc looked up, he asked, “Is everything all right with Leo?”

“Yeah. Everything’s fine with Leo.” Luc shrugged. “With the exception of his cancer, of course.”

This was a side of Luc he didn’t often see — the sullen, withdrawn, moody brat who was all the more surprising since Luc was usually easygoing and upbeat. It was what first led them to explore BDSM as a way to channel it into role-play so they could work through those moments when Luc seemed to get stuck and frustrated. Those experiments hadn’t been satisfying for either of them, but it did lead them to Leo, who’d immediately understood what Luc needed and was able to provide it.

Elliott was considering texting Leo for advice when Luc swore and put his phone facedown on the table. Before he could say anything, Luc got to his feet and announced he was taking the dogs for a walk.

“If you give me five minutes, I’ll come with you.” Elliott reached for the marinade’s final ingredients.

“That’s okay. I…” Luc blew out a breath. “I really want to be alone for a bit.”

“You’re su—”

“El.” Luc’s voice was sharp. “I said I want to be alone.”

Without another word, he walked out of the kitchen, leaving Elliott in stunned silence. In the other room, Elliott heard him talking to the dogs and the excited *tip-tap* of their toenails on the entranceway’s hardwood floor as he got them ready to go for a walk. Jericho gave a happy yip, which usually made Luc chuckle. Instead, all he did was give Jericho a gruff *come on*. Then the front door opened and slammed shut hard enough to make the house shake.

Elliott let out a frustrated huff of air and counted to ten. For a moment, he thought about trying to catch up with Luc but then decided it would be better to give him some space. He finished up the marinade, poured it over the steak, then poured himself a glass of wine and headed out back to sit on the deck.

He and Luc had spent a lot of time working on the backyard over the past couple of years, and they now had a space that was a peaceful retreat with plenty of privacy. There was space for the dogs to run, raised beds that held a variety of vegetables and herbs, and the garage they’d converted into Luc’s recording studio. Until Jericho arrived, they’d had a pond, but the dog had tried to drink it dry so many times they finally gave up and replaced it with a planting bed for the rosebushes Elliott had grafted from their existing plants.

Many of the roses in their yard had been transplanted from his grandmother’s Presidio Heights home after she passed away. They’d been her pride and joy, and Elliott had helped her prune them many times over the years. She favored the

English roses she knew from her childhood, and many of the roses at her house reflected that. Elliott hadn't been able to transplant all of them — the yard in Berkeley was far too small — so he'd concentrated on the ones that meant the most to his grandmother. He'd donated the rarer varieties to the Rose Garden in Golden Gate Park, and the rest he gave to her friends. With the new bed, Elliott had had room to add a few more plants, a few more of the varieties she'd loved.

Usually, sitting outside like this helped Elliott relax, but that wasn't happening right now. The longer he sat there, the more frustrated he became. He wasn't angry. On that point, he was very clear. And it wasn't that he didn't trust Luc or thought that Luc was lying to him about something. Luc literally had no poker face; everything the man felt was written in his expression. If Luc were cheating or doing something he felt guilty about, Elliott had no doubts he'd know it immediately. No. What Elliott suspected was that Luc was trying to figure something out on his own and doing a piss-poor job of it. His husband was brilliant and amazing, but he wasn't the best at figuring his own shit out.

For a fleeting moment, Elliott thought about contacting Leo to see if he had any insight into what was going on with Luc, but he dismissed that quickly. Leo had enough to deal with right now; he didn't need to be concerned about what was going on between Elliott and Luc.

Almost as if he'd summoned Leo, Luc's phone rang with the man's ringtone. Elliott hadn't realized Luc had left his phone behind, and that bothered him as well. While Luc

wasn't glued to his phone, he usually kept it with him so he could respond to the trend alerts he had set up. Had Luc left his phone behind deliberately, or was he so distracted he'd failed to take it with him? And should Elliott answer it so he could talk to Leo?

By the time he finished his mental machinations, Luc's phone had fallen silent. A couple of beeps told Elliott that Leo had left a voicemail.

He took another sip of wine.

Leo's contact info was in his own phone. He could call the man back, let him know Luc was out walking the dogs, but what would he say then? Luc will call you back? Given the mood Luc had been in when he left, Elliott wasn't sure if that would be the case.

While he was still contemplating what to do, Elliott's phone rang. He hadn't given Leo his own ringtone — adding Leo's contact information had been more of a *just in case* thing — but Elliott was sure who was on the other end of the line when he walked inside and picked up his phone.

“Hello?”

“Elliott? This is Leo.”

“Yeah. I figured. Luc took the dogs for a walk, but he left his phone behind. I heard you call.” Elliott swirled the wine in his glass and took another swallow. “Do *you* have any idea what's going on with him?” The question was out of his mouth before he had second thoughts about it.

Leo chuckled. “So, it’s not just me he’s giving the silent treatment to.”

“No.” Elliott poured some more wine into his glass and carried it back to the deck while cradling the phone against his ear. “He’s been in a mood for the past week. Won’t talk to me. Snaps at me if I ask if anything’s going on.” Elliott took a sip from his glass. “Are you okay? I mean, beyond the obvious. Is there something going on for you that’s got him worried?”

“I can’t say for sure, but there haven’t been any surprises from my test results or changes in my treatment plan.”

“How are you doing with all that? I mean, if you don’t mind telling me. Luc’s kept me up to date, but...”

“There’s nothing like hearing it from the horse’s mouth, right?”

“Right.”

Leo sighed on the other end of the phone. The man’s voice was gruff under the best of circumstances and always conveyed that Leo was someone used to being listened to, if not outright obeyed. Elliott had never been immune to how sexy it was, even if he had no desire to submit to the man.

“Doing as well as can be expected. We caught it early, so the prognosis is good. It’ll still be six months of chemo before we know if I’m going to respond this time or if we have to get more aggressive. I think Luc might be more freaked-out about this than I am. I’ve been through it before, so I’m resigned to

what's coming next. Luc...I think Luc is pulling away from me.”

“No! He loves you. He's worried, but I can't imagine him walking away from you.”

There was silence on the other end of the phone, and for a moment, Elliott wondered if the call had dropped, but then Leo spoke again. “It might be for the best.”

“Leo...”

“Elliott. I've been through this before. I know what it demands of the people around me. Last time, it was my mother. This time, I can hire the care I need, but it's still going to mean I'll rely on Luc a great deal. I'm not sure I can ask that of him. Or you.”

This time, it was Elliott's turn to fall silent. “I will do anything you need.”

“I can't ask that of you.”

“Then it's a good thing you're not asking. I mean it. Whatever you need from us, it's yours.”

“That's...” Leo drew in a heavy breath. “That's very kind. Thank you.”

It was on the tip of Elliott's tongue to tell Leo it was no problem, he was part of their family, but he held back those words and simply told Leo, “You're welcome.” He took another sip of his wine. “You know, Luc hasn't done any videos for two weeks.”

Leo cursed. “He’s missed his daily check-in with me for the past couple of days as well. I need to have words with that boy.”

The Dom growl in his voice made Elliott chuckle. “I was thinking about calling you.”

“Were you?”

“Yes. He was such a brat just before he took the dogs out. Snapped at me, slammed the door on his way out of the house. He’s been like that all week. I haven’t seen him in a mood like this since you and he got together.”

Silence again from Leo, but Elliott could tell he was thinking and remained quiet as well.

“You know,” Leo said, “I’m in Emeryville right now. Maybe if we sit our boy down and talk to him, he’ll let us know what’s going on.”

Elliott didn’t need to think twice about it. “That sounds like a very good idea.”



Twenty minutes later, Leo’s Tesla pulled into the driveway behind the vintage Karmann Ghia Elliott had bought the previous year. Elliott watched from inside the house as the gull-wing door opened to reveal Leo’s wheelchair. For a split second, Elliott wondered if he should go help, but a mechanical arm extended from the car and placed the chair on the ground, the seat facing toward the front door, which then

opened. Leo sat in the driver's seat. He pushed a small jump seat into position, reached for the chair, and maneuvered it closer, then used his arms to push himself from the car to the chair. Once he was seated securely and a few feet away from the car, Leo pushed a button on his fob, and both doors swung shut. He wheeled himself to the base of the Craftsman's stairs.

Again, Elliott wondered if he should go help, but once again, Leo surprised him when he maneuvered the chair up the stairs facing backward, one hand on the handrail and one hand on a wheel, arm muscles straining to pull the weight up the steps.

Once Leo was on the front porch and had had a few seconds to catch his breath, Elliott opened the door to welcome him, standing aside as Leo entered the house.

"I was having some wine when you called. Would you like some? Or maybe something else?" Elliott asked.

"Wine would be great."

Elliott showed Leo into the living room, then went to the kitchen to pour another glass for him, topped off his own, and returned. Leo took a sip and nodded appreciatively. "This is wonderful."

"Thanks. Luc and I found this boutique winery in Sonoma that specializes in Tempranillo. They've brought one of the original vineyards back into production. Some of the vines go back to the mid-1800s. We thought the wine was fantastic and bought a case." He swirled the dark red liquid in his glass, then took a sip, hoping he hadn't sounded too pretentious.

“I think Luc told me about this discovery. I can see why you both like it so much.”

The awkward conversation lapsed into silence. Elliott figured they were both listening for the sound of Luc returning and hoping it would be soon, but then Leo spoke.

“Do you have any idea what’s going on with our boy?”

Elliott shook his head. “Not a clue. Honestly, I thought he was reacting to what’s going on with you.”

“I don’t think so. I’ve had to reprimand him for being glued to his phone, so it’s not about me.”

Leo stared into his glass and then looked up at Elliott. His eyes were a piercing blue, and dark scruff shadowed his jawline. Leo’s hair was a thick, glossy black, which only accented the redness of his lips and paleness of his skin. Elliott couldn’t help but think about the lines in Grimm’s telling of Snow White that described the princess: *hair as black as ebony, lips as red as blood, skin as white as snow*. He smiled at himself and the fanciful turn his thoughts had taken, but he didn’t look away from Leo’s gaze.

“He’s been that way with me as well,” he said.

“With your permission, I’d like to try something, but it might expose more of our dynamic than you’re comfortable with, so I don’t want to presume.”

“Please.” Elliott gestured with his free hand. “If you’ve got an idea on how to get him to open up, I’m all for giving it a

try. I love my spouse, but when he's like this..." He shook his head.

Leo laughed. "He can be a handful."

"He can."

Their shared understanding seemed to break the ice, and by the time Luc walked back into the house, Leo was sitting next to Elliott on the couch, talking as if they'd known each other for years.

"Why is Leo's car in the driveway?" Luc asked as he closed the door.

"Because Leo is here," Elliott answered. He got up from the couch and walked into the hallway, where Luc was taking off the dogs' leashes. "Put the dogs in the backyard and come into the living room, please." Without another word, he turned and walked back into the living room.

He and Leo had discussed how Elliott should play this part, keeping his voice low, his posture somewhat rigid and formal. *Give him a command, and don't wait to see if he obeys, Leo had said. If he doesn't, I'll deal with him.*

From the way Luc thumped his way to the kitchen, Elliott knew he was good and pissed at the turn of events.

"I swear," he whispered to Leo, "it's like living with a teenager."

Leo snorted. "He gives good brat, but don't tell him I said that."

Even before he appeared in the living room, Luc was talking. “I can’t believe you called Leo and made him drive all the way over here.” He stopped in the dark wood archway that led into the room where Elliott and Leo were seated side by side. “That isn’t—”

“Boy,” Leo said. It was one syllable, softly spoken, but the warning tone in his voice was obvious and the effect on Luc immediate. “That’s enough. Present.”

Luc glanced at Elliott and then at Leo. Actually, he glared at Leo, an entire conversation transpiring between his fiery stare and Leo’s unwavering ice. Elliott nearly shivered from the intensity of their entire demeanor. When Leo inclined his head slightly, Luc’s shoulders slumped. He took a step forward, then looked down at the floor and back at Leo.

“Do you deserve it?” Leo asked. His hand idly brushed the cushion at his side.

“No, Sir.” Luc glanced at Elliott, then down at the floor. Without another word, he moved to the spot in front of the two of them that was usually occupied by the coffee table — Elliott had moved it to the side at Leo’s request — and lowered himself to his knees. It was a graceful move, his feet tucked beneath his ass, hands resting on his thighs, back straight, shoulders open, head bowed.

Elliott admired how perfectly at ease Luc was in this position. It didn’t turn him on — this wasn’t sexual in any way — but he recognized the way Luc’s body released the tension he’d been holding inside for the past week. He was

comfortable kneeling in front of Leo, waiting for whatever happened next. And he was beautiful in this position. A part of Elliott wished he was able to do this for Luc, but another part was grateful Leo was there to give Luc this place of calm where he didn't have to make any decisions, figure anything out, juggle a million thoughts. All Luc had to do was submit and let Leo take care of him.

“You owe your husband an apology for the way you've been acting, boy. You also owe him an apology for thinking he called me to deal with you. I called him. You missed two check-ins and weren't answering your phone. I was worried something had happened to you.”

“I...” Luc's body rocked forward, and he lifted his body slightly as if to protest, but then he settled again. “Yes, Sir. I'm sorry, Sir.” Luc looked at Elliott and gave him a small smile. “I'm sorry, El. I know I've been awful this week. Thank you for putting up with me.”

“Always, Luc. I love you, but I was worried too. You need to talk to me. To us.”

Luc bowed his head again and nodded. “I know. I was trying to figure something out, but the more I thought, the worse it got.”

“That's no excuse, boy,” Leo said, his voice tender but gruff. Elliott was tempted to accept Luc's apology and let it go, but Leo was in control, so he remained seated next to the man. “We have an agreement. Honesty and communication. That's the only way this works. If something is upsetting you,

you have to tell us. If you don't want to talk about it yet, you can ask for more time to think things through. But when you withdraw and forget your commitments to us, we worry."

"Yes, Sir. I'm sorry, Sir. I understand."

"Thank you, boy. Are you ready to talk to us?"

Luc shifted his body, clearly uncomfortable. Once again, Elliott took his cue from Leo and remained silent while Luc worked through his thoughts. The silence was excruciating, and Elliott's nose started to itch. The more he tried to ignore it, the worse it got. He couldn't imagine how both Luc and Leo remained so still and was just about to suggest they stop when Luc finally spoke.

"Zoomies offered me the sponsorship."

"That's fantastic," Elliott said. "Congra..." But Leo held up a finger.

"And?" Leo asked.

At that question, Luc looked up, and his eyes were bright with tears. "They want me in LA the week of Leo's first treatment. I can't do that. I can't leave you alone, Sir."

"I won't be alone," Leo said at the same time Elliott volunteered to help.

Both Luc and Leo stared at him. "What?" Elliott asked. "I'll take care of Leo so you can go to LA. At least, I will if Leo's okay with that."

Now both he and Luc looked at Leo, who seemed caught off guard by Elliott's offer. He recovered quickly and gave Elliott a nod. "I'd like that." Then he turned to regard Luc. "That was easily sorted. Now, let's discuss what we're going to do about your behavior this past week."

Luc's gaze fell to the floor, and a blush stained his cheeks. "Yes, Sir," he said, somehow managing to sound both contrite and...not at the same time.

Elliott stood. "If you'll excuse me, I've got to take care of some things for dinner. You'll stay?" he asked Leo. "We've got more than enough."

"I'll stay. As long as you're serving that excellent wine."

With a grin, Elliott returned to the kitchen, leaving Leo to deal with Luc.

CHAPTER NINE

Leo

The punishment Leo gave Luc wasn't too severe: Luc had to stand in the corner, nose to the wall, for twenty minutes. It was tedious and boring, and he knew Luc would be squirming before the first five minutes were up, but he also knew his boy would do it without complaint and understand the implied message about how much pain his silence and withholding had caused his partners.

If they'd been at Leo's place, he would have turned Luc over his lap and turned his ass red, but he hadn't known how that would play with Elliott. Especially since they were in Elliott and Luc's house. So, he settled for the corner, which only made Elliott raise an eyebrow when he returned to the living room with a fresh glass of wine for Leo.

They chatted quietly while Luc stood facing the wall. Leo asked how Elliott's semester was working out and when he'd be done with grading.

"This week is the big push," Elliott said. "One of my classes ended up with the very last finals slot on Friday, so next weekend is going to be me working like a fiend to get my grades in on time. But then I'm done."

"Summer off?"

Elliott snorted. "Hardly. I'm working on a book that's due to my editor in October, and my department head has insisted I attend a conference in Scotland at the end of the summer,

which means developing a paper and putting together a panel in addition to preparing for the fall semester's classes."

"I always thought one of the perks of teaching was getting summers off."

"Not when you're a college professor. Summer is when we get most of our own work done."

"If you're busy, you don't need to help me. I've arranged for a night nurse."

"Leo." Elliott reached out and put his hand on Leo's arm. The warm weight of it sent pleasant sensations coursing through his upper body. He wasn't unaware that Elliott Porter was a handsome man — he'd thought so from the beginning. When Luc first approached him, Leo had been mildly disappointed he was only looking to find a Dom for himself and not for both him and his husband.

When Leo looked up, his gaze caught on Elliott's lively hazel eyes. They were brown, flecked with bits of green and gold, and lit with the depth of Elliott's intellect and passion. And when the man said his name again, Leo swallowed hard and nodded.

"I wouldn't have offered if I didn't want to help. If you don't want me there, I'll understand, but I thought you might appreciate having someone you know with you."

Leo found it necessary to clear his throat before he could speak. "That...that would be nice. Yes. Thank you."

Elliott withdrew his hand, and Leo missed its warmth immediately. “I’m glad that’s settled. Dinner will be ready in about half an hour.” He inclined his head toward Luc. “How much longer does he have?”

“How much longer do you think, boy?” Leo asked. This was one of his favorite mindfucks because if a sub answered with *only a couple more minutes* when it clearly wasn’t close to time, an evil Dom would make them stand there longer. Conversely, if the sub erred on the side of what it felt like and answered with about *fifteen minutes more, Sir*, they were likely to end up with more time on the clock because that’s what they’d said they expected.

“I think about seven minutes, Sir,” Luc answered.

Leo glanced at his watch. It was only about three, but he figured he’d give Luc a break and not tack on the extra minutes. He held up three fingers so Elliott could see and said, “Very good, boy. You’re doing well.”

“Thank you, Sir.”

Leo was pleased Luc didn’t move or raise his eyes from the wall in front of him. He honestly hadn’t agreed to be Luc’s Dom with any thought of there being more than play sessions between them, but within a few months, it was obvious they were attracted to each other. It had floored Leo when Luc asked to be his boyfriend. He understood poly relationships, had been in a few himself over the years, but something had been different about this one from the start.

He looked at Elliott, who, at that moment, was swirling the wine in his glass before taking another sip, and thought that maybe Elliott had been part of the difference. The man was so open and accepting about his husband's desire for both BDSM and a boyfriend. Leo hadn't met too many married couples where only one partner was in the scene, let alone have the non-kinky spouse be completely okay watching his husband in a scene with said husband's Dom.

Granted, this was only a small taste of what Leo and Luc did, and it wasn't really anything more than asking Luc to kneel and accept a relatively mild punishment, but Elliott had agreed with everything Leo suggested, which intrigued Leo.

Elliott wasn't a submissive; Leo knew that. He was cooperative, and there was a difference. Submission was a willingness to let go and hand responsibility for your mind and body to another person, letting them give you what you needed, push you when you needed to be pushed, and take care of you. It required a great deal of trust and an ability to accept another person's control. Not everyone could do it. Even when someone had the desire to be submissive, sometimes they couldn't hand over that power to someone else.

It was the same thing with domination. Not everyone was cut out to be a Dom. Even the most controlling person wasn't necessarily a great Dom because there wasn't the willingness to consider the other person's needs and find satisfaction in giving someone that gratification. Leo didn't need a therapist to know that some of his desire to be a Dom was fueled by a

need to have control over this aspect of his life, but the more significant reason was because he liked being the person who was trusted. And with Luc, he loved watching the effect his commands had on the man. Luc was so responsive he was a Dom's wet dream, and Leo was grateful he'd found Luc before anyone else had.

The timer on Leo's watch ran down to single digits, and he canceled the countdown before the alarm sounded. He nodded to Elliott, who rose and walked over to Luc, standing behind him but not touching him, just as Leo had instructed him.

"Very good, boy. You're done," Leo said.

Elliott wrapped his arms around Luc's waist and turned him so they could embrace. Luc immediately crumpled against Elliott's chest, and Elliott soothed him with soft words and gentle touches.

"I'm sorry," Luc said, his voice muffled because he still had his face buried against Elliott. "I got so tangled up..."

"Shhhh." Elliott's hands stroked up Luc's back and into his hair, something Leo knew Luc loved, and sure enough, Luc arched back against the fingers weaving through his curls. "I know," Elliott told him. "But that's over. We've dealt with it, we all know what's going on, so now we can figure out what we're going to do."

Luc nodded and sniffled, then gasped as Elliott hooked his fingers into Luc's hair and tugged firmly so Luc had to look him in the eyes. "And we'll talk about how to make sure this doesn't happen again because somehow you decided this was

something you needed to deal with on your own instead of discussing it with Leo and me.” With his hands still in Luc’s hair, Elliott bent down and kissed him, which completely broke Luc. He wrapped his hands around Elliott’s neck, whispering *I’m sorry* between kisses until Elliott broke away and led him to the couch and seated him in the middle, next to Leo, then took his own place on the other side.

Immediately, Luc turned to Leo, then slid to his knees at Leo’s feet. He rested his head against Leo’s legs. “I’m sorry, Sir.”

Leo leaned down and took Luc’s hands, pulling him back to his feet and returning him to the couch. “Didn’t Elliott say we’re done with this?”

“Yes, Sir.”

“Good.” He paused for a moment and glanced at Elliott, considered what he was about to do, and then looked back at Luc. “Now, I saw you thank Elliott. Don’t you think your Sir deserves some appreciation too?”

A grin crossed Luc’s face as he leaned over and kissed Leo without hesitation, which filled Leo with warmth even before Luc’s lips touched his. When they broke apart, Luc touched his forehead to Leo’s.

“Thank you, Sir.”

“You’re welcome, boy.”

Then Luc sat back, took the glass from Elliott’s hand, and finished what was left in the glass. “This is the old vine from

Cruce del Río?”

“It is.”

Luc smacked his lips. “Tasty.”

Leo took the empty glass from him and put it next to his own on the side table. “Now. How about you tell us what sent you into a tailspin.”

With a sigh, Luc leaned back and looked up at the ceiling. “Zoomies made an offer, but they want me down in LA the week you start treatment. They want me to do a photoshoot with their mascots and meet with their marketing people to plan out what my sponsored posts and videos are going to be.”

“That’s fantastic,” Elliott said. “It’s what you’ve been working toward.”

“I know. I tried to get them to change the date, but they can’t. They’ve got a big corporate meeting, so everyone’s going to be in LA that week, and they want me there.”

“Is the money what you wanted?” Leo asked.

“More than. It was a very generous offer. I just didn’t want to leave you alone.”

“Which, as we’ve established, I won’t be. Elliott has offered to stay with me, and I’ll have a nurse to help at night if I need it.”

“So, I guess I’m going to LA.”

“I guess you are.”

Luc threw his arms around Leo's neck and gave him a kiss on the cheek, then turned and did the same to Elliott. "Thank you. I'm not sure what I did to deserve you two, but I'm grateful. And I promise to discuss these things instead of letting them freak me out."

"Can't ask for more than that," Leo said at the same time Elliott announced that it was time to get the steaks on the grill and stood.

"You're staying, right?" Luc asked.

Leo looked up at Elliott, who nodded. "I'm staying."



Half an hour later, they were on the back deck, enjoying another bottle from Luc and Elliott's wine country excursions and waiting for the steaks to finish cooking. The dogs lay next to the grill. Bey, with his head on his paws, looked like he was asleep, while Jericho watched every move Elliott made, his foxlike ears alert for any indication that something edible had fallen to the ground. The dog was fast. Elliott had dropped the tongs at one point, and Jericho was on his feet in an instant, darting for the tongs and leaping from the deck before either Elliott or Luc could grab him. There was an amusing game of keep-away with Jericho running circles around the two men.

It was clear this was something they did often because as soon as Luc gave the dog the command to *freeze*, Jericho didn't move a muscle and allowed Luc to retrieve the tongs and hand them back to Elliott, who took them into the kitchen

and returned with a different set which, Leo noticed, also had teeth marks on it. Leo admired the way Elliott rolled with the dog's antics. From their initial meetings, he hadn't gotten the impression Elliott was as easygoing as he was proving himself to be. Though, Leo supposed, he should have guessed it from the way Elliott dealt with Luc and the man's mercurial nature.

His mind strayed back to the moment in the living room when Elliott stood behind Luc and wrapped him in his arms and the way Luc crumpled, safe within them to let his walls down. He was happy they'd been able to do that for Luc but also gratified that Elliott had trusted him enough to follow his lead. For a brief moment, Leo let himself imagine what else Elliott might trust him to do, but those thoughts were interrupted by Elliott declaring dinner was ready.

They went inside, and Leo found his place at the table, where Luc had laid out the plates and lit the candles in the centerpiece.

The food and wine were delicious, the company and conversation lively, and Leo found himself at the limit of what he should have to drink before the meal was half-over. Regretfully, he turned down Luc's offer of another glass.

"Are you sure?" Luc glanced at Elliott, then back at Leo. "You could stay overnight if you're worried about driving home."

"I wouldn't want to impose."

"You won't be," Elliott said.

Leo held his glass out. “In that case, I accept. Both the wine and the invitation to stay.” Luc filled his glass, and the meal and conversation continued.

Now that he’d told them about the offer from Zoomies, Luc was back to his usual enthusiastic self. The man was full of joy, his heart big enough to embrace all manner of creatures and humans, and it sometimes astounded Leo that he was lucky enough to call Luc his boy. They’d fit almost perfectly from the beginning, what Luc was seeking aligning with what Leo had to offer as if they were made for each other.

Leo turned his attention to Elliott, who was talking about some interdepartmental drama that had erupted during the heightened tension and demands of finals. Luc knew the players, Leo did not, but he still paid attention because Elliott fascinated him. There was so much more to him than Leo had previously experienced. He was droll rather than outright funny, with a way of telling a story that spoke volumes about his British education. Occasionally, he dropped into that Cary Grant/Kathrine Hepburn Continental accent that sounded sophisticated and posh, but then he would make an observation that had them laughing.

Again, Leo found his thoughts wandering back to the scene in the living room and thinking about Luc, his responsiveness, and the things Leo wished he were capable of doing with the boy. Certain things were beyond his physical ability, like wielding a single tail or using floggers effectively. Likewise, suspension wasn’t something he was comfortable doing because his limited mobility made him concerned he wouldn’t

be able to help a panicking sub. But he thought heavier impact play and suspension were things Luc would enjoy. Would Elliott be interested in helping?

They moved into the living room to have coffee. Leo remained in his chair rather than shifting back to the couch. At some point, Elliott had returned the coffee table to its original position, and they arranged themselves around it. The table was too low for Leo to reach, so he held his mug until Luc brought him a TV table that was the right height.

Despite starting to feel tired, Leo was enjoying himself. It was rare that he spent time in other people's houses. They usually weren't set up to accommodate him, and he hated the frantic rearranging of furniture that so often happened when he arrived somewhere and they realized he was in a wheelchair. To make it easier, most of his social encounters took place in restaurants or coffee shops, and his meetings were either over Zoom or took place in his own home. The warm colors and dark wood of Elliott and Luc's house were comforting, and before long, Leo found himself yawning. He covered his mouth, apologized, and got caught by another yawn midsentence.

"I think it's about time to call it a night," Elliott said. He kissed Luc's cheek, then got to his feet. "I'll let the dogs out while Leo gets settled."

At the word "out," both dogs started frisking around his legs, with Jericho actively trying to encourage Elliott toward the back door. Elliott laughed. "At least he doesn't nip my

heels anymore,” he said as he left the living room, the dogs right behind him.

“So,” Luc said as he knelt in front of Leo. “The bedrooms are all on the second floor. If you’d prefer, there’s a pullout in the den.”

“How uncomfortable is the pullout?” Leo asked. He threaded his hands through Luc’s curls and gave a slight tug to pull Luc’s head back.

“It’s not at all.” Leo twisted a strand of hair around his fingers and tugged again, smiling when Luc’s eyes fluttered shut. “You have my word, Sir, it’s very comfortable. Elliott’s parents sleep on it when they visit because his mother can’t get up the stairs.”

“The den will do just fine. Now, get up here and give me a kiss before your husband gets back.”

When Luc’s eyes flew open and his tongue peeked out to wet his lips, Leo took note. Did Luc have a cheating kink? He wouldn’t have thought so since he was open about everything he did, but still... When Luc’s kiss held a fair degree of heat, Leo thought this was something that needed investigating. He tucked the thought away to dissect later and concentrated on the feel of Luc’s mouth and the quiet noises the man was making. Leo adored how eager a lover Luc was, the way he put all of himself into every scene, every kiss, every touch.

It was intoxicating to feel this wanted, and Leo missed the feel and taste of Luc’s mouth as soon as he let go and sat back in his chair. He wanted to keep going, wanted to hold Luc in

his arms as they both fell asleep, but that wasn't going to happen here. And truth be told, as much as he might be aroused by Luc's kiss and wish for more, he was tired.

“All right, boy, let's get me into bed.” Leo tried for his gruff Dom voice, but he couldn't stifle the yawn that snuck out of his mouth.

“Yes, Sir.”

After Luc got the bed set up and Leo took care of himself in the bathroom, he settled beneath the covers Luc had turned back for him. Luc kissed him good night, then closed the door behind him as he headed upstairs to his husband, leaving Leo alone and staring at the ceiling.

It was a comfortable bed, just as Luc had promised, but despite being tired, Leo knew he wasn't going to fall asleep quickly. His mind was too active, too aware of being in a house that wasn't his own, too full of his own arousal and Luc's to quiet right away. He also knew the fatigue was more because of the cancer than being ready to sleep, and as the house settled and quieted around him, Leo swore he felt it eating away at him.

By this point, he'd mostly gotten over the frustration and sense of betrayal that it was back. It was useless to expend that kind of energy in denial or anger. If he'd learned anything from being in a wheelchair for more than half his life and having gone through one bout with cancer already, it was understanding there was no sense in dwelling on the complications of his body. For whatever reason, this was the

body he had to deal with, and if he wanted any kind of future, he needed to accept what it was doing right now. So, cancer it was, and that meant treatment, which meant months of feeling sick and weak, throwing up, losing his hair, relying on others to take care of his most basic needs. He hoped Luc and Elliott realized what they were signing up for.

And that brought his thoughts back to the men upstairs.

It wasn't just Luc who came to mind, but both of them and the way Elliott had watched him all through the earlier scene with Luc. Elliott might be the more dominant partner in his marriage, but that didn't make him a Dom, nor was he into the kind of D/s relationship Luc craved. And yet, Elliott had played his part in that scene to absolute perfection, following Leo's lead and his own instincts to help Luc break through whatever wall he'd built around his sponsorship and why he couldn't accept it.

As his thoughts wandered, Leo found himself drifting off to sleep, but his dreams that night were erotic enough to give him a rare morning erection.

CHAPTER TEN

Elliott

Wrapping up the semester, finalizing Luc's travel plans, and multiple doctors' visits filled up Elliott's time for the next couple of weeks as everyone settled into their new routine.

He told Becks he needed to decline the Edinburgh conference as he was helping a sick friend over the summer and would need the personal time. Becks wasn't happy about it, but Elliott promised to finish the draft of his current book and put together a proposal for a couple of spring conferences based on his research, and that appeared to mollify his boss. Elliott shuddered to think how Becks would react if he needed to take a sabbatical in the fall.

This was one of those rare times when Elliott envied both Luc and Leo with their chosen professions. They had goals — Luc wanted a certain number of followers and sponsorships; Leo needed a certain amount of income — but it wasn't quite the same thing in his line of work. Academia was one hurdle to jump after another in order to keep proving your value and relevance. Though tenure was the golden prize, it didn't mean you could relax and devote yourself to teaching and working with students once you had it. Publication and research were constant pressures and vital to your rank in the department and field, conferences a way to stay connected to the other leaders in your area of expertise, and faculty committees a necessary evil that seemed to multiply each year. If your area of study

was narrowly defined, like Elliott's, you always had to be adding to your CV to prove your worth to the university, even if there weren't any additional rungs to be climbed on the ladder of success and your research didn't add much to the university's bottom line.

Most of the time, Elliott loved his job — he loved his subject, enjoyed being in the classroom, and even had a great time at conferences and talking to most of his peers — but he was grateful he had the summer to help take care of Leo. Luc was getting busy with Zoomies, and that was important to all three of them. Luc needed to concentrate on the sponsorship and enjoy his success without worrying that Leo wasn't being taken care of. Once they'd figured all that out and Luc got over his anxiety and accepted the offer, he blossomed. His creativity and ideas for ways to incorporate Zoomies into his videos was incredible. It thrilled Elliott to watch his husband achieve something he'd worked so hard for, and he'd do anything to make sure Luc could take full advantage of the opportunity.

Leo, for his part, seemed to have accepted what the next six months — and possibly longer — were going to look like. His initial protests and reassurances that he'd be fine with a night nurse crumpled after Luc broke down and confessed that he'd feel more comfortable if, at least while he was in LA, Elliott was staying with Leo. So that had settled that. A few days before Luc left, Elliott and the dogs moved into Leo's home. Elliott's offer to board the dogs had been met with a scowl

from Leo. For whatever reason, Leo wanted the dogs at his place, so the dogs were moving in as well.

Surprisingly, the dogs took to the new accommodations without issue. Bey was usually well-behaved, but even Jericho seemed to understand that he needed to be on his best behavior. Both dogs quickly picked up on the front door as the one to sit by if they needed to go out just like they did at home, and both dogs learned to navigate around Leo's chair with only a few times someone's toes — usually Jericho's — got caught under a wheel. But other than an occasional mad scurry of toenails on the poured cement floor, both dogs settled in without too much stress.

Elliott also adjusted to the new space with little difficulty. He had the advantage of knowing it was temporary and that, if he needed something, home was only half an hour over the bridge, but it was still an adjustment living in a home where almost everything had been built to accommodate a wheelchair. It made Elliott reconsider how much he took for granted in terms of sink heights, toilet accessibility, closet and cabinet access, doorways, even the amount of clutter on surfaces.

When he'd first seen Leo's home a few weeks prior, he'd assumed Leo preferred minimalist décor with very little ornamentation on surfaces of any kind and no carpeting or area rugs. After a few days of living in the same space as Leo, he realized that clutter of any kind became a hazard because it cut off Leo's ability to maneuver his chair without banging into something or knocking something over. A vase might

look nice on a side table, but if Leo bumped it and it fell on the floor, it became a problem to solve, or he had to get someone to pick it up for him. A rug might soften the space, but it also presented another thing for Leo's chair to get hung up on. From Luc, Elliott knew not to help if something fell over but to wait until Leo asked for assistance, but it was sometimes difficult not to rush in and do it for him. Elliott was working on it.

All in all, everyone — human and canine — seemed to be adjusting to the new arrangement without too much difficulty until the night before Luc left for LA.

At first, Elliott thought the tension was mostly from Luc worrying about the trip and Leo's first treatment. Then he noticed Leo was uncharacteristically sullen and withdrawn, which he supposed was a reasonable response to what was about to happen to him. It wasn't until after dinner, when Bey shoved his head into Elliott's lap, practically begging to be pet, that Elliott realized he, too, was feeling uneasy, almost walking on eggshells around the other two, and that they were equally as tentative around him. Dinner had been stilted, conversation decidedly unsparkling as each of them got lost in their own thoughts, and afterward, they'd all retreated to different corners of the condo.

He looked down at the big silver-gray dog and stroked his ears. Elliott swore the dog waggled his eyebrows at him. "Yeah, you're right, you big muffin." He bent down and kissed Bey on top of his forehead wrinkles.

“Family meeting,” Elliott called as he got to his feet.

Luc looked up from the dining room table, where he’d been doing something on his laptop. “Why do we need a family meeting?” he asked. “We’ve talked about everything that needs to be talked about for the coming week.”

“Not quite.” Elliott held up a finger. “But hold that thought. Leo?”

“Present and accounted for,” Leo called back from down the hall. He was in his office, making some notes for one of his employees about an upcoming launch.

“Could you come out here, please?”

Elliott heard the mechanical sound of the chair’s brake being released and then a quiet *eerch* as its rubber tires turned on the polished floor.

As soon as Leo was in the living room, Elliott motioned for Luc to come over and resumed his seat on the couch.

“There’s one thing we forgot to talk about,” Elliott said, “and that’s tonight.” When Luc and Leo glanced at each other, Elliott knew he’d hit the issue right on the head. “Am I right in thinking you two would like some time together?” Another look passed between them.

“That’s not...” Leo started to say at the same time Luc said, “Yes,” which earned him a sharp rebuke. “Boy! That’s not your place.”

Luc glanced at Elliott, a mix of emotions displayed on his face, but above all, Elliott saw relief and longing. Those two

things convinced him to go forward with what he'd intended to say.

“This arrangement has worked,” Elliott said, “because we’ve been honest with each other. For the past two years, we’ve had some pretty definite lines drawn, and that’s worked well for all of us, I think.” He paused and waited for Leo and Luc to nod or disagree with him, relieved when both their heads bobbed forward. “But we’re changing things right now because our circumstances have changed. And I don’t just mean because of Leo. Luc, your time is going to be more limited with your new commitments, so that will change things as well. We need to continue to be open and honest about what’s happening for us, and right now, I’m pretty sure if I weren’t here, you two would be in the playroom.”

“I don’t know...” Leo started again, but Luc interrupted by going to his knees at Leo’s feet.

“Sir, he’s right. It would make me happy if I could go into my meetings with a reminder of you.”

For a long moment, Leo remained silent. Then he reached out a hand toward Luc, and Luc leaned closer so Leo could run his fingers through Luc’s curls. He looked up at Elliott. “If it really wouldn’t bother you.”

Elliott smiled. “It won’t bother me. I’ll take the dogs for a walk so you can have some time.”

Leo nodded. “Thank you. I think I need this too.” And then he turned his attention to Luc.

The dogs frisked around Elliott's legs as he walked to the front door. As he picked up their leashes, he heard Leo's quiet voice giving Luc instructions and turned back toward the living room. What he saw took his breath away.

Leo had dimmed the lights in the living room until only he and Luc were illuminated. Luc was still on his knees, but he had rocked back so his ass rested on his heels. His back was straight, his hands resting easily on his thighs. Elliott had seen him in this pose the night he and Leo confronted Luc about the sponsorship, but this was different. This time, Elliott could feel the power of Luc's devotion and trust as he gazed at Leo. His expression was completely open and relaxed, patiently waiting for Leo to give him an order or tell him what they were going to do, and he looked incredible. The light was behind him and glowed through his curls, highlighting his cheekbones and the sensuous curve of his slightly parted lips.

But it wasn't just Luc that Elliott was watching. Leo was stunning as well. The intensity in his eyes as he stared at Luc, the connection he created between them without any physical contact. It was palpable and filled Elliott with a sense of peace.

Elliott couldn't look away from either of them, recognizing the nature of Luc's submission in a deep and visceral way he'd never understood before. It wasn't something these two did; it was something they were. And it was beautiful. Elliott was profoundly grateful he'd seen their need this evening and given them the space to be there for each other.

He slipped on his shoes and closed the door behind himself and the dogs as quietly as he could. As he descended in the elevator, Elliott found the moment he'd witnessed between Leo and Luc staying with him as he left the building and walked toward the Embarcadero. That sense of peace and rightness remained through the entirety of his walk and was still with him when he returned forty-five minutes later.

The condo was quiet when Elliott stepped back inside. The lights in the living room were off, but so were the ones in the playroom. In fact, the only lights on in the entire place were set into the floorboards so Leo could see if there were things obstructing his path. He didn't usually use them, but one time running into a solid, one-hundred-and-twenty-five-pound dog whose coat was designed to disappear in the dark had changed Leo's mind, and now the lights needed to be on when it was dark.

Elliott gave the dogs fresh water, then tiptoed down the hallway, intent on getting into bed without being heard, but just as he put his hand on the doorknob to the guest room, Luc stepped out of Leo's room. He was still naked, but even in the dim light, Elliott could see the flush on Luc's cheeks, the tangled mess of his hair, and the slight sheen of sweat on his skin. It made his heart swell all over again for the moment he'd witnessed. It also — Elliott wasn't going to deny it — made his dick stir as well.

“You look beautiful,” Elliott said quietly and stepped close enough to snag his hand around the back of Luc's head, pulling him in so he could give his spouse a kiss. When they

finally broke apart, Elliott rested his forehead against Luc's. "I love you."

The smile Luc gave him was glorious. "I didn't...we didn't want to make you uncomfortable. You're already being so amazing. But we needed that, and I didn't..." Luc drew in a small breath. "We may not be able to do a scene for a few months, so thank you."

Elliott gave him another kiss. "I'm glad I read the room right."

"You did." Luc turned adorably shy and bit his lower lip as he gazed up at Elliott. "Sir has a request for this evening, if you're willing."

"What is Leo's request?"

"Sir doesn't think any of us want to sleep alone tonight...so, he was wondering if both of us would share his bed." With a flirty wink, Luc added, "There's plenty of room."

"Do you want that, Luc?"

"I do. I didn't want to have to choose between you two, but it didn't seem right that any of us should sleep by ourselves. Not tonight." He took Elliott's hand between his own. "This way, no one has to be alone."

Elliott closed the distance between them again. Luc's lips were kiss-swollen, and Elliott could taste Leo, too, once Luc opened his mouth to Elliott's explorations. Elliott paused. He knew conventional ideas of relationships said he *should* experience any number of negative reactions to the idea that

another man had been kissing — and more — his husband mere minutes before he was doing the same thing. But that wasn't what Elliott felt at all.

He pressed closer to Luc, drew his smaller body against his own, and deepened the kiss. He always loved the feel of his husband in his arms. Luc's body was compact and lithe, a gymnast's body full of power, which made his submission all the more sublime.

For two years, Elliott had seen the evidence of Leo and Luc's play sessions — the marks, the bruises and bites, the handprints — but only the next day, and only after Luc had showered and changed clothes. Elliott loved mapping them with his fingers and tongue, sometimes overlaying them with marks of his own, but he was always distanced from the acts that created those marks.

Here, naked in Elliott's arms, Luc still bore the presence of Leo on his skin. Leo's scent, his taste, alongside the evidence of his touch in red marks that would either fade by morning or deepen into bruises — it was all unexpectedly arousing and intimate, and Elliott's body was responding to those thoughts, the image of Luc on his knees, the feel and taste and scent of the man in his arms, the knowledge that Luc's lover was just on the other side of a closed door.

No. Elliott wasn't feeling any of the things he knew he was supposed to. This moment was profoundly erotic in the most primal way.

With a groan, Elliott broke off the kiss and rocked back so he could see Luc's face. He pushed a curl from the man's forehead, then rested his own against it. "I will be happy to share Leo's bed, but I'd like to shower first." *And get off so I don't embarrass myself.*

"I could join you." Luc grinned as if he'd heard Elliott's thought.

Elliott chuckled. "I want a quick shower." When Luc pouted, Elliott let him go, turned him around, and swatted him on one already rosy butt cheek. "Go back to Leo. I'll be there in fifteen minutes."

"That hurt." Luc rubbed a hand over his wounded posterior. "Lucky for you, I like that kind of thing." He smacked a quick kiss to Elliott's cheek, then headed back toward Leo's bedroom. "Don't take too long."

Luc had his hand on the doorknob when Elliott grabbed him and pulled him close again. Then he dropped to his knees. "This will make sure I don't take too long," he said just before he opened his mouth and swallowed Luc's cock. He didn't do much more than swirl his tongue along Luc's length — Luc wasn't fully hard, and Elliott wasn't trying to get either of them off — but muffled curses coming from above were music to his ears. Luc tasted musky with a hint of cum still lingering in his slit. Elliott teased at it, enjoying himself, especially when Luc grabbed his hair and fucked his face with a few quick thrusts. He wasn't hard enough to cause Elliott an issue no matter how enthusiastically he pushed his cock into

Elliott's mouth; it just felt amazing to be connected to his husband this way.

With a groan, Luc pulled out of Elliott's mouth and pushed his head back so he could bend down and kiss Elliott. "I love you," he whispered, then rubbed his nose against Elliott's, straightened, and disappeared into Leo's room.

Elliott stood, palming himself with a sigh, then headed for the guest bathroom so he could shower and get rid of the hard-on his husband had just caused.

Both the shower and jerking off were expedient and functional. Elliott was in no mood to waste time, even if his thoughts kept straying to Luc and Leo waiting for him down the hall.

He stepped out of the shower, toweled off, and was met with a dilemma. What should he wear? He'd brought pajama bottoms and T-shirts to wear in the morning, but he usually slept naked. Luc had been naked when he left Leo's room, but that didn't mean...fuck it. Elliott settled on a pair of boxer briefs and a T-shirt and, true to his word, opened the door to Leo's room fifteen minutes later.

Luc and Leo were already in bed, Luc in the middle with enough space on his left side for Elliott to slide under the covers, which Luc held up, revealing that he was, indeed, still naked. Without a word, Elliott slipped into bed, and Luc settled the cover over him, turning so Elliott could spoon him, which he did without question, wrapping an arm around Luc's waist and pulling him closer. He nuzzled against Luc's neck —

a habit ingrained from their years together — without thinking about Leo's presence.

“Thank you for joining us.”

Leo's voice rumbled with humor, and Elliott glanced up to see Leo's blue eyes practically sparkling.

“Thank you for asking me.”

There was a pause, almost awkward in the tension Elliott felt between them, and then Luc started to laugh. He pushed his ass against Elliott and reached out to run a hand over Leo's chest. “You two,” he said, his voice full of affection. “Maybe you should sniff each other's butts. It seems to help the dogs relax around each other.”

Elliott caught Leo's eye roll and laughed when Leo said, “I'm game if you are.”

“That might be too kinky for me,” Elliott said, which made Leo laugh.

Tension broken, Leo pushed himself onto his side so he was facing Elliott. He reached out to touch Luc, his fingers brushing Elliott's. Without thinking, Elliott entwined their hands and watched a bit of heat flare in Leo's eyes. He widened his own eyes, questioning if this was all right. Leo took a deep breath, then nodded, and Elliott smiled.

Even though he'd agreed to sleep in Leo's bed without hesitation, it was largely because Luc wanted it so much. Elliott had expected it to feel uncomfortable, so it surprised him how wonderful it felt to hold Luc between his and Leo's

bodies. But it wasn't only the feel of Luc against him that felt good. It was also Leo's hand in his, that odd flare of heat on his skin like when they'd held hands at dinner the day Leo had gotten his diagnosis.

Luc yawned, and both Elliott and Leo reached out to cover his mouth, grinning at each other as their hands collided again.

"Time for your beauty sleep, boy." Leo reached for a remote on the headboard and closed the curtains, then tapped the lights off.

"That's pretty handy," Elliott said, instantly worried that it might sound condescending despite the genuineness of his reaction. He'd love to control the lights and curtains at home by remote.

"It makes things easier," Leo said. "Especially when *someone* doesn't want to move, even when his Sir tells him to."

Luc giggled into the pillow, and Elliott found it endearing to see his playfulness. He ran his hand down Luc's side, deliberately teasing at the ticklish spot on his hip to make him squeal and try to get away. Unfortunately, Leo had him wedged against Elliott, and he couldn't move without climbing over Leo. Elliott continued to run light touches up and down his side, laughing as Luc squirmed to get away. He laughed harder when Leo joined in the game, and they both tickled Luc until he was gasping for breath and tears were running down his cheeks.

“Oh my God, you two are the worst,” Luc huffed when they finally relented. He rolled over and kissed Elliott, then turned and kissed Leo. “And I love you both so much.”

Elliott caught Leo’s gaze as the man looked at him as if to gauge his reaction, but all Elliott did was smile, then bent his head to kiss Luc’s shoulder. “We love you too.”

“We do,” Leo echoed, his expression tender. “But if you do not go to sleep in the next five minutes, I will turn you over my lap and paddle your behind until you’ll have to stand up for the entire flight to LA.”

Luc giggled again. “Sorry, Sir.”

“I’ll believe that when I see it,” Leo grumbled, but he settled on his side, one hand across Luc’s waist, the other raised over his head.

Elliott snuggled in close to Leo, his arm resting across Luc brushing against Leo’s in a way that felt familiar. He snaked his lower arm under the pillow, surprised when he encountered Leo’s hand. It only took him a moment to make the decision to clasp Leo’s hand in his. He squeezed gently, asking if this was okay, and received an answering squeeze.

As they settled and Luc’s breathing turned soft and rhythmic, Elliott felt the weight of his contact with Leo. It wasn’t uncomfortable. In fact, it felt the exact opposite. Cradling Luc between them, it seemed as if they were finally expressing with their bodies what they’d already been doing: taking care of their boy and each other. Despite concern that it would take him time to fall asleep in a strange bed with a

foreign sleeping arrangement, Elliott drifted off to sleep right after Luc and didn't wake until Jericho pounced on him in the morning.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

Leo

They dropped Luc off at the airport for his flight to LA the next afternoon, taking Luc's car so they could fit all three of them and the two dogs along with Luc's luggage and Leo's chair.

"You're sure you're only going for a week?" Elliott asked as he unloaded the trunk while Luc said goodbye to the dogs and told them to be good boys for Daddy Elliott and Daddy Leo. It amused Leo that he was now *Daddy Leo*.

"I need photo shoot clothes, along with tourist clothes and going out clothes. Just be glad I couldn't find any play parties to go to, or else I'd have had to bring another suitcase, and wouldn't you just love to see the TSA agents' faces when they looked in *that* bag?"

"Probably nothing they haven't seen before," Leo grumbled from the front seat. He looked over his shoulder to see Jericho pretty much giving Luc a tongue bath. "You expecting to kiss me with that mouth, or did you bring some wet wipes and mouthwash? I've got enough issues right now; I don't need a case of hookworm or mange."

"As if," Luc said, then smooshed Bey's face between his hands. "Don't listen to Daddy Leo. I would never let you boys get worms or mange." He kissed Bey's nose, then gave Jericho a final hug and ear scratches before closing the rear door and coming to Leo's.

He made a big show of wiping his mouth off on his sleeve before he opened the door and squatted down, as close to kneeling as he could get on the dirty pavement. Leo wouldn't have expected him to go all the way to his knees in this environment, so he appreciated the gesture.

Leo turned as much as he could and reached out for Luc, wrapping his hand around Luc's neck. "You are going to be good while you're away." It wasn't a question. They'd talked about this last night. Leo had given him specific times to text and only allowed one call a day each to him and Elliott unless it was an absolute emergency. Without those parameters, he knew Luc would spend too much time worrying about what was happening at home and not enough on the purpose of his trip.

"Yes, Sir. I promise to be good," Luc said. He closed his eyes and nuzzled against Leo's palm. "But you promised to let me know if anything happens here. I'll be back in a heartbeat if you need me."

"I know, boy, but Elliott will take good care of me, so you don't have to worry."

"I'm going to anyway."

"I'll send you regular updates," Elliott said. He laid a hand on Luc's shoulder. "I promise."

Luc nodded, but it was clear he was prolonging this goodbye as long as possible.

"All right. Up on your feet, boy. Time to catch your plane."

“Yes, Sir.” Luc stood, then leaned forward and wrapped his arms around Leo. “I love you, Sir.”

“I love you too.” Leo turned his head, catching Luc’s mouth with his. It was a soft kiss, but Leo didn’t let Luc pull away quickly. As much as he wanted his boy to go and wow them in LA, he was going to miss Luc fiercely, especially the following day when he received his first round of chemo. The kiss ended, and Leo caressed Luc’s cheek. “Okay. Up on your feet. You’ve got to go show some tech bros what you’re made of.”

“Yes, Sir.”

Luc gave him one final, quick kiss, then stood and went to Elliott, who had gone back to the suitcases. Leo turned to watch the other people arriving for flights but could see Elliott and Luc in the side mirror as they embraced. Luc was such a perfect sub that it was interesting to see him in his non-D/s relationship. Luc enjoyed the power exchange dynamic with Leo a great deal. Leo wasn’t a high-protocol Dom, but certain things were important to him, like having Luc kneel, call him Sir, and letting him take the lead in their interactions and play sessions. He’d have collared Luc in a hot minute if Luc had only been his, but it hadn’t been something with which Elliott was comfortable, so he hadn’t. Luc was his as much as Elliott’s, even if their relationship was different.

He watched as they embraced, whispered to each other, and kissed just as passionately as Leo and Luc had. And Leo was aware he was watching Elliott just as much as he was Luc.

Leo had never been interested in a non-D/s relationship. From the moment he first encountered the BDSM community, he knew he'd found what he'd been craving. He found someone to teach him how to be a Dom, someone who was willing to help him figure out how to navigate BDSM with the limitations his mobility placed on him, and then he'd begun to explore. The only boyfriend he'd ever had who wasn't part of the community reminded him a lot of Elliott. James had been monogamous but open to Leo's needs for BDSM partners. Unlike Elliott, he didn't want to know anything about it and shut down any conversation in which Leo mentioned play sessions. Ultimately, it was the lack of communication more than the basic incompatibility in their sexual needs that killed the relationship, but Leo had vowed never to get involved with someone who wasn't in the lifestyle ever again.

Which made it all the more curious that he was as fascinated with Elliott as he was.

When he'd suggested Elliott sleep in his bed the previous night, Leo had been thinking about not making Luc have to choose one lover over another. Poly relationships often required thinking outside the usual boundaries, and this had been one of those times. But just like holding hands with Elliott after dinner weeks before, their touches *felt* more than just casual. The effect they had on Leo was definitely more than responding to the touch of an acquaintance. When their hands brushed against each other and Elliott entwined their fingers, it had taken Leo's breath away. Falling asleep with

Elliott's hand clasped in his had been unexpectedly comforting.

Leo stopped watching Elliott and Luc in the side mirror and turned his gaze back to the other couples saying goodbye to each other while he waited for Elliott to return to the driver's seat. It didn't take long. Luc stood by the revolving door and waved; they waved back. Then Luc took hold of his suitcases and disappeared into the terminal. Jericho whined, but Bey stared placidly out the window, huffing a bit when Luc was no longer in sight. Leo leaned back and gave both dogs a quick pat.

He expected Elliott to start the car, but the man was still staring after his spouse, a sheen of tears in his eyes and an expression that matched Jericho's. Leo put a hand on Elliott's arm. "He'll be back in a few days."

"I know." Elliott shook his head. "It's just that he's never been away since we got married." He smiled at Leo. "I don't count the nights he spends with you as him being away."

Leo returned the smile. "I don't think of the nights he's with you as him being away either."

They stared at each other for a long moment, and Leo felt a strange heat expanding in his chest. If this had been a date, chances were they were seconds away from leaning toward each other for a kiss. But it wasn't a date, and the two airport security guards were giving them *hurry up* gestures. Elliott cleared his throat and started the car.

“Do you want to get something to eat?” Elliott asked as he steered the car into the endless stream of traffic.

“What about the dogs?”

Looking over his shoulder before merging into an open spot, Elliott said, “There’s a place Luc and I go where we can eat outside. They’re used to that.”

“Okay then.”

Elliott drove them to a small restaurant that felt like it was in the middle of nowhere. Or at least as much of the middle of nowhere as you could be in the Bay Area. The restaurant was flanked by a power station on one side and an auto shop on the other. There was a field of weeds across the street, but beyond that was a contractor supply warehouse, a statuary foundry, and the burnt-out remains of some structure.

“What’s that?” Leo asked as Elliott brought his chair around to the passenger’s side door. He stepped back as Leo maneuvered the chair into position and then shifted himself so he could move from one seat to the other.

Elliott looked in the direction Leo pointed. “That’s the old roundhouse.”

“And a roundhouse is?” Leo grunted as he lifted himself from the car to his chair.

“Where they serviced the steam engines in the first half of the twentieth century. They stopped using it in the fifties, I think, and then it burned in 2001. It’s abandoned at this point,

except for the kids who poke around and add to the graffiti on the walls.”

Leo got himself settled into his chair. “Interesting.” He eyed Elliott. “Were you ever one of those kids?” His voice dipped down into Dom register, and he suppressed a smile when Elliott shivered, then blushed.

“Maybe.” He turned to the rear door and got the dogs out.

“Professor Porter, do you have a secret wild side?”

Elliott snorted. “Hardly. I had a boyfriend a couple of years before I met Luc who was a photographer and loved urban decay. He broke into all sorts of abandoned buildings.” Elliott shook his head. “Stupid git. There were some places he took me where the floor was rotting so badly we had to tether ourselves to the walls in case they gave way beneath us. Dead rats and birds were some of the nicer, unexpected things we came across.”

They crossed the street at the light, Leo’s wheels riding smoothly over the pavement while the dogs trotted at Elliott’s side.

“Was it the rule breaking, the risk, or the unsavory discoveries that bothered you the most?” Leo asked as they reached the other side of the street.

“All of the above.” Elliott cast an amused smile at Leo. “Trying to get into my head, *Sir*?”

Leo laughed. “Just curious and wanting to know you better. We’re about to get very intimate, and I’d like to know more

about the guy who's going to be cleaning vomit off my face.”

“I’ll be happy to tell you anything you want to know.” He flashed a wicked grin at Leo. “As long as you’ll do the same.”

“I’m an open book,” Leo said as they stopped at a host stand.

As they waited for someone to seat them, Leo noted that the place was a sports bar with ample screens broadcasting golf tournaments and basketball games. The outdoor seating area was narrow. If the place were full, Leo would have had difficulty navigating between tables, but the server who seated them cleared the way of chairs as he led them to a table in the corner.

The server left them with menus, then returned with a bowl of water for the dogs.

“Everything’s good here,” Elliott said before Leo had a chance to ask. “But I highly recommend the lumpia, the garlic wings, or the adobo.”

“And the dogs are having...?” Leo asked because he’d seen the dog menu with steak bites and grilled chicken.

Leo looked down at them, and he swore Jericho grinned. He leaned over and gave the dog a scratch behind the ears. Dogs hadn’t been a part of his life growing up because his mother was afraid of them. Even after his accident, when the doctor had suggested a service dog for him, his mother couldn’t do it.

It wasn’t often that Leo got swept up in thinking about his childhood and what his life had been like before the drunk

driver T-boned his father's car and gave him the T-11 fracture that left him paralyzed. He could barely remember what it felt like to walk or run anymore; any adolescent sports star dreams were long gone. Not that he'd had any, but he supposed every boy wondered if he had what it takes whenever he swung a bat or threw a football.

"Did you play any sports as a kid?" Leo asked.

"A little bit of rugby, some footy like most lads in the UK. My grandmother was a brilliant horsewoman and tried to get me interested, but her horses didn't like me, and I preferred the library and my studies anyway. Why?"

Leo shook his head. "Just conversation."

"Ah. Did you...?"

"Before the accident? Yes. A bit. American football, baseball. I ran track in my freshman year of high school."

The server appeared at the table, and they placed their orders. Leo went with a salad and an order of the lumpia, while Elliott asked for garlic wings and sisig for himself and steak bites for the dogs. They both ordered iced tea to drink.

"Did you grow up in the Bay Area?" Elliott asked as the server went away.

"Just outside of Boston. I came to San Francisco for school."

"Please tell me you went to Cal."

Leo gave Elliott an evil grin. “Sorry to disappoint. I went to Stanford.”

“I might have to leave you here. I think it’s in my contract not to fraternize with Cardinals. How did I not know this?”

Before Leo could answer, both his and Elliott’s phones buzzed with an incoming text message.

“Luc,” they both said at the same time, reaching for their phones.

thru TSA heading for gate love u both

The message had been sent to a text group Luc had apparently set up. Leo grinned and typed back: **glad to see you’re using your time wisely**

Elliott’s text posted right after his: **make sure you get something to eat**

Luc: **did u guys switch phones?**

Leo: **Elliott is right. Get some food.** He snapped a pic of the dogs and sent that with his text.

Luc: **awwww**

Luc: **get the boys cigars**

“Cigars?” Leo asked.

Elliott shrugged, tapping at his phone. His text came through a second later.

We’ll get them to go.

The server brought their food, and Elliott immediately snapped a pic and sent it to Luc.

Luc: **meanie**

Leo: **Mind your manners, boy**

Luc: **sry, Sir**

With a snort, Leo typed back: **Like hell you are. Eating now. Tell us when you're on the plane. Love you.**

“Sounds like he’s nervous as all get out,” Elliott said as Leo put his phone facedown on the table.

“I think so too.”

Leo picked up one of the lumpia, dredged it through the sweet chili sauce, and popped it in his mouth. He nodded, making appreciative sounds as he chewed and swallowed. “You’re right, this is excellent.”

For several minutes, they did nothing but eat, gradually picking up their conversation as their hunger faded. It surprised Leo how easy it was to talk to Elliott. Even though he’d enjoyed their evening, part of him had wondered if it was because Luc was with them. Luc had a knack for talking to people and making friends, which was a large part of the reason he was doing so well with his pet care channel.

Despite running a successful business that required him to meet clients and sell them on his company’s services, Leo was usually reserved around new people he met socially. He was never sure how they were going to react to him, and he hated being talked down to or people treating him as if his mind was

disabled, as well as his body. Knowing that he might have to educate someone about ableism put him on edge, and he compensated by being formal and reserved, but he didn't feel that way with Elliott. Maybe it was because he was in the humanities at Cal and had to be cognizant of identity and diversity issues when dealing with his students, but Elliott had seemed comfortable with Leo from the beginning of his relationship with Luc.

In fact, Leo thought, Elliott was a nice middle ground between him and Luc. He was warm and genuine like Luc but more grounded like Leo. Add in that sexy-as-fuck voice with its deep resonance and slight British accent, the well-fitted, classically tailored clothes that hugged his lean frame just right, and those lively hazel eyes, and, yeah, it wasn't difficult to get engaged in a discussion with Elliott about just about anything. Case in point, Elliott was telling him about the history of this area on the Peninsula and the restaurant's history as a mile house, which was basically a nineteenth-century version of a rest area, and Leo was fascinated.

"I have to admit," Leo said as Elliott concluded his history lesson, "I've never really considered San Francisco's history much beyond what I learned in school about the Gold Rush and the sixties."

"Typical tech bro," Elliott responded, but he smiled to soften the epithet.

Leo felt his cheeks flush and looked down, surprised to find Jericho's head on his thigh. He'd been so caught up in what

Elliott had been saying he hadn't noticed the dog moving. He stroked the dog's silky head, a smile creeping at the corners of his mouth as his face cooled.

"Not so typical, no," Leo said softly. "Just busy."

"I can't believe Luc hasn't talked your ear off about SF. His family's lived here since the late 1800s, and he's got some relative connected to almost every major event since then. Walking through the city with him has made me very aware of how every step I take is walking in someone else's footsteps."

"Well, that's the problem." Leo looked at Elliott, keeping his expression warm and open so he'd know Leo wasn't upset. "I can't walk."

For a moment, Elliott looked stricken, but then he nodded and met Leo's gaze. "I guess we'll just have to expand your world, then."

Leo held his breath as they stared at each other. Was he falling for Elliott? Or was he simply captivated by the fullness of the relationship Elliott and Luc had and grateful to be included in Elliott's generosity?

For the first time, Leo contemplated what it would be like to have that kind of relationship. He loved what he and Luc had. Luc was the kind of partner he'd always dreamed of: responsive, experimentative, sensuous and sexy, in tune with Leo's wants and needs, and beautifully submissive with just the right amount of brat to be fun. The boy thrived on his submission to Leo. Most of their time together was spent playing in Leo's home or at a party, but, sitting across from

Elliott, Leo had to wonder if he'd missed something in his focus on BDSM as the basis for his relationships.

All the way home, Leo thought about that and his reaction to Elliott, trying to parse the nuances of it. Was he reacting to Luc being gone? Was he projecting his own fears and anxiety into feelings of relief that someone he knew would be with him tomorrow? Leo doubted it. He wasn't prone to that kind of thing and took great pride in dealing with his issues head-on. But how to explain the way he'd felt at the restaurant or when he'd held Elliott's hand at dinner and the previous night?

As soon as they were back in the condo, Leo said he needed to get some work done and headed for his office. It was a lie, and he was pretty sure Elliott knew everything was taken care of for the next two weeks while Leo's treatment got underway and he discovered how his body was going to react. Elliott, thankfully, only nodded and said he had work to do as well.

For the rest of the afternoon, they remained in their respective spaces, only aware of each other when their phones both dinged with a message from Luc saying he'd landed safely, all his luggage had made it, and he was on his way to the hotel. Leo assumed Elliott was actually getting work done while Leo noodled about on his computer, falling down rabbit holes that tangentially related to his clients' projects. He barely noticed what he was reading as his mind continued down the path he'd begun in the car.

Lost in thought, Leo didn't notice the passing time until Elliott knocked on his doorframe. He leaned a shoulder against

it, the sweatpants he'd changed into when they got back doing nothing to lessen his appeal. Leo swallowed, then cleared his throat before asking if Elliott needed anything.

“It’s half past six. I was wondering what you wanted for dinner.”

“Oh.” Why did he feel a stab of disappointment that Elliott was only being a good caregiver and filling the role Luc would have taken on if he weren’t in LA? And why...? Nope. This was ridiculous. It probably was a reaction to the cancer and an animalistic need to ensure his genes got passed on to another generation of humans. If he were straight, he’d probably be looking to bang someone or freezing his sperm or something. Leo cleared his throat. “Sure. What do you want to order?”

Elliott laughed. “I was going to cook something.”

“There’s not much in the fridge right now.”

“I’ll go take a look and report back.”

Leo stared at the doorway after Elliott retreated, shaking his head at where his thoughts had gone a few minutes before. Elliott was his boyfriend’s husband. They’d never discussed anything happening between Leo and Elliott because Elliott wasn’t interested in BDSM, so Leo had never considered that anything would be possible between them.

It still wasn’t, he reminded himself. Leo didn’t do relationships without dominance. No matter how attractive Elliott might be nor what fantasies he inspired in Leo, nothing

was going to happen between them. And especially not while Leo's future was uncertain.

“Okay, you've got pasta and some chicken that's not too badly freezer burned,” Elliott said as he returned. “Honestly, Leo, we'll have to go shopping tomorrow because I am not ordering in for every meal while I'm here.”

Leo waved a hand toward his computer. “Tell me what you want. I'll place an order.”

“Oh.” Elliott glanced over Leo's shoulder to the laptop on his desk and then back at Leo's face. “I...yeah...I guess I didn't...”

“El,” Leo said gently, aware he'd just used Luc's nickname for Elliott, but the man didn't seem to notice. “It's not because I can't get to the store; it's because I usually don't make the time when it's easier to order what I need.” It wasn't entirely the truth, but Elliott felt bad enough about his able-bodied assumption. Most grocery stores weren't set up for people in wheelchairs, that was true. Anything that wasn't at waist height was out of reach for him. He had a grabber tool that allowed him to get things off higher and lower shelves, so he wasn't totally helpless in the store, but the effort of pushing a cart, maneuvering the checkout line, getting the bags in his car, and then getting everything home and put away was exhausting. Ordering online was much easier.

“Okay. But please tell me if I make some boneheaded or insensitive comment.”

“Promise,” Leo said.

“Good.” There was a moment of staring at each other while their emotions settled. “So, dinner. Is pasta okay for you? I was going to make a chicken alfredo sauce.”

Leo’s stomach growled, and Elliott’s laugh caught Leo’s full attention. He had an amazing laugh, and that twinkle in his eyes? *Gah*. Leo had to stop thinking these thoughts. Maybe he was just spinning out some bizarre scenario so he didn’t have to think about the chemo. “That sounds good.”

“Great.” Elliott started to turn, then stopped and looked back at Leo. “How do you feel about peas? I noticed you had a bag of frozen ones in the freezer.”

“I don’t dislike them. Though I mostly use peas for sore muscles.”

A grin tugged at the corners of Elliott’s mouth. “Is it okay if I put some in the sauce?”

“Sure. I’ll make sure to order a new bag. It doesn’t work well if peas spill all over the floor. I can’t pick them up easily.”

“That’s why Luc and I have dogs. They’re better than a Roomba.” At that moment, Jericho popped his head around Elliott’s knees, and Elliott leaned down to give the dog an affectionate pat. “He probably heard me say the D-word.”

The dog looked up at Elliott and gave a sharp yip as if in agreement.

“He’s smart,” Leo said.

“Sometimes too smart, actually. Not that Bey’s a slouch, but Jericho figures stuff out that Bey would never even consider a

problem. He keeps us on our toes.”

“Luc tells me stories. He was so upset when Jericho’s family refused to take him home.”

“He was.” Elliott looked down at the dark dog. “But then I saw those big, brown eyes, and I couldn’t say no to making him ours. And I mean Jericho’s eyes, not Luc’s, though...” Elliott chuckled. “Luc was pretty persuasive as well. I have a difficult time saying no to him when he hits me with that wide-eyed, innocent look.”

“I believe he used that face on me the first time he asked to do a scene.”

“I think you’re right.”

Leo didn’t know the man well enough to interpret the expression that crossed Elliott’s face. Before he got a chance to really study it, Jericho whined and nuzzled his nose into Elliott’s hand.

“Yes, I know,” Elliott said, giving the dog another affectionate pat. “You’re not the only one who’s hungry.” He looked up at Leo. “I’ll go get dinner started for all of us.”

For several minutes after Elliott left his doorway, Leo continued to stare at the space he’d occupied. He was lost in thought about the man currently making him dinner, listening intently to the sounds of Elliott moving around his kitchen, talking to the dogs, humming something Leo couldn’t quite make out but wanted to. Elliott’s speaking voice was deep and

rich, and Leo could only imagine his singing voice would be the same.

As he started to move toward the door, he caught himself and shook his head. Was he seriously crushing on Elliott? Or was he simply responding to the care and generosity of the man? And, seriously, did he think Elliott was motivated by a desire to be with Leo? Leo was a fool if he thought Elliott was motivated by anything other than keeping his spouse from worrying by taking care of Leo the way Luc would if he were home.

With that in mind, Leo returned to his desk and responded to emails and his team's Slack chat until Elliott reappeared in the doorway to tell Leo dinner was ready and ask what he wanted to drink.

Leo followed Elliott back to the living area. The dogs were happy snorfling into their dinner bowls in a corner of the kitchen, and the table was set for the humans, complete with candles, their flames reflected in the windows that overlooked the city. It was a curious choice, and Leo tried not to read anything into it. For all he knew, Elliott and Luc had candlelit dinners all the time, and it had just been habit that made him look for candles in Leo's kitchen.

"I didn't expect a candlelit dinner," Leo said as Elliott placed a serving dish full of pasta, chicken, and — yes — peas on the table.

"I always find it calming," Elliott said over his shoulder as he returned to the kitchen. "And I thought that would be a

good thing tonight.”

Leo steadfastly refused to be disappointed that Elliott’s motive had been purely out of concern for his anxiety and worry. He cleared his throat. “You know, I only have those for wax play.”

The lights in the condo dimmed — it seemed Elliott had found the remote that controlled the lights, heat, and AC — and then he was back with two glasses of water. He placed one at the head of the table for Leo and the other at the seat he’d occupied a few weeks ago before pulling out the chair and sitting down. He smirked as Leo wheeled himself to his place.

“That does not surprise me.” He took the napkin from beside his plate and placed it on his lap, then handed the serving platter to Leo. “I didn’t think Luc was into wax play.”

“He isn’t. It was someone before him. I don’t know how old those candles are, actually.” Leo laughed as he placed a generous portion on his plate. “I wasn’t particularly adept at it since it was difficult for me to be directly over the sub and ended up getting almost as much on myself and my chair as I did on him. And it’s a bitch to clean up.” He handed the platter back to Elliott. “Have you ever tried it?”

Elliott shook his head. “Not something I’ve been particularly interested in, so, no.”

“What *are* you interested in, Professor?” Leo’s voice had unintentionally dipped lower, which made Elliott smile.

“You can’t help yourself, can you?”

“What do you mean?” Leo twirled the fettuccine around the tines of his fork.

Elliott took nearly a full minute to do the same and take his first bite of the food. He chewed thoroughly, swallowed, then took a drink of water before replying. “Have you ever had a non-BDSM relationship?”

“That’s not exactly what you were asking before.”

“True, but it answers the same question.”

It was Leo’s turn to gather his thoughts as he took a sip of water. “I did,” he finally answered. “Once.”

“Was it the lack of scenes? Play?” Elliott shrugged, clearly trying to find the right word.

“Primarily. Though there were other issues between us.”

“Oh.”

Leo watched as Elliott concentrated on eating. It was clear something was on his mind even though Leo had wondered — hoped, maybe? — that his initial questions had been a form of flirting. With another internal eye roll, Leo began eating in earnest.

“This is very good,” he said after his third mouthful. “Thank you.”

“You’re welcome.”

Elliott’s answer was perfunctory, the anticipated response, and he was keeping his attention on his food. When the dogs finished their dinner and came trotting into the dining room,

Elliott barely acknowledged them, feigning interest in twirling his pasta even though he wasn't eating. Leo left him alone with his thoughts until Elliott began casting furtive glances his way.

“What is it that you really want to know, El?” he asked and felt a flush of pleasure when Elliott gave a small smile at the use of Luc's nickname for him, but he still subverted Leo's question with a shrug.

“I suppose I miss Luc.”

“That might be true, but I'm calling bullshit on what's going on in your head right now.”

Leo waited patiently while Elliott toyed with his food for another couple of minutes.

“Elliott?”

With a sigh, Elliott put his fork down. “I'm not interested in kink. Not at all.”

“I know.”

“And you said you've never had a non-kink relationship that worked out.”

“And I've had a lot of D/s ones that didn't either. What brought this on?”

“I went into the playroom today. I know. I shouldn't have. It's your space with Luc, and I apologize.”

“No, it's fine. Luc already showed you the room, so it's not off-limits. You're living here at the moment, and you're about

to see me at my most vulnerable. If you're not completely comfortable here, we need to renegotiate before tomorrow."

"That's not...I'm fine. We can forget about it."

"We're not going to forget about it. It's clear something is bothering you. One of the things I need you to understand is that I value honesty and open communication. The reason most of my relationships have failed has been because those two needs weren't met. Without them, there's no trust, and without trust, there's no intimacy."

"We're not dating, Leo," Elliott said. His voice was gentle, chiding, even.

"No, we're not. But there are intimacies deeper than sex. Most of them are. In my experience, sex is easy. Sex might be a bit more challenging for someone like me, but that's mechanics more than anything. Becoming intimate with someone requires a degree of trust that makes most people uncomfortable or frightened. It's one of the reasons D/s and kink are important to me. By definition, they require intimacy in order for everyone to get what they need out of the relationship. So, I'll ask you again, what is your concern?"

"I don't know if I can meet Luc's needs like you can."

Leo smiled. "You already know you can't."

Elliott started to protest, then laughed in embarrassment. "True," he mused. "Luc told me the day we met that he's poly and doesn't believe that one person can meet all the needs of another. *'We don't expect one friend to be everything for us, so*

why should we expect one lover to satisfy all our needs' is the way he put it.”

“That sounds like our boy.”

“*Our boy*,” Elliott repeated and frowned, and Leo knew he’d hit the nail on the head.

“And?” he prompted.

“I saw the two of you last night.” He gestured toward the living room. “Just before I left with the dogs, I looked back and saw Luc kneeling for you. It was...*he* was beautiful. And you...” Elliott sucked in a deep breath. “The connection you two have is...” Elliott shook his head. “It’s sublime.”

“Sublime?” Leo cocked his head to the side. “Meaning?”

“‘Sublime’ means something so perfect it’s almost holy. Something that inspires awe, something to revere and treasure in your heart. And that’s what I felt last night, seeing the two of you together.”

“And you don’t think you have that kind of connection with Luc?”

When Elliott nodded, Leo reached out and took hold of his hand. “From what I see, you very much do. The trust between the two of you is beautiful. The joy you take in each other, the care you give each other. I can’t tell you how lucky I feel to be a part of that in some way and how grateful I am that you are so generous, so willing to share him with me. And if you don’t think that’s every bit as important a connection for Luc, you

are underestimating how special you are and how much he loves you.”

Elliott swallowed hard and raised his head to meet Leo’s eye. For a moment, Leo couldn’t breathe because of the vulnerability and rawness he saw in the other man’s gaze. The hand gripping his was warm, and Leo felt that same jolt of electricity travel up his arm and lodge in his chest as he had the night of his diagnosis. He licked his lips and watched Elliott’s pupils dilate, heard his breathing hitch.

And then the moment was broken as both their phones buzzed with an incoming message.

“That would be Luc,” Elliott said, his voice slightly husky as he withdrew his hand from Leo’s and stood up.

Leo cleared his throat. “I imagine so.”

Elliott disappeared into the kitchen and returned with his phone, a smile playing on his lips as he read what Luc had sent. He sat down again and turned his phone so Leo could see.

Luc: **im so bored**

Luc: **sombdy talk to me pls**

The messages were followed by a GIF of a giant panda lying on its back, idly stripping leaves from a bamboo stalk.

Taking his phone back, Elliott tapped out a response: **read a book**

Luc: **nooooooo**

Luc: **i wt to tlk**

“As a professor, does Luc’s text speak ever drive you crazy?” Leo asked as he pulled his phone from the utility bag on the side of his chair and texted back: **patience, boy. We’re still eating dinner.**

“You have no idea,” Elliott said and put his hand over his heart. “It grieves me dearly, for he hath been speaking in thumbs too oft.”

For a second, Leo stared at Elliott, who was trying to maintain the pained expression of an aggrieved professor without cracking up. The longer Leo stared, the harder it got until Elliott started laughing.

Both their phones rang before Elliott got himself under control. He was still laughing as he answered the phone.

“Well, someone sounds like he’s having a good time. No wonder you don’t want to talk to me,” Luc huffed.

“Elliott just made a rather ridiculous joke at Shakespeare’s expense,” Leo answered.

“Really, El? You know you’re the only one who thinks that shit is funny.”

Elliott wiped the tears from the corners of his eyes. “’Tis an impoverished man indeed who cannot find humor in his own predicaments.”

“Run, Sir. He’s spouting aphorisms. Not to mention making them up.”

“I’ll have to settle for wheeling away slowly.”

Luc groaned on the other side of the phone. “You two are the worst. I’m getting dad jokes in stereo now.”

“How are you doing, Luc?” Elliott asked, still wiping at his eyes. “Besides being bored, of course.”

“LA is hot, the traffic is horrible, and the ocean is a million miles away. And I miss you guys.” There was a wistful note in Luc’s voice. “How are the boys? Do they miss me?”

As if on cue, the dogs got up from where they’d stationed themselves in the corner of the room and trotted over. Jericho whined and pawed at Elliott’s leg.

“Someone misses you,” Leo said. He ruffled Jericho’s fur.

“Put the phone to his ear so I can say hi.”

“Really, Luc?” Elliott asked, but he was already leaning over. “Okay. Talk to him.”

Luc’s voice was muffled, but he could still hear him cooing to the dog, telling him he was a good boy and that Luc would be home in another five dinners. Jericho barked at the word *dinner*, and Luc laughed.

“Someone’s vocabulary is definitely growing,” Elliott said as he put the phone back on the table.

“That’s because he’s a smart boy,” Luc said in the voice he reserved for Jericho. It was part baby talk, part singsong, but it made the Mudi prick his ears up and Bey decide to get in on the attention.

The big dog padded over to the table and snuffled at the phone, which made Luc laugh again. “And, yes, Bey, I love you too.”

Seemingly satisfied, Bey turned his enormous head toward Elliott, who stroked his ears a few times before the Mastiff lumbered back to the dog bed they’d put in the living room.

“I didn’t know they were this entertaining,” Leo said.

“This is nothing,” Luc said. “You should see them when Jericho gets his brat on and teases Bey. Bey’s pretty good at putting up with him, but as soon as Bey’s had it, he’ll put a paw on top of Jericho’s head or hold him down. Once Bey sat on him because he was being such a pest.”

“Your dog is a brat?” Leo asked. “Why does that not surprise me?”

“Because you know me, Sir.”

They all laughed, and then Leo quizzed Luc about how his day had gone, shifting from general chitchat to a Dom inquiring if his sub was taking care of himself. Elliott got up and began clearing the table from their dinner, the dogs following on his heels as he carried the dishes into the kitchen. It didn’t surprise Leo at all to learn that Luc hadn’t eaten anything since breakfast.

“Call room service, boy,” Leo said as the smell of coffee wafted from the kitchen.

“Sir?”

“I want you to call room service and order yourself some dinner. Use the room phone so I can hear you do it.”

“But I’m not really hungry.” Luc practically whined, and Leo could imagine the pout on his face.

“I don’t care. You need to eat, or else you’re not going to be at your best tomorrow.”

After a bit more grumbling, Luc got out the room service menu and ran his options past Leo until they figured out an acceptable dinner, just as Elliott returned from the kitchen with two cups of coffee.

It’s decaf, he mouthed as he listened to Luc placing his order. He raised an eyebrow at Leo.

“He hasn’t eaten since this morning,” Leo said and held up a finger when Elliott opened his mouth. “I told him to call room service.”

“Ah.”

Elliott sat and lifted the coffee mug to his mouth, but it was still too hot, so he blew across the surface to cool it down. Leo was instantly captivated by the sight of Elliott’s pursed lips and couldn’t take his eyes off them.

“All done, Sir.”

“Good boy,” Leo said, still fixated on the sight of Elliott taking small sips from his mug, then blowing on it some more. He shook his head. This was ridiculous. If this infatuation continued, he’d have to have a conversation with Luc about his attraction to Elliott. It would be the right thing to do, but

dammit, Leo didn't want to jeopardize his relationship with Luc over something that probably was nothing more than a reaction to his impending treatment.

With a low groan of frustration, Leo rested his elbow on the table and shielded his eyes with his hand.

"What was that sound?" Luc asked, and Leo silently cursed the microphone on Elliott's phone.

"Nothing," Leo said.

"No. I distinctly heard something that sounded like...Sir, what are you doing?"

"Sitting at the table with Elliott, who just brought me coffee. Quit trying to stir up trouble, brat."

Luc chuckled. "We could all have phone sex later."

"Boy!" Leo slammed his hand down on the table at the same time Elliott did a spit take, and a spray of hot coffee landed on the back of Leo's hand. "This phone call is now over. Text me a picture when your dinner arrives, and text me one when you're done. We'll discuss your punishment when you get back. Now, say good night to Elliott."

"Yes, Sir." Luc's words were contrite, but his tone was anything but. "Good night, El. I love you."

"I love you too, Luc. Eat your dinner and get a good night's sleep. We'll talk tomorrow."

"Good boy."

"Thank you, Sir. Sorry. I'll text you my pictures."

“Good night, Luc.”

“Good night, Sir.”

After Elliott ended the call, Leo reached for his coffee.

“He’s certainly a handful,” Leo said.

“He is,” Elliott agreed, the affection for his husband clear in his voice.

Leo noticed that Elliott wasn’t looking his way, nor had the blush that stained his cheeks at Luc’s outrageous suggestion gone away.

Was it possible...?

Nope. Leo shoved the thought away. *I will not crush on my boyfriend’s husband.* He promised himself he’d go to sleep repeating this mantra and hopefully wake up the next day without a thought for Elliott other than gratitude that he’d be there when Leo started puking his guts out.

CHAPTER TWELVE

Luc

Luc headed for Leo's condo as soon as he collected his luggage. His time at Zoomies had gone great, and the publicity photos were brilliant, but he was anxious to see Elliott and Leo and the dogs, so he'd left for the airport as soon as his final meeting was over.

It meant he was arriving home a day earlier than anyone expected, but he didn't care. He'd missed them all more than he thought possible, not to mention his worry over Leo's first round of chemo had been very distracting. Even though Elliott assured him it had gone as well as they could have hoped and Leo had been able to get back to work for a few hours the day before, Luc was still chafing at the amount of time it took to get from SFO to downtown San Francisco.

Once the Lyft driver stopped in front of Leo's building, Luc was out of the car in a flash. He wrangled his suitcases out of the trunk, through the doors, and into the elevator as quickly as he could, impatiently staring at the floor numbers as they climbed to the eighteenth floor. He sighed in relief as the doors opened on the familiar hallway that led to Leo's door.

Luc thought briefly about ringing the bell but decided to let himself inside with his key. As soon as he stepped inside, he heard Bey's booming bark come from deep inside the condo — probably the guest room, Luc thought, from the direction of the sound — and Jericho's cautious, alert yips.

“Hello?” Elliott called out.

“Honeys, I’m home!” Luc yelled back just as the sound of skittering nails alerted him to an incoming missile in the form of a black, furry blur known as Jericho.

His arms full of a frantic dog who couldn’t decide if he wanted to lick Luc’s face or inhale all his scents so he could catalog where Luc had been, Luc was on his ass laughing by the time Elliott and Leo made it to the foyer. Bey left Elliott’s side, ambled over, and stuck his nose in Luc’s face, then began to inhale him from the neck down, nose trailing from his shoulders to his feet before he returned to Elliott’s side.

“We weren’t expecting you until tomorrow,” Elliott said over Jericho’s excited yips.

“I changed my flight.” Luc put a steady hand on Jericho’s body. “Settle,” he commanded, and Jericho sank to the floor, eyes still on Luc but no longer frantically trying to sniff and lick every inch of skin he could reach. “Good boy.” Luc ruffled his ears and stood. He held up a hand to forestall any protest from the other two men while he stared at them. They were his whole world, and he felt a warmth expand in his chest as he took them in, searching for any minute changes that had happened in his absence — just as the dogs had done with him — while he assured them that he’d done everything he needed to in LA. “I knew I’d be miserable if I stayed another night instead of coming home.”

Finally, a small smile graced Leo’s lips while Elliott grinned. “Welcome home, Luc.”

Leo started to move forward, then paused and looked at Jericho. “Is it safe?”

With a laugh, Luc nodded. “He’ll stay there until I tell him he can move.”

“Good.” Leo closed the distance between them, and Luc knelt as he came closer, head bowed, hands open on his thighs. “Welcome home, boy.” Leo put a hand under Luc’s chin and drew his head up so Luc could see him. He leaned forward, and Luc closed the distance between them so Leo could give him a kiss. “We all missed you too.”

Luc rested his forehead against Leo’s. “You look pretty good, Sir,” he said.

“*Pretty good?*”

A sudden lump formed in Luc’s throat, and he felt tears welling in the corner of his eyes. “I was so worried about you,” he whispered.

“I know, love.”

Closing his eyes against the tears — which seemed ridiculous since Leo was the one who had gone through everything — Luc pressed his head into the palm of Leo’s hand. “It was more difficult than I thought it would be to be apart from you this week.”

Elliott’s hand rested on his back, and then El was squatting down next to him, fingers playing in the curls around Luc’s ear. “But you did it,” he said. “And it sounds like they loved you.”

Luc nodded. The comfort and reconnection Elliott and Leo were offering him felt wonderful. Although he'd enjoyed his week in LA — the people at Zoomies had taken care of him like he was visiting royalty — and Leo's first treatment had gone well, it had been stressful keeping all his fear and anxiety under wraps. He felt all of what he'd held at bay welling up inside him as he leaned into the solidness of Elliott's body and the gentle caresses as Leo outlined his face. Inhaling deeply, then letting it all go, Luc felt the tension of the past week melt away. A whine from Jericho — still in his place on the floor — made Luc smile. He was home. With the two people — and two dogs — he cared about most deeply.

The three men remained huddled around each other, arms entwined and heads so close they were breathing each other's air, until Luc's stomach growled. Without breaking contact, Leo asked if Luc had eaten.

“No, Sir. I was too focused on getting home.”

Leo sighed. “I should punish you, but I'll let it pass this time because I'm very glad to see you.”

As Luc stood, he noticed that Leo was looking a bit haggard and guessed that the lack of punishment was also caused by Leo's fatigue. He looked at Elliott, who gave him a small nod.

“I'll get some dinner started,” Elliott said. He gave Luc another kiss before heading toward the kitchen, Bey at his side like a shadow.

“Go with Daddy Elliott,” Luc told Jericho, then released him. Jericho nudged Luc's leg with his nose, then took off

after Elliott and Bey. When he looked back, Leo was watching him with an assessing gaze, and Luc knew to wait until Leo decided to speak.

With a nod of his head, Leo told Luc to accompany him to his room, then turned his chair and made his way down the hall. Luc followed as he'd been commanded, his mind turning over the various reasons for Leo's request. He'd said Luc wasn't going to be punished, but that didn't mean he didn't want to talk to Luc about changing plans and skipping meals. Being taken care of by his Dom meant Leo helped Luc tame some of his impulsiveness and made sure he remembered to take care of himself. Luc remained silent, trusting that Leo would tell him what was on his mind when he was ready.

Knowing that, trusting Leo's judgment and that Luc's needs and well-being were always at the forefront of Leo's considerations, made it possible for Luc to relax for the first time in days. He was home. He could stop thinking and worrying and being responsible for all the minutiae of his schedule and just be in the present moment with Leo and Elliott.

Once inside his room, Leo positioned the wheelchair next to his bed. "Come help me, boy." He motioned Luc over.

"Sir?" It was so rare Leo requested assistance that Luc didn't know what to do.

Leo sighed. "I'm tired, and I'm going back to bed." He looked over his shoulder and fixed Luc with a glare. "If someone had told me he was coming home today, I would

have rested more. But someone didn't, so now you'll have to put up with a Dom who's worn-out and feeling bitchy."

"Are you all right, Sir? Do you need anything?"

"I need to get into my bed. Come here." Perhaps realizing he'd spoken sharper than he intended, Leo shook his head. "I'm sorry, boy."

Luc moved closer. "No, Sir. I shouldn't have questioned. What do you need me to do?"

It was a bit awkward since Leo was obviously uncomfortable with any kind of assistance, but Luc was used to shifting large animals whose movement was impaired by injury or illness. It wasn't so different to do that for Leo. He held Leo steady as the man lifted himself from his chair onto the mattress, then helped him slide back so he was supported by the pillows. When they were done, Leo was pale and a bit sweaty, but he picked up one of the pillows and put it on the floor for Luc. He sighed as Luc sank to his knees and moved close enough for Leo to run his fingers through his curls.

"Are you all right, Sir?"

"I'm fine. Just tired. But that's the new normal for me. You'll have to get used to it."

"I wasn't complaining, just asking. If you're up to it, could you tell me how it's been this week?"

They'd talked every day, but that wasn't the same as being in the same room with Leo, and Luc was noticing the small things that had changed in Leo's room during the week he'd

been gone. There was a water bottle with a straw on the nightstand, along with a couple of bottles of medication and a small bowl. The room smelled a bit stale, with a faint lingering odor of antiseptic lingering in the air, but the bouquet of flowers on Leo's dresser — in his direct line of sight from the bed — helped brighten the room.

The flowers made Luc smile. He knew Elliott had brought the collection of heather and sunflowers, along with some of the pink roses from their garden, and that each of those flowers had been chosen with care for their beauty and meaning. It touched him that Elliott had made a special effort to keep Leo's spirits up, and his heart beat with a surge of love for his husband.

Leo ruffed up Luc's hair, drawing his attention back to his Sir. "Don't worry. Elliott's been taking good care of me, and he would have told you if anything dire had happened. But the chemo wipes me out. That's all this is. It'll probably be another week before I'm feeling more like myself. It went better than I expected, and they prescribed an antiemetic that curbed most of the nausea, so Elliott wasn't wiping any noxious liquids from my face at three in the morning or carrying me to the bathroom so I could shit my guts out."

Luc smiled, finally relieved. If Leo was being self-deprecating, then everything was all right, even if he looked worn and slightly gray around the edges. "I'm glad, Sir."

"You married a good man, Luc."

“I know, Sir.” Luc looked up and met Leo’s eye. There was a tenderness in Leo’s voice, a note of affection that hadn’t been there before Luc left, and he was glad to hear it. “He’s one of the best men I’ve ever known.” Luc leaned forward and rested his head on the edge of the mattress. “As are you. That’s why I was worried.”

Leo massaged Luc’s head, something that practically made Luc purr with contentment. He loved this, and he knew Leo knew it, which made him sigh again that his Sir was taking care of him even when he wasn’t feeling one hundred percent. It also made him happy that he could give Leo this sense of connection, something he knew Leo needed as much as him.

A knock came from the doorway and then Elliott’s voice asking if he could come in. Luc didn’t lift his head as he heard Leo say yes and then the sound of Elliott’s footsteps crossing the room. The mattress shifted, and Luc knew Elliott was sitting on the bed, which gave him another surge of happiness that El and Leo were comfortable enough with each other for Elliott to come into Leo’s space and sit on his bed. Leo’s hand on his head twitched but then resumed stroking and tracing the contours of his skull.

“Dinner’s cooking,” Elliott said. “I’m warming up some of the soup for you, and I got a new loaf of that Italian bread you liked.”

“That sounds good,” Leo said. “I don’t know how much I’m going to eat tonight.”

Elliott made a noise of acknowledgment but didn't offer any platitudes or remind him that he needed to eat to keep his strength up. Leo was more aware of the limitations and needs of his body than anyone Luc had ever met, and that warm feeling grew at knowing Elliott understood this about him.

Luc knew this was far outside the bounds of what was considered a normal relationship because here was Elliott taking care of his husband's lover as if it were the most quotidian thing in the world. *God*. That Elliott accepted Luc's need for submission to Leo was more than enough, but this... this was incredible. Could he love his husband any more than he already did? And could he love Leo more for accepting Elliott into his home, letting El take care of him? These men were amazing, and Luc couldn't believe he got to call them his.

His body buzzed with contentment listening to Elliott and Leo talk, absorbing Leo's touch like a balm. He'd missed this so much during his week away. By the time Elliott left the room, Luc was drifting.

"Come up on the bed, boy," Leo said. "You're falling asleep."

Luc stood, stretching while a large yawn made his jaw crack, and made his way to the other side of the bed, lying down in the spot where Elliott had just been sitting. It was still warm, and he curled up against Leo's side, head on his thigh.

One of the things Luc had had to get used to when they started dating was the slackness in Leo's legs due to his

paralysis. At first, it had been a bit awkward for him because they didn't feel like he expected them to. He'd anticipated them being firmer, more solid like Leo's upper body and arms, but Leo's legs hadn't moved in seventeen years except during physio sessions. The muscles didn't tense in response to commands from his brain, and the neurons that caused the random firings that kept the short fibers ready for action had all gone to sleep. In addition, atrophy made it possible to feel Leo's bones. Luc was careful to lie on the fleshiest part of Leo's legs to avoid bruising him and loved the feel of Leo's legs beneath his head.

Leo resumed petting him with gentle strokes along his scalp, and Luc sighed in contentment.

Both of them must have dozed off by the time Elliott returned to tell them dinner was ready. He had a bed tray for Leo, which he placed over Leo's legs after Luc sat up. Luc noted the medications Elliott had placed in a small paper cup and how Leo immediately took them.

"I was thinking we could all eat in here," Elliott said. "If that's all right with you, Leo."

It sounded strange to Luc's ears to hear someone address Leo by his name. He was so used to calling Leo *Sir*, but he decided he liked the way *Sir's* name sounded coming from Elliott's mouth.

"I'd like that," Leo said.

Elliott disappeared down the hall and reappeared a few minutes later with another tray laden with bowls of soup and

several slices of crusty bread. The dogs trotted into the room after him, noses high as they followed the scent. Luc didn't blame them because it smelled amazing.

"I only brought water for us," he said as he placed the tray on Leo's bed, "because I don't think either of us needs wine at the moment."

Luc agreed. If he had a glass of wine, he'd probably pass out before he got a taste of this soup, and that would be a tragedy.

"This looks delicious," Luc said as he dipped his spoon into it. It was cream-based, satiny smooth, and smelled of vegetables and herbs.

"Elliott has kept me well-fed," Leo said, raising his own spoon to his mouth and nodding toward Elliott.

"It wasn't that difficult," Elliott said. He concentrated on covering a slice of bread with butter, but Luc swore there was a tinge of pink in his husband's cheeks.

"I'm grateful just the same. You made this week much easier for me than I'd anticipated. Thank you."

Elliott nodded, his attention focused on his food while that pink continued to creep up to the tips of his ears. *Interesting*, Luc thought. It wasn't like Elliott to get embarrassed or self-conscious about compliments. As he continued to watch Elliott and Leo interact, Luc was happy to see that a level of familiarity and ease had developed between the two men. It hadn't been there when Luc left, but he could see it now in the

way they laughed with each other. Luc saw it again when Leo asked for a new napkin and their hands casually brushed against each other as Elliott handed it over. He smiled to himself as he bent his head over his food, happy to see these two men caring for each other.

It wasn't until later, when Luc was helping Elliott bring the dishes to the kitchen, that he noticed something else.

"El...?" he asked as they passed the open door to the guest room. "Where did you sleep?"

Elliott's step faltered, and Luc saw the tinge of pink reappear at the back of his neck.

"Did you sleep in Leo's room?" Luc asked. He wasn't angry or upset, just curious why they hadn't told him.

"I did." Elliott turned. "We didn't want you to think things were bad for Leo — that's why we didn't tell you — but he said he'd feel safer if I stayed with him in case he needed something. And he had a couple of rough nights with aches and chills — the nausea got pretty intense, but the medication they gave him helped. Honestly, I think it was more because he didn't trust me to hear him if he needed my help than because he wasn't feeling well."

Luc nodded. It made sense, and he could definitely see Leo taking the practical route of having Elliott stay with him if he wasn't one hundred percent certain El would hear him. Even if it was the more unconventional solution.

“Then you’re not trying to steal my boyfriend?” Luc teased and closed the distance between the two of them. He tilted his head up so Elliott could give him a quick kiss, which Elliott immediately did. “I missed you, husband,” Luc whispered against Elliott’s lips.

“I missed you too, husband.”

Elliott gave Luc another kiss before turning and resuming their path to the kitchen. Along the way, Luc noted another display of flowers in the living room and one on the dining room table. He loved how they brought color to Leo’s normally spartan home and that Elliott had thought to provide Leo with something so vibrant.

In the kitchen, Luc washed the dishes while Elliott put them in the dishwasher. He stowed the cooking things in their proper place in the cabinets and drawers. Luc was impressed with how familiar Elliott had become with Leo’s kitchen in the week he’d been living here.

He was also impressed with how the dogs had come to think of this as their space as well. Bey had remained in Leo’s bedroom. The Mastiff had taken up residence on a dog bed in the corner of the room and not moved when Elliott and Luc left with the dirty dishes. Jericho, of course, had followed them — the *tip-tap* of his toenails on the poured concrete floors reminding Luc that he needed to trim them — but he was circling back and forth between the kitchen and the bedroom, ears pricked for any morsel of food that might drop.

“The dogs seem to like being here,” he said as he rinsed a soup bowl and handed it to Elliott.

“They settled right in, even Jericho, though he definitely missed you. But Bey really took to Leo — doesn’t leave his side unless it’s to eat or go out.”

“Hm.” Luc nodded, his mind going back to an earlier thought he’d had about getting a service dog for Leo. They could train the dog to alert a caretaker if Leo was in distress and needed help. He tucked that into a corner of his brain to think about later. Right now, it was much more interesting watching the friendship that had developed between Leo and Elliott. “I’m glad you were here for Sir. That made things a lot easier for me while I was in LA, but I think it was good for him, too, having you here.”

Elliott shrugged as he put a glass into the dishwasher. “Most of the time, I felt like I was unnecessary. It wasn’t like he was completely incapacitated by the chemo.”

“True, but it surprises me he asked you to sleep in his bed. I guess he was more comfortable since we’d done that when all three of us were here.”

Luc finished up with the dishes, then wiped down the counter and stovetop while Elliott started the dishwasher. Luc reached out and pulled Elliott to him, standing with his back against the counter and Elliott pressed to his front. He ran his hands up Elliott’s arms, then clasped them behind his husband’s neck and rested his head against El’s chest.

“I can head home if you want to be with Leo tonight,” Elliott said as his hands crept under Luc’s shirt and caressed his back.

Luc shook his head. “I want to be with both of you.” He shuddered against Elliott’s body. “It was really hard to be away from you two. Much harder than I thought it would be, even though everyone was great. I was so busy I don’t think I fully felt how much I missed you both. And the furballs too. But now that I’m back, I’m feeling greedy and don’t want to have to choose who to be with.”

Elliott tightened his arms around Luc and kissed his head, then traced his lips down the side of Luc’s face until he reached his lips. “I’m glad you’re home too,” he said, and then the warmth of Elliott’s plush lips pressed against Luc’s.

It was a kiss that started sweet enough but quickly grew heated as Luc traced the seam of Elliott’s lips with the tip of his tongue, teasing until Elliott let Luc inside. They made out for a couple of minutes until the angle made Luc’s neck start to hurt. He broke the kiss, hopped up on the counter, and wrapped his legs around Elliott’s waist to draw him close again.

They were both hard, and Luc slid forward so he could feel Elliott’s length rub against the underside of his cock.

“You are so fucking sexy,” Elliott groaned against Luc’s mouth. “And I missed you so fucking much.”

Luc chuckled. When Elliott started to curse, it was a sure sign he was turned on, and Luc loved that side of him. His

upright, reserved British spouse could become a hedonistic libertine once he let his sensual side out to play, and Luc delighted in making it happen as often as he could.

He slid his hands to the front of Elliott's pants and drew down the zipper so he could slip his hand inside.

"Luc," Elliott ground out, trying to move away from Luc's questing fingers, but Luc tightened his legs around El's waist and didn't let him go. "We shouldn't." Elliott shuddered as Luc's fingers closed around his cock.

"You feel so good," Luc panted. Elliott's cock was hot and hard in his hand, and he couldn't stop himself from stroking the velvet skin. "Please, El, can I taste you?"

"Fuck, Luc." Elliott thrust into Luc's hand. "We're in Leo's house."

"I know." Luc gave a wicked twist to his hand, which made Elliott's hips buck forward, tunneling his shaft through Luc's fist. "That makes it hotter."

Elliott pulled back so he could stare into Luc's eyes. His pupils were blown, his lips red and swollen from their kisses, and his cheeks were flushed. When Luc stroked him down, then up, and back down again, slicking his path with the fluid leaking from Elliott's slit, Elliott clenched his teeth, his eyelids fluttering shut as he fought for control. But Luc was relentless. He knew how to drive Elliott crazy and get what he wanted, which was El's cock fucking his mouth and coming hot and heavy down his throat.

“Please, El,” he whispered. “I need you bad.”

“Badly,” Elliott ground out, teeth still clenched, fighting hard to resist.

“No. Bad, Professor. I need you to let go and be bad with me. Because it’ll feel so good.” He increased the pressure and speed of his hand as he stroked Elliott, watching for the moment El gave in. He was close. The tendons in his neck stood out as he strained to keep his arousal at bay.

Luc was so turned on he couldn’t think of anything but getting on his knees and having Elliott fill his mouth. Letting go of Elliott’s cock — something El protested with a barely suppressed whine — Luc slid from the counter to the floor. He put his hands to the button on Elliott’s pants, then looked up at him with his best puppy dog eyes.

“Please, El.”

Elliott stared at him, the hunger in his eyes warring with the tension in his body for so long Luc was convinced the answer was going to be no. Then — finally — Elliott closed his eyes and nodded. He pushed Luc’s hands away and undid his pants himself, pushing them and his briefs out of the way and taking his cock in his own fist.

He stroked himself a couple of times, then looked down at Luc, his eyes blazing. “Is this what you want, boy?”

Shocked, Luc’s mouth fell open at Elliott’s tone. It was full of command and dominance, two things his husband rarely displayed when they had sex. It turned him on so much he had

to grab hold of himself through his jeans to keep himself from coming. He moaned as Elliott took advantage and ran the head of his cock against Luc's lips.

“Do it,” Luc whispered as he undid his jeans and pushed his hand inside his briefs. “Use me, El.”

Elliott stroked Luc's cheek with his fingers. “With pleasure,” he said and thrust himself into Luc's mouth.

Oh my God. Luc's eyes nearly rolled back in his head with how good it felt. He loved Elliott's cock, worshipped it, in thrall to the hard length sliding over his tongue and to the back of his throat. Swallowing around it, Luc groaned, the vibration making Elliott curse, and then — *fuck fuck FUUUUCK* — he took hold of Luc's head and began to thrust.

It was glorious. It was perfect. Tears ran down Luc's cheeks as Elliott used him with a ferocity that nearly made it impossible to breathe. Luc was in absolute heaven as he stroked himself in time to Elliott's thrusts.

“So close,” Elliott gritted out.

Luc hummed in agreement, his mouth too full to tell Elliott to do it. *Let go. Use me.* He prayed Elliott got the message and sucked harder on Elliott's length.

“Luc, fuck. Fuck.”

A hot stream of cum flooded Luc's mouth at the same time his own orgasm blasted through his body. He swallowed and stroked, milked Elliott's cock as he pulled on his own, savoring every burst of cum until they both got too sensitive.

Elliott pulled out of Luc's mouth, then sank to the floor beside him. He lifted Luc's hand and cleaned it with quick swipes of his tongue until no evidence was left behind, then laid his head on Luc's shoulder.

"You are such a bad influence," he said. "I should tell your Sir what you just did."

Luc grinned. "Please?"

With a chuckle, Elliott lifted Luc's chin and kissed him, mingling their tastes on Luc's tongue. Luc had to admit he felt a thrill at the idea of going to Leo smelling of Elliott's cum and his own, of kissing Leo and letting him taste the both of them. He'd never do it. Elliott and Leo didn't have that kind of relationship. But it was nice to fantasize about.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

Elliott

May turned into a gloomy and overcast June, and then July dawned with bright blue skies and gentle warmth. Leo's treatments continued to progress as well as they could hope, with only a few glitches caused by his paralysis. His primary care doctor and oncology team were happy with the way he was responding, as well as encouraged by the lack of complications, which made Luc happy, and that made Elliott happy as well. Leo, of course, was still doing the really hard work, vacillating between days when he could barely get out of bed and days when he felt almost normal, letting the chemo do its thing and staying focused on the positive outcome they all wanted.

As his chemo progressed, the tumors began to shrink and Leo continued to be free of complications, and Elliott watched him relax and begin to think toward the future again. His company focused on developing apps that made life more accessible for quadriplegics and paraplegics, and he had started working on a new program.

Leo had tried to explain it to Elliott, but in most ways, he was a complete Luddite with technology. He used it. He appreciated how it made his life easier. But anything more advanced than illuminated manuscripts made his brain shut down. Still, he enjoyed spending time with Leo, enjoyed listening to him talk about his passion, and found himself looking forward to the nights he slept at Leo's condo.

As the months progressed, they'd fallen into a routine, with both Luc and Elliott spending time on the San Francisco side of the Bay Bridge. He was touched that Leo wanted him there even on days when he was at his worst and often asked Elliott to read to him. Surprisingly, he wanted Elliott to read from the texts he taught, and they spent evenings talking about Dante, Chaucer, Marguerite de Navarre, Murasaki Shikibu, Sei Shōnagon, and Christine de Pizan.

On days when Leo felt almost well — the best he could do at the moment when the reality of his cancer was always in his thoughts — Elliott returned home to give Leo and Luc some private time, but Elliott had noticed Leo was more and more frequently asking him to stay as well. It wasn't a hardship. Elliott enjoyed Leo's company, and he loved the lively conversations between all three of them in the evening when Luc told them about his day at the vet hospital or what he was planning for his next TikTok or IG post.

At first, Leo and Luc had kept things...not exactly hidden, but more subdued and less active than Elliott knew they would if he wasn't there. They didn't use the playroom at all, and he could tell they were both missing that aspect of their relationship. Leo wasn't always up to playing, but there were more subtle aspects to their D/s relationship they weren't displaying in front of Elliott. For instance, Elliott rarely saw Luc kneel for Leo, and several times he caught each of them running their hands over the plush cobalt pillow he knew was reserved for Luc. Which was why he started making excuses to return home on nights when Leo had more energy.

The problem was, Elliott couldn't settle on those nights. He had the dogs to keep him company, so he wasn't exactly lonely, but the house was too quiet, and his mind kept drifting back to what Luc was doing. Increasingly, he was aware that his thoughts turned to Leo as well, and not just because he was concerned about the man's health.

Elliott was quite aware he was attracted to Leo. It had been clear to him the night of their first dinner together after Leo's diagnosis, but he thought it was gratitude for all Leo had done for Luc. Then he thought it had been the beauty of watching Leo and Luc together, of seeing Luc's submission to his Dom. As he'd told Leo, that moment was sublime perfection, but what he hadn't admitted was that it brought to life the flicker of heat Leo's touch awakened in Elliott when they joined hands that first night.

The week he'd spent with Leo while Luc was in LA had fanned that fire, and he'd been debating with himself about saying something ever since Luc returned. Honesty and open communication might be the foundation of this V-relationship and the key to its success, but Elliott didn't want to do anything that would jeopardize its balance. He'd held off bringing the subject up because he didn't want to risk changing what they had. Luc was the love of his life, and Leo's friendship had come to mean the world to him.

In truth, Elliott was also embarrassed to admit to either man how much time he spent watching Leo when they were all together. Leo had a sensuality and ease in his body Elliott hadn't anticipated nor thought he would find as sexy as he did.

That Leo was gorgeous, Elliott had known since the first time he'd seen the man. Now, it went beyond appreciation of a beautiful man to something Elliott wasn't willing to name out loud let alone define for either his husband or Leo. Not to mention how breathtaking Luc was when he and Leo were together.

On nights when Elliott was by himself, his fantasies included Leo more often than not. Him watching Leo play with Luc. The three of them in bed together. Him touching Leo's body, getting to explore the muscular lines of Leo's arms and chest, his strong jaw, run his fingers over those sensuous lips. *Fuck*. The number of times Elliott had jerked himself to completion thinking about the three of them tangled together nearly rivaled when he'd first discovered porn as a teen and couldn't get enough of watching hot guys come all over each other.

So, no, Elliott was not eager to have this conversation with Luc and Leo, but he knew it needed to happen. While there was a chance he could ruin everything by admitting how he felt, *not* talking about it was a bomb that would destroy both relationships if he kept silent.



In mid-July, Leo was feeling well enough that they decided to take a weekend trip to wine country. All three of them needed a break, and the Leonid meteor shower was going to be at its peak. Luc knew a spot north of Healdsburg where the light

pollution from the Bay Area's larger cities wouldn't interfere with their ability to see the stars. Leo booked them an Airbnb that was wheelchair-friendly while Luc asked a coworker at the vet hospital to look after the dogs.

They had a brief discussion about who was going to pay for the trip and finally agreed on Leo taking care of the place, Elliott paying for their meals and wine. Luc insisted on contributing something because he'd gotten his first checks from Zoomies and wanted to mark the occasion, so they decided he would pay for the gas to get them there. Elliott protested that he and Luc had a joint bank account, so the costs weren't evenly split, but Leo pointed out that he was Luc's Dom and responsible for Luc's well-being just like Elliott, so a portion of the rental was for Luc as well, and Elliott knew it wasn't worth the argument.

He was still grumbling about it as they crossed the bridge to San Francisco on their way to pick up Leo. Luc put a hand on his arm and told him to stop. "Sir likes taking care of people. This is his way of saying thank you for everything you've done for him and letting you know how much he enjoys your company."

Despite himself, Elliott's entire body flushed with pleasure at hearing that Leo liked having him at the condo. Guilt followed quickly on its heels, though, and Elliott glanced at Luc and then back at the road.

"What is it, El?" Luc asked. "You do know that Leo is happy he's gotten to know you, right?"

Elliott swallowed hard, the confession rising on his tongue.
“Luc, I...”

At that moment, a Ferrari screamed past them on the left, diving into the lane right in front of them and almost clipping the front of their car.

“Shit!” Luc yelled as Elliott reflexively swerved to the left.
“Fucking entitled tech bro assholes!”

The adrenaline that flooded Elliott’s body drove out all thoughts except for relief there hadn’t been any cars next to them since he hadn’t had time to check his mirrors before changing lanes. It wasn’t until they pulled into the parking space next to Leo’s Tesla that Elliott remembered what he’d been about to say to Luc and decided it was for the best. The conversation needed to happen with all three of them present. Elliott vowed he’d talk to Leo and Luc before the weekend was over.



The place Leo had found for them was a beautiful, old ranch house in the middle of a vineyard in the Russian River Valley. It was a single story with a wraparound porch and a ramp that made it accessible for Leo without assistance.

Elliott still admired how Leo was able to navigate a world that wasn’t set up to accommodate his wheelchair or limited mobility, but he had learned to keep those thoughts to himself. The one time he said something, Leo — kindly and without rancor — pointed out that it was an ableist-centric way of

looking at things. *No one admires you for being able to walk from one place to another or navigate through a store without knocking things over,* he'd said. *Why should I be congratulated for doing what needs to be done to get myself around?*

In the months since, Elliott had become much more aware of the barriers Leo had to negotiate every day to do things he and Luc took for granted, the obstacles they could walk around while Leo had to go out of his way or wait for someone to move the object that blocked his path, the aisles in stores that were too cluttered or narrow for Leo's chair. Obstacles that had been placed in his way by people without mobility issues who didn't consider the world from other points of view. At first, Elliott felt angry and had been tempted to rush to Leo's defense or confront store managers and shove the ADA codes in their faces. Luc calmed him and said that had been his initial reaction as well, but now he recited Leo's mantra — *educate, demonstrate, legislate* — and let Leo handle the situations as he deemed appropriate.

"Just be Leo's friend. Don't try to swaddle his world," Luc had said, and Elliott did his best to curb his white-knight tendencies and concentrated on being a better ally.

He also tried very hard to think of Leo as a friend, but the more time he spent with the man, the more difficult that became. Elliott knew if he didn't talk about it this weekend, it was going to create more problems down the road. With a silent prayer he would know when the right moment presented itself, Elliott followed Luc and Leo into the house.

Leo had insisted on driving, but the trip had taken enough out of him that he needed to rest before they did any exploring. That was fine with both Elliott and Luc. Their hosts had left them with a delicious assortment of cheeses, fruit, and charcuterie, along with a few bottles of their wines and freshly ground coffee from a local roaster, so no one felt the need to rush out to the store or drive to a tasting room.

By mutual agreement, they were sharing the large main bedroom. Luc had been the one to make the request, so he didn't have to choose between his spouse and Dom. Since it was how they spent most nights at Leo's condo, it wasn't a big ask. It made Luc happy, like they were having a slumber party whenever the three of them were together. In truth, Elliott enjoyed having Luc tucked between him and Leo, Luc's head on Leo's chest, his legs entwined with Elliott's, and Leo's hand wrapped in his own. It was the way they'd fallen asleep the first night, and Elliott continued to reach for Leo every night they were all together. Elliott hadn't questioned it until he realized his attraction to Leo wasn't a passing thing, nor was it the product of how wonderful Leo was for Luc.

Several times on the trip north, Elliott found himself looking at Leo and thinking about how it would feel to kiss him, to touch him, to have him reciprocate, as well as the possibilities for the three of them. He wanted to be able to take Leo's hand and hold it just for the pleasure of feeling its warmth and the calluses worn into his skin by the wheels of his chair. He didn't know what he wanted beyond that, didn't let himself think too much about it because he didn't know if

Leo would be interested in a relationship with him since he didn't want a Dom. Nor did he know if Luc would be willing to share Leo or feel as if Elliott was intruding on something that he considered his. The only way to find out was to talk about it.

He wasn't fool enough to think the right moment would present itself by chance. Bringing the topic up needed to be a decision he made deliberately. It might make things awkward, but it would also give them all the best chance to discuss how to move forward. While he didn't want to spoil the weekend, Elliott thought he would do it after dinner.

As a surprise, Elliott had arranged for dinner to be prepared for them by a personal chef who'd come highly recommended by one of his colleagues. Simon specialized in farm-to-table, locally sourced organic meals and worked with Elliott to design a nine-course tasting menu that offered the greatest chance for Leo to enjoy his food. The chemo often left Leo with a metallic taste in his mouth, and there had been very few meals in the past three months he'd truly enjoyed. Simon prepared meals for many people with specialized diets and needs, so Elliott hoped the dishes they'd chosen would be to Leo's liking.

Simon and his assistant arrived at six and began their preparations while Leo was resting in the bedroom. Luc was with him, so Elliott had taken the opportunity to get some reading done and do some class prep for the coming fall semester. He was teaching a graduate survey class that looked at a global cross-section of writing from the fifteenth century.

Many of the texts were obscure, but interest in the subject was high among the doctoral students at Cal because of the perspective it offered on the pre-Columbian world.

He was sitting on the couch, revising his syllabus, when Luc emerged from the bedroom and startled at the sight of Simon bustling around the kitchen.

“Was this your idea or Leo’s?” he asked as he crossed the room.

Elliott closed his book and looked up at his spouse as Luc came to a stop in front of him. “Mine. I thought Leo would appreciate not having to go out tonight.”

After moving Elliott’s laptop to a nearby table, Luc straddled his husband’s legs and wrapped his arms around El’s neck. He gave Elliott a sweet kiss. “You are a wonderful man, Mr. Porter. Every time I think I can’t love you more, you go and do something that makes me so happy to be with you. You’ve been so amazing with Leo. He told me that he’s so glad to have had you with him these past months and thinks that’s one of the reasons he’s doing so well with his treatments.”

Although Luc’s words warmed Elliott, they also made his heart hammer in his chest. *Tonight*, he promised himself as he gathered Luc closer and kissed his husband until Luc began to rock against him.

“I take it all back,” Luc whispered against Elliott’s lips. “You are evil.” But he didn’t pull away.

About the point Elliott was debating if they should wake Leo for dinner, the man emerged from the bedroom. A huge grin broke over his face, and he closed his eyes as he inhaled deeply. “What smells so good?” he asked as he made his way into the living room, where Elliott was still sitting with Luc curled against his side.

“You’ll have to narrow it down,” Elliott said. “There’s consommé, foie gras, duck with black cherry and port wine reduction, venison medallions with wild mushrooms, a sea bass with Dijon and tarragon foam, and four other courses all prepared by our chef for the evening, Simon Etienne.”

“How much do you expect me to eat?” Leo asked.

“As much as you like,” Elliott said. “It’s a small plate tasting menu Simon put together especially for us. He won’t be offended if something doesn’t appeal.”

Simon emerged from the kitchen and asked if they were ready to begin. At Leo’s enthusiastic affirmative, Elliott smiled. He’d done good.

An hour later, they were up to the final entrée course, and they all agreed the dinner had been amazing. Elliott felt content, a growing sense of pleasure in his body as the well-orchestrated courses had built on his senses and awakened an awareness of the texture and scent of what he was eating, as well as its taste and appearance. Simon had brought a variety of wines from the region, moving them from the lightest of whites to the most robust of reds as the dishes demanded, and his pairings were spot-on.

Their conversation had started out on general topics — what wineries they were going to visit the next day, where Luc wanted them to go to watch the meteor shower, how each of their jobs were going — but slowly came to focus on the food as the courses progressed. By the time the chicken dish appeared, they'd been reduced to a list of superlatives about what they were eating, and by the final dish — delicate slices of beef served over a root vegetable puree — words failed each of them, and all they could muster were groans of appreciation.

When Simon asked if they were ready for dessert, those groans turned to protests, and Leo asked if they might delay dessert a bit to give him a chance to recover from the food coma he was falling into. Simon laughed and said he'd be happy to clean up, clear out, and let them enjoy their dessert in private.

“It was a pleasure cooking and serving you tonight, gentlemen.”

Elliott accompanied him to the kitchen to thank him for the extraordinary meal. When he returned to the table, he found that Luc and Leo had moved to the porch. He could see them through the open doors. Leo was stretched out on the chaise and had coffee while Luc sat next to him with a glass of wine, so Elliott poured the rest of the Malbec into his glass and joined them.

“We saw a couple of meteors flash by and decided to come outside,” Luc said as Elliott sat in the chair next to his.

“That was a lovely surprise, Elliott,” Leo said. “Thank you.”

Elliott nodded and took a large swallow of his wine, his heart pounding so hard he was sure the other two could hear it.

“I swear I ate enough for the rest of the weekend,” Luc said and rubbed a hand over his belly. “Look at this food baby.”

“You’re still beautiful, sweetheart,” Leo told him. “But don’t think this gets you out of eating breakfast tomorrow.”

Luc leaned forward so he could give Leo a kiss. “Maybe someone could give me a workout later?”

With a sultry laugh, Leo turned Luc and swatted him on the backside. “That’s about all I’m capable of today, boy. You’re going to have to ask your husband.”

When puppy dog eyes glanced his way, Elliott took another swallow of wine. “Anytime, Luc,” he said, his voice tight with anxiety.

Luc turned toward Elliott, but Leo caught his hand and pulled him back with a nod toward the kitchen. Simon and his assistant were still cleaning up, and Elliott felt his chest warm with gratitude. He’d introduced their chef for the evening as the friend of one of his colleagues, and both Leo and Luc had kept conversation and PDA to what would be appropriate between friends. Poly relationships might be becoming more common and out in the open — at least in San Francisco — but that didn’t mean Elliott wanted his colleagues as a whole to know his personal choices. If the looming conversation went in the direction Elliott hoped, he’d be bringing both Luc

and Leo to department functions and conferences soon enough.

The thought of introducing both of them to some of his stuffier colleagues made Elliott grin. His smile grew even larger as he imagined how his students would react. Professors of antiquities like himself weren't known for testing social mores. The stereotype of white, middle-aged — or older — men who favored classic tweed jackets and more conservative ideas of gender, race, and sexuality was, unfortunately, more often accurate than not. Elliott sometimes joked that one of the reasons Cal hired him was because he'd been in his late twenties and openly gay, rather than the diplomas from Oxford he displayed in his office. If they only knew what his private life looked like or the complication he was contemplating.

He was dimly aware of Simon and his assistant quietly exiting the house but fully distracted from his thoughts by Luc tugging on his hand and urging him to join Leo on the chaise.

“Why are you looking like the cat who ate the canary?” Luc asked as Elliott shifted positions.

He perched on the edge of the cushion alongside Leo's legs, thinking how odd it was that he could feel their warmth even though Leo couldn't. In response to Luc's question, Elliott shrugged. “Just feeling very content at the moment,” he said.

Luc's eyes went soft, and Elliott saw him swallow hard. Beside him, Leo was staring at Elliott, and Elliott risked glancing at him. The intensity and heat he saw aimed his way surprised him, and he held his breath. The air between the

three of them grew heavy, but no one said anything until Luc shouted and pointed at the sky.

A flash of green and gold flared to life overhead, blazing a brilliant trail of fire in its wake.

“Make a wish,” Luc told them. “Quick. Before it burns out.”

Luc needn't have worried. This meteor remained visible long enough for Elliott to send up a silent prayer that his admission wouldn't send his relationship with Luc nor his friendship with Leo crashing to the ground.

Elliott made his wish, and when he opened his eyes, both Luc and Leo were still staring at him. Luc reached out and took hold of Elliott's hand, entwined the fingers of his other hand with Leo's, and Elliott closed the circle by extending his hand to Leo, their palms meeting halfway. He took a deep breath as the heat of Leo's skin burned into his own and tightened his grip on Luc's hand. Luc squeezed back.

For a long moment, the three of them stared at each other, and Elliott took heart from what he saw in their expressions. He took a deep breath, let it out slowly.

“I have a confession,” he said quietly. He suddenly couldn't meet their eyes and looked down at the hand in which he held Leo's, then to the one that held Luc's, and brought them together. Moving closer to the other two men, he brought their hands to his chest and kissed first Luc's and then Leo's. “We have talked about the need for honesty and openness in order for our arrangement to work, but I don't think I can continue with the way things have been for the past two years.”

Luc's eyes immediately filled with tears, and Elliott realized with horror the way his words must have sounded to his husband.

"El...I thought...I..."

"Hush, boy," Leo said gently. "Let your husband speak. I have a feeling his confession might match the one I was planning to make as well." He looked at Elliott, eyes intense, but a slight smile of encouragement curved the corners of his mouth upward. "At least, I hope so."

Elliott felt a wild rush of excitement burn through him, and then it doubled when Luc turned to him and asked, "Is that true?"

"I think so," Elliott answered. His gaze focused on Leo. "I am not into kink or submission, and we've talked about your lack of interest in relationships that don't include those elements, but Leo, I am attracted to you. Very attracted. I have been for a while, to be fully honest. You amaze me. Your spirit, your passion, your generosity. You're gorgeous inside and out, and you care so much about Luc. Every time we're together, I fall a little bit more for you. I'm scared shitless I'm going to mess all of this up and lose both of you, but if you're willing to give this a try as a triad, I'd like to see where we can go together."

"Sir?" Luc whispered and turned to face Leo, who hadn't taken his eyes off Elliott.

Leo tugged on Elliott's hand to get him to move closer, and Elliott went willingly. He scooted forward so his knees

bumped against Luc's, but that wasn't close enough for Leo, who gave him the full force of his Dom stare. Never having been the recipient of that look, Elliott felt his breath hitch and swallowed hard. He also moved closer, his legs draped over Luc's thighs, and then leaned in. Only then did Leo let go of his hand and gently cupped Elliott's face in his palm. He stroked his thumb over Elliott's lips.

"You have no idea how often I have thought about kissing you, do you?" Leo turned his head then without letting go of Elliott and brought Luc's hand to his lips. He laid a soft kiss on Luc's fingers. "Would you like this, boy? To see Elliott and me together?"

"Yes, Sir." Luc's eyes were shining. "I'd like that more than I can say. I won't lie, I've thought about it since we had dinner the day of your diagnosis. I love both of you so much I can't imagine you don't love each other as well already."

Leo kissed Luc's fingers again, then turned his attention back to Elliott. "I've never had a successful non-D/s relationship," he said. "And you're signing up for a potential heartbr—"

Elliott stalled Leo's final word by kissing his palm, then took hold of his hand and leaned forward until they were nose to nose. "Do not finish that thought, Leo. I know what I'm asking for. I know what I'm signing up for. And I don't care. The only thing that concerns me is hurting you or destroying what I have with Luc."

“That’s not possible, El,” Luc said and crowded against the other two men until their foreheads were all touching. “You’d hurt me more if you weren’t true to yourself and how you feel. And, Sir, if the past three months haven’t shown you how much Elliott already cares for you, then I might have to rethink how intelligent I think you are.” He laughed when Leo growled. “Sorry, Sir.”

Leo laughed as well, then sobered. “In all seriousness, though, there is a lot we need to talk about and figure out, but right now, I would like to kiss both of you.”

“I’d like that too,” Elliott said.

“Then come here and let me finally discover how you taste.”

Heart full, Elliott closed the remaining distance between himself and Leo. If he’d thought the feel of Leo’s hand in his had been electric, it was nothing compared to how it felt to touch those plush lips, then open to allow Leo to explore him and discover that Leo tasted like warm caramel and smelled of vanilla and rich musk. And when Luc’s fingers teased along Elliott’s jaw and his teeth nibbled at Elliott’s ear...he groaned at how quickly he became turned on. From the sounds both Luc and Leo made, the feeling was mutual.

It felt a bit like trying to get pieces in a jigsaw puzzle to fit before they figured out how to have all three of them on the chaise in a way that allowed them to kiss and explore and didn’t crush Leo. Elliott was cautious, learning how to touch

Leo in ways the man found pleasurable, but worried about doing something that would hurt him.

“You’re so sexy,” he murmured as he took Leo’s mouth once again.

Luc’s hand snaked under Elliott’s shirt, fingers teasing over El’s ribs and up to his chest, where he rolled one of Elliott’s nipples between his thumb and index finger, pulling on the small nub, then squeezing. If Elliott thought he’d been hard before, it was nothing compared to how his cock ached now. He could feel it weeping with precum, and his hips punched forward in response, rocking him against Leo’s side.

“What can I do?” Luc whispered as his fingers continued to explore Elliott’s body.

“Come here, boy.” Leo broke free of Elliott’s mouth, leaving El momentarily bereft until Leo’s hand inched its way under the back of his shirt. Luc’s fingers still worked over the sensitive skin on his chest — rolling, pinching, teasing — while Leo’s began tracing the lines of his back, following the groove of his spine, the ridges of his shoulder blades. Elliott got the distinct impression that Leo was mapping his sensitive spots and committing them to memory, and he was happy to help Leo find them. He arched his back and rolled his shoulders to get more contact with his hands while Leo plundered Luc’s mouth.

Elliott gave himself up to watching them while their hands roamed his body. If he’d thought Luc kneeling for Leo had been beautiful, it was nothing compared to how his husband

gave himself over to his lover. And to watch them while they explored him...Elliott swallowed hard. It was easily the most erotic moment of his life.

He had no expectations about how far they would go this evening or over the weekend, not only because this was new for all of them and they hadn't had a chance to talk yet, but because of how much Leo's body could take. Between his paralysis and fatigue, Elliott knew they might be pushing Leo's physical limits, but he trusted the man to tell them if he needed to stop, just like he trusted Luc to let him know if something wasn't right for him.

It was an odd position to be in with a new lover. Thanks to all the processing he did with Luc, Leo was at once an unknown and also familiar, but there was a difference between hearing about what Leo and Luc did and getting to have a front-row seat; not just a seat, actually — he was part of the show. Elliott's stomach fluttered a bit at the thought, even as he leaned forward and traced Leo's ear with the tip of his tongue, knowing it was something the man liked.

The sound that came from Leo's mouth was like nothing Elliott had ever heard before. It was a low growl followed by a breathless gasp as Leo's neck arched beneath El's hand.

Luc chuckled. "You found Sir's G-spot on the first try."

"Boy."

With a sharp flick of his tongue, Elliott's laugh was deep and sinuous. He glanced at his husband, who was staring at him with naked hunger, pupils so blown in his dark eyes they

looked completely black. Elliott nodded his head and winked, and Luc, understanding, shifted his focus to the lobe of Leo's other ear, pulling the bit of flesh into his mouth and teasing at it with his tongue.

“Oh fuck,” Leo exhaled.

Both Elliott and Luc chuckled...and continued teasing at Leo with little nips down his neck and gentle caresses on the sensitive parts of his ears until the man was shuddering in their arms. As if by mutual agreement, they broke apart and stared at each other. Luc snuggled under Leo's left arm, his own resting casually across Leo's stomach. He grinned up at Elliott.

“Is that what you wanted, El?”

“It's a good start.”

Leo ran his fingers through Elliott's close-cropped hair. “I think someone has an advantage.” He swatted Luc's backside with his other hand.

“You were the one who insisted El and I talk, Sir. I always do what you tell me to.”

“That might get you a spanking, brat. You're not supposed to lie to your Sir.”

“I wasn't lying.” Luc tried to sit up, but Leo was able to restrain him easily, and Elliott was once again struck by the power in Leo's upper body. He hadn't gotten a chance to fully explore, but it was high on the list of things he'd like to do this weekend. He'd seen enough of those muscles while staying

with Leo; now, he was finally going to get a chance to explore them with his hands and taste them with his tongue.

“You always do what I tell you? Always?”

Luc rolled his eyes and settled himself back into the crook of Leo’s arm. “Well, okay. I always *try* to do what you tell me to do, Sir.”

Elliott grinned as Leo leaned over and kissed Luc. He’d been worried that he would confuse their dynamic, but he was happy to see that didn’t seem to be the case. Nor was he going to let Leo’s presence inhibit his desire for his husband. While they kissed, Elliott reached across Leo’s lap and undid the button on Luc’s jeans, drew down the zipper, and slid his hand inside.

The front of Luc’s briefs was damp, and he was rock hard. Elliott traced the outline of Luc’s cock with his fingers, teasing at the tender flesh exposed as the thin fabric stretched to encompass it. Luc moaned into Leo’s mouth and rocked against Elliott’s hand, seeking more contact, more friction.

Elliott chuckled at the same time as Leo, and then Leo’s fingers dipped below Elliott’s waistband and began caressing the skin at the base of his spine, teasing as they moved lower.

“Oh, fuck,” Elliott breathed out. He closed his eyes and leaned his head against Leo’s shoulder, rocking his hips forward so Leo could have more access.

With Luc’s cock in his hand and Leo teasing at his ass while Luc squirmed and whimpered, Elliott was about to go out of

his mind. The chaise wasn't built for three people who wanted to explore each other's bodies, and the more turned on he got, the more frustrated he became until he finally threw back his head and said, "Stop."

Leo's fingers instantly disappeared, which Elliott regretted even as he felt grateful for how quickly Leo responded.

"What's wrong, El?" Leo asked.

When Elliott opened his eyes, he found the other two men staring at him, concern etched in their features.

"Can we take this to the bedroom? Please."

"Yes, please," Luc echoed.

For a moment, Leo seemed to hesitate, but then he leaned forward and kissed Elliott on the lips. "Okay. Bring me my chair, boy."

Luc swung his legs off the chaise and was about to stand when Elliott reached out to stop him. He stared into Leo's eyes, those eyes that were as blue as the ocean and that crackled with intelligence and humor. There was something he wanted, and he hoped Leo wouldn't react badly to it.

"I'd like, very much, to carry you," he said.

"Oh," Luc breathed out, and Elliott knew Luc was remembering how El had carried him into their honeymoon suite on their wedding night. It had been silly and romantic, but Elliott had loved the feeling of Luc in his arms. He wanted to repeat that with Leo to indicate that this time, when the three of them got into bed, it wasn't to go to sleep.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

Leo

Leo stared into Elliott's eyes. If eyes truly were the windows to the soul, then Elliott was guileless, his emotions so present Leo would have to be blind not to recognize that this was not a simple request. The whole time Elliott stayed with him while Luc was in LA, he'd been mindful that Leo was a perfectly abled person. Leo also knew enough about Elliott now to understand that gestures like this had meanings that went deeper than what they appeared to be on the surface. So, this was about more than getting Leo from the patio to the bedroom. From the way Luc was watching him, it was about much more than transportation for both him and his husband.

"Please, Sir," Luc whispered as the silence lengthened between them, and Leo finally nodded.

He was rewarded with broad smiles from both Elliott and Luc, and then both men leaned in and kissed him, which delayed leaving the patio a bit as they took more time exploring each other. Leo marveled at how familiar Elliott already felt, how they fit together as easily as he and Luc did. Easier even because it had taken the two of them months to work out their physical dynamic once they recognized their attraction wasn't just about dominance and submission but a sexual one as well. Perhaps...but then Elliott cupped Leo's jaw and kissed him with a depth and thoroughness Leo swore

he felt in his toes, even though that was a physical impossibility.

When they broke apart, Leo stared up at Elliott, raised his hand to trace the lips that had just been kissing him so thoroughly he'd forgotten how to think. "Take me to bed, El."

Luc was on his feet first, taking charge of Leo's chair, while Elliott stood and asked Leo the best way to pick him up.

"Slide one arm under my legs, put the other around my shoulders, and lift from your knees. I'll put my arms around your neck like a bride."

Elliott beamed. "Exactly like a bride," he said, and Leo immediately understood why this was so important to the other two men.

"Ah," he said.

"El carried me like this after our wedding. It was very romantic."

"And you were very silly," Elliott said, then looked down at Leo. "Are you ready?"

"As I'll ever be." Leo didn't think the butterflies in his stomach were just because Elliott was about to pick him up. They were about to embark on an entirely new phase in their relationship with each other, and Elliott was using this ritual to mark the occasion.

"Relax, Sir," Luc said as Elliott's arms came around Leo. "Being in El's arms always makes me feel safe."

Leo nodded, but he still tensed as Elliott lifted him. When he put his arms around El's neck, it was as much for stability as to get closer to the man. As they began to move into the house, Leo glanced over Elliott's shoulder.

"How were you silly on your wedding night, boy?" he asked, and Elliott snorted. The mischievous grin Luc gave him told him his boy had been a brat.

"I tried to tickle him. El's got a ticklish spot right..." Luc reached forward.

"Luc, don't you dare," Elliott said at the same time Leo gave his boy a stern look.

"I wasn't going to touch you, El."

"Sure you weren't."

Luc pretended to pout while Leo shook his head, then rested it against Elliott's shoulder. No doubt about it, his boy was a brat, and Leo didn't doubt for an instant that he wouldn't have tickled Elliott if given the chance. El's protective growl had been almost Dom-worthy, and it gave Leo a curious feeling in his stomach. The man's arms felt wonderful as he cradled him. It had been a long time since Leo had let someone take care of him like this, and as Elliott carried him through the living room and into the bedroom, Leo found himself lulled by the gentle rocking of his stride and the sound of his heart beating beneath Leo's ear.

With a slight lift of his chin, he was able to see over Elliott's shoulder and watch Luc without losing contact with El. The

expression on Luc's face was one of contentment and bliss. He smiled and found himself cradled by more than just Elliott's arms when Luc smiled back like a kid who'd unwrapped a present and found the very thing he'd been wanting for forever. Leo was captivated by that smile and knew he was enfolded by the love Luc had for both him and El. He was equally cherished by the bond between El and Luc and the connection the three of them shared. It struck him how blind they'd all been to the fact that they'd been in a relationship with each other for the past two years, a devoted relationship that transcended the V Luc had forged with Leo and his husband. It didn't matter that Leo and Elliott only knew each other in passing. They loved each other through the conduit of Luc's feelings for each of them.

Leo could feel that tenderness and passion emanating from the strength and sureness of Elliott's arms as they held his body. In practical terms, it was much too early to give voice to those deeper feelings. Leo knew this and wasn't in any danger of blurting them out, but at the same time, he had to wonder why he and Elliott had kept away from each other for so long. It was almost as if they'd recognized, on a subconscious level, what the future held and wanted to let the relationship with Luc get established before adding something that could become very complicated to it.

At that thought, Leo lifted his head and stared at Elliott. "Thank you," he said.

"For what?" Elliott asked.

“For trusting me. And for trusting Luc enough to speak up, for giving us a chance to have this.”

Elliott’s smile was gentle as he looked down at Leo and held his gaze for a moment before he responded, “How could I not?”

He stopped on the threshold to the bedroom and glanced over his shoulder at Luc. “Come here, sweetheart,” he said and waited until Luc came up alongside them.

With a sureness of movement that didn’t make Leo worry he was going to topple to the floor, Elliott leaned over slightly and kissed his husband, then bent his head and kissed Leo. He rested his forehead against Leo’s, and Luc moved in to do the same.

“I just want to check before we cross a line we can’t uncross. Are you both sure this is what you want?”

Luc rolled his eyes. “Oh my God, El. You’re killing me. Yes. Yes, this is what I want. The three of us. On that bed in there. Getting hot and sweaty with each other.”

“Patience, boy,” Leo said but smiled when Luc pouted.

After giving his spouse an affectionate kiss, Elliott fixed Leo with a look that had Leo’s blood turning to fire. “And you?” he asked.

“I do,” Leo replied with a grin.

“God help me, I thought Luc was the only brat,” El said, but he was smiling as he gave Leo a quick kiss. “All right then. As long as we’re on the same page.”

With that, Elliott took that final step over the threshold.

Leo's heart began to beat harder in his chest as Elliott carried him toward the bed. He wasn't used to not being in charge, not being the one to direct what would happen, but it thrilled and aroused him. As Elliott placed him in the center of the bed, Leo laid his head back on the pillows and reveled in how cherished he felt by Elliott's attention. His gaze slid to Luc, and the hunger he saw in his boy's eyes drew a groan from his throat.

"What would you like us to do, Leo?" Elliott asked.

Without a pause, Leo told them he wanted to watch as they kissed and undressed each other. "I've pictured it so many times I want to see how close my fantasies come to the reality."

"Luc?" Elliott turned to face his spouse, and Luc stepped in front of El without hesitation.

"Reporting for duty! Sir!" Luc snapped off a quick salute. "And ready for some action."

With a grin, Elliott reached out a hand and drew Luc to him. "Come here, beautiful."

Elliott ran his fingers along Luc's jaw and then tangled them in his curls while Luc wrapped his arms around Elliott's waist and tilted his head up. "I love you, El." His voice was already rough with desire, and Leo had a fleeting thought of how strange it was to already know everything about Luc's voice, his body, the way he responded when he was aroused, even

though this was the first time they would all be together, and then he didn't care because Elliott and Luc were kissing, and they were gorgeous.

“God, I want you,” Elliott gasped out as Luc slid his hands under El's shirt and then down the back of his jeans.

They were all in a state of disarray from the make-out session on the chaise. They'd left their clothes as they were when they decided to move indoors, which meant that Luc could get his hands on Elliott's ass without hindrance. Elliott whined as he devoured Luc's mouth, his hips thrusting forward. Then his back arched, and his head came up, and Leo knew Luc was teasing at Elliott's hole. If Leo had been worried Elliott would be inhibited or shy in front of him, he needn't have been. Elliott thrust back against Luc's fingers, then suddenly jerked away.

“Stop,” he gasped. “Shit. Stop, or I'm going to come.”

“Get on the bed,” Luc growled. He glanced at Leo. “May he put his head on your lap, Sir?”

That Luc remembered their protocols at this moment meant more to Leo than he could have expressed out loud. As it was, he nodded mutely.

“On your back, El. Legs over the edge, head on Leo's thigh.”

Elliott moved to comply, but Leo told him to stop. “Clothes off,” he said. “Both of you.” And he was gratified when both

Elliott and Luc began a slow tease of removing each other's clothing while they kept their gazes fixed on him.

"Do you like what you see, Sir?" Luc asked as he unbuttoned Elliott's shirt and pushed it off his shoulders.

"Very much." Even to his own ears, Leo's voice was husky, tight with the desire that was lighting a fire in his belly. He'd been right about the way El would look beneath his clothes, and he couldn't wait to run his hands over that lightly sculpted chest and abs. Then Luc slipped his hands inside Elliott's jeans, pushed them down his legs, taking the denim and El's briefs with them, and Leo just about forgot his own name. He'd seen the man's gorgeous legs before but never all of him, and never naked and hard.

"You're stunning," he breathed and was rewarded with the flush that came to Elliott's cheeks. The man was beautiful with his long, lean frame. His muscles were defined but not overly developed and his chest lightly furred with the same sandy-blond hair that covered his head. His cock was long and stood out from the trimmed hair at his groin. "Come here."

Elliott crawled across the mattress, his cock already rigid, swaying between his legs as he moved. Leo swallowed and forced himself to meet Elliott's gaze as the man approached.

"May I kiss you?" he asked.

"Of course."

Elliott's lips were velvet, soft and warm, that seemed to melt against his. As he opened to El's questing tongue, Leo put

his arms around Elliott's neck to pull him closer. He wanted more contact, more of the wonderful contradiction of something that was at once both new and incredibly familiar.

As they kissed, Leo was aware of Luc moving behind Elliott, but it seemed El had been completely focused on Leo because he suddenly broke contact with a yelp of surprise, then groaned deeply. Leo glanced over his shoulder, but all he could see was the top of Luc's head and his hands curled around Elliott's thighs.

"Oh, shit, Luc," Elliott gasped. He closed his eyes and lowered his mouth to Leo's, kissing and moaning as Luc rimmed him.

Leo knew the moment Luc's tongue slid through the tight ring of muscle because Elliott lost the rhythm of their kiss as he groaned and panted. He rested his forehead against Leo's, eyes squeezed tight until he gasped, eyes flying open, head thrown back. A wicked chuckle from Luc let Leo know he'd slipped a couple of fingers into Elliott's ass, and he suddenly wanted to see the two men together. It would have to wait, though. His boy had plans for Elliott, and Leo was eager to see what they were.

He'd rarely — if ever — been with a couple who was so in tune with each other, so fluid and at ease with their sexual roles. While Luc was a willing and enthusiastic sub, it also seemed his boy was a fantastic service bottom who wasn't shy about taking control to give Elliott what the man wanted.

“Oh, God,” Elliott groaned out. “Oh, God. Oh, fuck. Luuuuuuc.”

Another evil chuckle, and then Luc stood, the disheveled mop of his curls appearing over Elliott’s shoulder. “On your back, El.”

Without hesitation, Elliott flipped over and pillowed his head against Leo’s thigh.

Somehow, Luc had managed to drive his husband to the brink of orgasm while shedding the rest of his clothing and now stood beside the bed, completely naked. His lithe body was covered in a sheen of sweat, his face flushed from his recent exertions, and he was practically glowing. The cock Leo knew well was hard, the head shiny with precum.

“Come here, boy,” Leo rumbled.

Grinning, Luc straddled Elliott’s thighs and knee-walked his way over his husband’s body until he could lean in and let Leo kiss him. His hum of approval turned to a gasp, and Leo chuckled, knowing the temptation of Luc’s cock waving in his face had probably been too much for Elliott to resist. Leo didn’t blame him, but he still smacked Luc on the ass.

Luc yelped and pulled back, then sat astride Elliott’s hips, his shaft wet with El’s spit. With feigned indignation, he rubbed his ass cheek and pouted at Leo.

“Don’t pretend you didn’t enjoy that, boy.”

“I won’t, Sir, but next time, you might want to warn El. I nearly rammed my dick down his throat.”

“Maybe you should make it up to your husband, boy.”

“I didn’t mind,” Elliott said.

“Hush.” Leo laid a gentle hand across El’s mouth. “My boy needs to learn to be more careful. Don’t you, boy?”

Luc grinned, but then he shifted around so his ass was in front of Elliott’s face and his back to Leo. He looked over his shoulder. “You don’t get to watch, Sir,” he said playfully and stuck out his tongue before he leaned down and swallowed Elliott’s dick right down to the root.

With a deep groan, Elliott pushed his head back on Leo’s thigh. Leo leaned over and kissed El while Luc went to work on his cock, head bobbing up and down as he did his best to drive Elliott over the edge.

Leo lifted his head but stayed close to Elliott, enjoying the sounds the man was making and the view of Luc’s ass muscles flexing, as well as the teasing glimpses of his hole. With a wink to El, Leo reached out and ran his fingers down the crack between Luc’s cheeks. Luc whined, and Elliott groaned.

“You don’t get to come, boy,” Leo reminded Luc. “Not until I tell you to.”

He thought he heard Luc hum, but he couldn’t tell if it was in pleasure or agreement with the command from his Dom. In truth, he didn’t care much. If Luc came, it just meant he’d get to punish his boy, while if he managed to stave off his orgasm, Leo would reward him. With a wicked chuckle, Leo put his fingers to Elliott’s mouth. It was his turn to groan when El

sucked them in without hesitation, getting them nice and slick so Leo could return them to tease at Luc's hole.

Luc gave another whine as Leo slid one finger inside his ass, which made Elliott breathe out a string of curses, then turn his head so he could capture Leo's mouth with his own.

It became a feedback loop of mounting desire: the more Leo teased at Luc, the harder Luc worked to get Elliott off, and the more desperate Elliott sounded, which only aroused Leo more.

When Elliott broke off their kiss to slick up one of his own fingers, Leo paused. And when El slid his finger inside Luc's hole alongside his own and Luc arched his back, his groan echoing into the room, Leo thought he'd never had a more erotic moment in his life. These men — *his* men — were amazing.

He'd have taken a moment to figure out how to drive them out of their minds, but Elliott's finger was caressing his as they both stroked at Luc's channel, and El was nuzzling toward Leo again, asking for more of their deep kisses. Leo was only too happy to comply, bringing their mouths together, then opening so Elliott's tongue could explore. And Leo realized they were already doing a damn good job of turning each other on. He felt like his blood had turned to fire, and the steady thrum of arousal throughout his upper body was unlike anything he'd ever felt.

Luc's body was suddenly racked with tremors, which Leo knew was him desperately trying to stave off his own orgasm. Evil Dom that he was, Leo pushed another finger into Luc's

hole, stretching the rim to accommodate it, then crooked his fingers to nail Luc's prostate.

The wail that filled the room was almost inhuman.

Luc lifted off Elliott's cock, his back bowing and his curls cascading between his shoulder blades. He shoved his ass back on Leo and Elliott's fingers, begging for more, but Leo denied him. Luc was flying, and Leo wanted Elliott to see how perfect his husband was when he was fully immersed in subspace.

"Turn around, boy. Show Elliott how beautiful you are."

Leo gave Luc a last stroke with his fingers, then withdrew, and El did the same. When Luc turned, Elliott gasped. Luc was not merely stunning in subspace; he was a wrecked and debauched angel. His face was slick with spit and tears, his lips swollen and reddened, and his chest heaved, which made his engorged cock bob up and down, the head turned nearly purple and weeping a constant stream of precum.

"Can I touch him?" Elliott whispered to Leo, the awe in his voice making it clear how deeply he was affected by the bliss that was clear in every inch of Luc's body and the exquisite expression on his face.

"Of course."

Elliott reached up and traced Luc's jaw, his lips, murmuring words of love, telling Luc how cherished he was, how beautiful. It wasn't long before Leo realized Elliott was crying as well and felt tears well up in his own eyes.

“Let El taste you, boy,” Leo commanded and felt his body flush with pleasure as Luc rose to his knees and moved closer until he could slide his cock into Elliott’s waiting mouth. Both men groaned, and Elliott took hold of himself and began to stroke his shaft in time to Luc’s thrusts. It didn’t take long for Luc to beg for release.

“Please...Sir....” he panted. “Please.”

Leo took a breath. He didn’t want this to end, but he knew Luc was too close to the point of no return to make him wait much longer. But then, he also knew this wasn’t going to be the only time they were together. They were only getting started.

“Come, boy. Come for your Sir and your El.”

Luc barely had time to breathe out a thank-you before his wail filled the room again and his body went rigid as he spilled into Elliott’s mouth. With a deep groan, Elliott toppled over the edge as well, his hips stuttering as cum coated his fist.

As the last aftershocks of his climax faded, Luc swayed and crumpled to the mattress. Elliott rolled to the side and maneuvered his sex-drunk spouse into lying against Leo’s side, then spooned him from behind. Leo used his arms to lie down facing the two men, his arm across Luc’s waist. Elliott immediately clasped their hands together. He laid gentle kisses on Luc’s shoulders while Luc purred, drifting on the wave of endorphins that had flooded his body and pushed his mind into subspace.

They lay without speaking for nearly half an hour, the only sound an occasional gentle murmur of comfort or praise. Hands caressed and drew lazy circles over arms and chests, traced lips and cheeks. Luc had gone deep into subspace, and Leo knew he would likely fall asleep before emerging from the dreamy place his mind went during their play sessions.

Except, this hadn't been a play session. This had been... Leo didn't even have a term for what they'd just done.

"I had no idea," Elliott murmured, and Leo raised his head a bit so he could see El's face.

"Is it always like this for the two of you?" Elliott asked.

"No." Leo swallowed. "This was...it was... It was more than I've ever experienced before." He lifted his hand from Luc's waist and touched Elliott's face. He traced the line of his cheekbones and scraped his fingertips along the stubble that lightly furred Elliott's jaw. "It's always been wonderful with Luc, but this...it was something more."

Elliott nodded. "It was. For me too."

"And me," Luc chimed in without opening his eyes. He snuggled closer to Leo, then reached over and pulled Elliott tighter against his back and ass. "I'm still floating."

"I know, boy. Just rest."

Luc draped an arm across Leo's chest, then frowned as he plucked at the fabric of Leo's polo shirt. "You're still dressed, Sir."

"It's fine. I'll get myself ready for bed in a bit."

Shaking off the other men's arms, Luc sat up and faced Leo. "It's not fine, Sir. El needs to see how beautiful you are." He lifted the hem of Leo's shirt. "Please, Sir?"

"Luc..." Elliott had sat up as well. He put his arms around his husband. "It's okay."

But Leo could see it wasn't okay. Doubt had clouded Elliott's lively hazel eyes, and Leo was instantly ashamed. Elliott had gifted Leo with his willingness to allow Luc to fully experience his sexuality. He'd been willing to risk his marriage and happiness because of his love for Luc, and in doing so, he'd given Leo more than Leo could have imagined requesting of anyone. Not only that, but Elliott had also given Leo himself tonight. He'd braved the possibility of damaging his relationship with his spouse, of hurting both Luc and Leo as well as himself, by declaring his attraction to Leo, and then he had joyfully connected the three of them through his passion. How could he meet Elliott's bravery with anything less than his own?

"Will you help me, El?" Leo asked Elliott and held out his arms as if he were a child needing a parent's help to undress. Only he wasn't a child. He was a man, reaching for his lover and letting himself be vulnerable. He saw when the impact of his words registered in Elliott's mind, the slight widening of El's eyes, the parting of his lips, and then the quick nod.

"Of course."

Elliott kissed Luc, their foreheads touching for a brief moment before Elliott rose from the bed and came around to

Leo's side. Instead of immediately reaching for Leo's shirt, Elliott knelt beside the bed. He rose up on his knees and took Leo's hands in his own, then gently raised them to his lips and kissed each finger before he stood again and drew the shirt from Leo's body.

His fingers skimmed Leo's exposed chest, testing, teasing, finding the spots where Leo was most sensitive. There were places on Leo's body that were extremely sensitive to touch, that aroused him when Luc caressed those places. But as Elliott continued to caress and explore, Leo felt his entire upper body become an erogenous zone.

He groaned when Elliott skimmed his fingers along his collar bone, traced the tendons in his neck, the outline of his ear. When El leaned down and teased at his earlobe with his tongue, Leo closed his eyes and rolled his head to give the man better access, and he felt tension build in his belly, a whirl of energy that seemed to expand as Elliott explored more of his body.

"You're beautiful, Leo," Elliott murmured as he nuzzled the skin just beneath Leo's left ear. "May I see all of you?"

Leo opened his eyes and turned his head so he could meet Elliott's gaze. It was reverent, awed, and heated with desire. He swallowed. It was a line he let so few people cross, an intimacy far greater than sex. If he said no, he knew Elliott would respect it, but, he realized, he didn't want to say no.

Another swallow, and he nodded. His reward was a radiant smile from Elliott and a happy wiggle as Luc leaned in to give

him a kiss on the cheek.

“Thank you.” Elliott leaned down and pressed his lips against Leo’s. It was a kiss of gratitude, of promise, an offering that wrapped itself around Leo’s heart and told him everything would be okay.

“Please,” he whispered and watched another smile spread across Elliott’s face.

“Luc?” El turned to his husband. “Help me, please?”

Working together, the two men drew Leo’s pants from his waist and down his legs. Leo heard the denim land on the floor, but he was completely captivated by the expressions on his boyfriends’ — *yes, they were both his boyfriends now* — faces as his legs came into view.

Elliott stroked his fingers along Leo’s thighs as Luc hooked his fingers into Leo’s briefs and pulled them down, exposing all of him to Elliott’s gaze, but Elliott didn’t look away or stop touching him, tracing his scars, caressing his thighs. Even if Leo couldn’t feel a thing, he could still see everything Elliott was doing. The sight of Elliott loving his body took Leo’s breath away.

Once he was fully naked, Elliott did the most extraordinary thing. He turned and began kissing Leo’s feet, stroking his hands over them as he pressed kisses to the skin of his toes, his ankles, his shins.

“You know I can’t feel any of that?” Leo asked, but the huskiness of his voice belied the effect it was having on him.

“I know,” Elliott said, barely pausing in his advance up Leo’s body.

“Then why...?”

The question made Elliott stop. He rested his chin on Leo’s thigh and stared at him intently.

“Do you enjoy watching Luc when he jerks off for you?”

“Yes, but...”

“Haven’t there been times you asked him to do that only so you could watch him?” And Leo finally understood what Elliott was saying. He smiled, and El smiled in return. “Then hush and let me make love to you. Your body is extraordinary, and I want to know it as well as I know Luc’s. I want you to feel pleasure at watching me touch you.”

Elliott waited until Leo gave him a nod, then resumed his explorations, his caresses and kisses slowly working their way up Leo’s body until he was nuzzling at Leo’s cock, which lay flaccid against his right thigh.

“I rarely get hard,” Leo said, but Elliott didn’t stop running his nose along Leo’s sack, trailing his tongue into the hollow between it and his thigh.

“You smell amazing,” Elliott sighed and motioned for Luc to mirror him on Leo’s left side.

Occasionally, Leo felt a bit of sensation in his cock and balls — the damage to his spinal column was low enough to allow for that — but it was muted, almost like an echo or a ghost of what he’d known before the accident. Sometimes he

thought it was like phantom pain, his brain responding to what it knew it should feel, even though the messages his nerves sent could no longer reach it.

He knew this, and yet, as Elliott and Luc continued to mouth him and touch him, he swore his body was responding. Not enough to get hard, and not enough for an orgasm, but it was there. A slight tingle that made his stomach clench and his heart beat faster.

And then Elliott was shifting, his touches and the slight nips from his teeth rising up Leo's hips, crossing the line that marked the boundary on his body where real feeling began. It was definite and sharp enough to make Leo groan.

Luc remained focused on his lower body while Elliott had raised up on an elbow so he could watch Leo's face as he teased at Leo's nipples. Leo arched into his touch, but Elliott settled him back to the mattress. Then Luc was beside him, taking Leo's other nipple into his mouth and sucking, teasing at the nub with his tongue, while Elliott continued to stroke his body and face.

“Let go, Sir,” Luc whispered in his ear. “Let us love you.”

In truth, Leo hadn't been aware of the tension in his body. He'd been so captivated by the beauty of the two men on either side of him, so mesmerized by the way they moved and the sight of his lower body being...*worshipped* — it was the only word Leo could think of — that he hadn't realized he'd been waiting for them to pull away, to decide they'd had enough of this activity and move on. But no, they were doing

this *for* him, not *to* him, and at Luc's words, he sank back against the pillow and closed his eyes. He allowed his brain to exist only in the realm of sensation and let himself float on waves of arousal and joy that rose to a peak. He cried out at the sensation and was soothed by Luc's and Elliott's kisses. They continued touching and kissing until all three of them were content and sated and burrowed under the covers to sleep, Leo cradled in the middle.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

Leo

Leo's fourth round of chemo came three weeks after the weekend in wine country, and it left him feeling drained and fragile. His doctor had warned him that each treatment had to be taken on its own and that the effect was often cumulative. *You're at your strongest when we start*, the oncologist had said. *Each subsequent treatment takes more out of you, so, as well as things are going, they might not stay that way. And if it doesn't, remember that it's not your fault. You haven't failed chemo if you find your side effects increase as we move forward.*

The fatalist in Leo had been waiting for this because life — cancer and chemo aside — had been so good lately, and it seemed inevitable that his body would do something to remind him how much he was at its mercy. He tried to keep his frustration away from Elliott and Luc as best he could, but it was difficult.

In the time since their mutual declarations and decision to change their relationship to a triad, they hadn't had much of an opportunity to explore what that meant. Physical intimacy had been limited due to Leo's health and fatigue, though there had been changes in the way they interacted. Elliott accompanied Luc to Leo's condo more often than not. They snuggled on the couch while Luc either sat on his cushion at Leo's feet or next to his husband. Kisses happened often, caresses as well, but

Leo chafed at the inability to do more with Luc or test Elliott's boundaries.

Leo also spent time at Luc and Elliott's house as well, but the Craftsman wasn't set up to accommodate his chair, which meant Elliott and Luc slept upstairs, and Leo's nights were spent alone in the downstairs guest room. He had no idea how active Elliott and Luc were with each other when they were by themselves because no one was talking about it, but he suspected they weren't having sex as often as they had before the trip to wine country. There was tension between them that hadn't been there before, and he worried he was the cause of it.

The fact that he didn't *know* was another area of concern because it meant they weren't talking as much as they should, but Leo didn't have the energy to take this on. He had to trust they would say something if they were unhappy with the situation. The irony wasn't lost on Leo that, as much as he expected those two to speak up, he wasn't initiating any conversations either, but he blamed that on his reaction to the latest round of chemo. He didn't have the energy for anything except healing, and he was worried that he'd upset this delicate balance the three of them had established.

A week after his chemo, Leo was starting to feel more like himself. He wasn't throwing up anymore and could actually keep down some of the delicious soup Elliott had made for him. After their dinner in wine country, Elliott had hired Simon to do menu planning for the three of them, and the result had been a succession of meals that both tempted Leo's

erratic appetite and nurtured his body. Leo was incredibly touched by the gesture and grateful Elliott understood Leo's needs. On nights when he was on his own with only the night nurse for company, Leo could feel Elliott's affection with every bite he was able to manage.

Life was good.

Which was why it didn't really surprise Leo when he developed a sore on the back side of his right thigh. Apparently, a fold of fabric no one noticed had gotten caught under his leg and rubbed the skin raw. Because Leo was always sitting or lying down, his legs, buttocks, and back were highly susceptible to sores. The paralysis in his legs kept any sensory information from reaching his brain, even something as important as discomfort or pain. In addition, his reduced circulation gave even the smallest skin abrasion the potential for developing an infection. Add in the compromised and overworked state of his immune system, and it was a wonder it had taken this long for something to develop.

Leo suspected the night nurse was at fault. Luc and Elliott were careful to make sure his clothing didn't bunch, but the nurse was a different story. She seemed to go out of her way to be rough with him, treating him like an invalid and doing many things Leo told her he could do on his own, like moving himself from bed to chair. At least she no longer tried to bathe him. Leo had quite firmly shut the door in her face after she followed him into the bathroom on her first night in his home.

While he didn't want to believe it, he knew her attitude might be because he was gay. It could also be because she'd explored his home while he was sleeping and found the playroom or because she thought — and rightly, but still none of her business — that he was in a relationship with both Elliott and Luc. She'd been hired to take care of him, not sit in judgment over his life, but Leo knew it wasn't always possible for people to separate their prejudices from their work. He'd have said something to the agency, except she seemed competent in the areas that mattered most, and there was no guarantee that her replacement would be better.

In any event, the sore had developed an infection before either Elliott or Luc noticed it. They'd gotten him to the doctor earlier that day, and he'd been given an injection as well as a prescription for antibiotics. The night nurse was fired, and the agency agreed to send out someone new for that evening. While Leo would have felt better if Elliott or Luc could stay, Elliott had a university function to attend that evening. Leo assured them he would be fine. Recent events notwithstanding, the agency provided him with good care, and though he didn't look forward to meeting someone new, it would all work out.

“If you're sure, Sir,” Luc said.

“I am. I don't want you to give up your special night just because of something so minor.”

“It's not minor if the antibiotics don't work,” Elliott said.

Leo smiled and reached out a hand so he could drag Elliott close enough to kiss. Before this past month, he'd never seen

this side of Elliott, and the grumpy, protective mamma bear persona did something for him.

Elliott kissed him back, smiling against Leo's lips. "You will call us if you need anything," he said. "I don't want anything happening to my new boyfriend."

Forehead resting against Elliott's, Leo paused, realizing it was the first time they'd used that word out loud. "Boyfriend, huh?" he teased.

"Yes. And I'm quite taken with him, so you need to be careful."

"How did I not know you were this possessive?" Leo asked.

"I could have told you, Sir," Luc piped up. He was kneeling by Leo's side and whimpered when Leo reached out to stroke the side of his face, then pulled on one of Luc's curls.

"But you didn't, boy, so I might have to punish you until you tell me all Elliott's secrets."

"With pleasure, Sir."

"Good. Now, come up here and kiss me goodbye."

Leo could tell Luc was still reluctant to leave, but he did as he was told and gave Leo the sweetest of kisses, then nipped at his lips and wiggled his ass when Leo slapped it. Elliott laughed and took Luc by the arm. "Do you want us to check in after the dinner?" he asked as all three of them moved toward the door.

“No,” Leo said. “I’ve got medication, the new nurse should be here in a few hours, and I want you two to enjoy yourselves. Go home and spend some time with each other, and don’t worry about me, okay?”

Another round of kisses and hugs, and then Elliott and Luc were gone, leaving Leo alone in the silent condo.

A few hours later, Leo was dozing on the couch while some mindless comedy played on the television. His upper body suddenly flushed with heat, and then he was shivering. He pulled a blanket from the back of the couch and wrapped it around himself as best he could, then looked for his phone.

“Fuck,” he muttered. He’d left his phone in the bedroom when Elliott and Luc left. “Alexa?” No response. “Alexa, call Luc.” Still nothing. “Alexa, call Elliott.”

When the computerized voice failed to respond, Leo turned his head to look over his shoulder and let out another curse. The port was dark, which meant the internet was out. Which he should have realized because the image on the TV was frozen. How had he not noticed?

Leo put his hand to his forehead. His skin was hot. He felt his neck, felt the enlarged glands, which were sore when he prodded at them. He was running a fever, and his body ached. When he touched the spot on the underside of his thigh, his fingers came away damp, which meant he was either sweating or, more likely, the wound had wept through the bandage.

Panic threatened, but Leo fought it down. The night nurse would be there soon. How bad could it get before she arrived?



Leo knew he was in the hospital even before he opened his eyes. The smell and sounds were unmistakable. As was the feel of Luc's hands holding his own. He turned his head to see the mop of Luc's dark curls spread on the stark white hospital blanket, both hands clasped tightly around his.

"Luc?" His voice sounded raspy and weak. He cleared his throat, tried again.

"Oh my God," Luc said. "You're awake. Thank fuck."

"Language, boy." Leo coughed. He was lying flat on his back, something he hated, and he struggled to push himself into a more upright position.

"Sir, don't." Luc stood. "You've got an IV in your arm. Please don't move. I'll get a nurse. And Elliott."

Luc moved away from Leo's bedside, but Leo didn't let go of his hand. "How?" he asked.

A blush stained Luc's cheeks even as tears welled in his eyes. "I made El stop by your place after dinner. When you didn't answer your phone or the land line, I got worried about you. And thank fuck I was. You were unconscious on the couch, and your fever was sky-high. We called 911. Leo... what..."

Luc took a deep breath, and Leo was so overwhelmed by his emotion he didn't even comment on Luc's use of his name. He stroked his thumb over Luc's wrist to help him focus.

“Slowly,” he commanded. “Go slow and tell me.”

“Why did you send the nurse away if you weren’t feeling well?”

For a moment, Leo wondered if he had done that. His memory was foggy about everything after Elliott and Luc had left his place the night before. He remembered being on the couch and watching a movie, he remembered thinking the nurse should arrive soon, but then things began to blur. Figuring out when he’d lost consciousness was impossible.

“I don’t think the nurse ever showed up,” he said.

“Why didn’t you say anything when El and I were there before dinner? I would have stayed with you.”

“Luc,” Leo said gently, “I swear, I was fine when you left. This fever must have spiked very quickly.”

With a nod, Luc brushed the lingering tears away from the corners of his eyes. “El said the same thing. He didn’t remember you feeling warm when we left.” Luc’s lips thinned into a tense line. “But that still doesn’t excuse the night nurse.”

“No, it doesn’t. I’ll call the agency as soon as I get a chance.”

Luc looked as if he wanted to say more but was interrupted by a nurse knocking on the doorframe, then walking into the room.

“Good to see you awake, Mr. Galvan,” the young man said as he entered. He made a beeline for Leo’s IV, checked the bag and then the catheter in Leo’s arm. “You’re getting fluids and

antibiotics as well as medication to reduce the fever. The doctor will be by in about an hour to speak with you and give you more information about your condition.” He turned to Luc and smiled. “Your boyfriend has been with you since you came in.” Then he leaned closer to Leo. “We could only allow one person in your room at a time while you were sleeping, but your other boyfriend is in the waiting area. I’ll let him know you’re awake if that’s all right with you.”

Leo nodded, but Luc said he’d tell Elliott. “He wants to see you, and I’ll go get us some coffee.”

With a sweet kiss to Leo’s lips, Luc left the room, leaving the nurse to continue checking Leo’s vitals.

“You’re a lucky man, Mr. Galvan,” the nurse said.

“Because I’m alive?” Leo asked, not without a touch of bitterness in his voice. Without Luc to lighten his mood, Leo’s plummeted quickly.

“Not just that.” The nurse leaned closer and winked. “Your boyfriends are so hot. I’m a bit jealous. The older one, with the accent.” The man shivered. “Delicious.”

Despite himself, Leo laughed. He *was* lucky. Lucky that Luc and Elliott had cared enough about him to check in. Lucky they had found him and gotten him to the hospital. He didn’t know how bad things had been the night before, but he suspected he’d been dangerously close to permanent damage or even death. That was a sobering thought and distracted Leo from the nurse’s chatter as he shifted Leo’s body to check on the dressing on the back of his thigh.

“Is there any other soreness, tenderness, or pain I should note on your chart?” the nurse asked.

Leo shook his head. He may have been lucky, but he was also incredibly tired. It wasn't just fatigue from the chemo or the infection or the energy the fever had sapped from him. He was tired of dealing with a body that seemed determined to betray him time and again. Tired of thinking about it, tired of needing to adjust every damn thing in his life to accommodate it, tired of the way even simple things took time and effort and energy to do.

It didn't help that Leo knew it wasn't his body that was wrong; it was living in a world that wasn't built for it and demanded forethought and preparation in order to accomplish even the smallest of tasks.

The trip to wine country had been one of the few times he'd been able to share that responsibility because he trusted Elliott and Luc to take his needs into account. Like the dinner Elliott had arranged knowing Leo was likely to be tired after their drive north or the way Luc was willing to do as little or as much as Leo's body let him and never complained or needed Leo to explain.

By the time Elliott appeared in the doorway — Leo was aware the nurse had been stalling so he could get a chance to chat with Leo's *other* boyfriend, the tall, sexy one with the accent — Leo was sunk into a black hole so deep and cold he was actually shivering.

“Can you bring some more blankets?” Elliott asked as the nurse stepped into the hallway.

“Absolutely. I’ll be back in two shakes.”

There was a tease in his tone, but Leo didn’t even look in his direction as the nurse left him and Elliott alone. The possessive growl that would usually have rumbled in his throat was nothing more than a slight rasp.

Where Luc had been emotional and needed Leo to comfort him and assure him Leo was okay, Elliott strode to Leo’s side and clasped his hand between both of his. He brought Leo’s hand to his mouth, kissed his fingers, then leaned over and kissed Leo’s lips.

“You scared the shit out of us,” he murmured.

Leo nodded. “It wasn’t my intention. I wanted you and Luc to have a fantastic evening, not spend it in a hospital with me.”

Elliott sat in the chair his husband had occupied without letting go of Leo’s hand. “What’s wrong, Leo?” At Leo’s shrug, Elliott narrowed his eyes and studied him. He seemed to be debating pushing the matter while regarding Leo with a calculating expression until finally Leo broke.

“I’m tired, El,” he admitted.

With a nod, Elliott leaned closer. “Of course you are.” He lifted his free hand and laid his palm on Leo’s forehead, then caressed the side of Leo’s face and trailed his fingers to Leo’s mouth, where he traced Leo’s lips. “You were burning up

when we found you.” He grinned. “You’re normally hot as hell, but I never want to see you like that again.”

Leo appreciated the attempt at humor, but he couldn’t muster even a smile in response.

The nurse returned with an armful of warmed blankets, which he carefully placed on top of Leo’s covers. The weight and warmth on his chest was comforting, as was the feel of Elliott’s hands holding his.

“I love you, Leo,” Elliott said after the nurse left them alone. “At first, I thought I loved you because of what you’ve done for Luc, but now I know I love you for who you are and what I am when I’m with you. I learned that last night when I thought we were going to lose you.” Elliott kissed Leo’s fingers, rubbed his cheek against Leo’s hand.

“Elliott, I...how can you want me when...” Leo swallowed hard.

“I will want you in whatever way I can have you for as long as I can have you,” Elliott said. “You warned us. You warned Luc when you got the cancer diagnosis, and you warned me, repeatedly, up in wine country when we decided to make a go of a relationship with all three of us.” Pausing until Leo met his gaze, Elliott nodded. “Neither of us are going anywhere. We love you, and we want to be with you. No matter what. I made a vow to Luc when we got married to love him for better or worse, in sickness and in health. That vow applies to you too, you know. For better or worse, in health *and* in sickness, I love you, Leo.”

Leo let his head sink back into his pillow and stared up at the ceiling. “You must be a masochist, then.”

“Don’t make this into a joke.”

The snap in Elliott’s voice made Leo look back at him. They stared at each other for a long moment, and Leo felt something he’d never experienced before. As a Dom, he was used to being in control, used to having his commands obeyed, used to being the one to take care of the person he was with. With Elliott, he felt...vulnerable. There was no wall between them, no expectations or prescribed roles for them to inhabit and rely on to inform their actions and relationship with each other. It wasn’t that he was less honest or authentic with Luc or his feelings untrue because of those roles, but with Elliott, Leo was working without a net.

“I wasn’t, El, I promise. I love you too.”

“I know. I can tell.”

Elliott rose from the chair and leaned over Leo so he could give Leo a gentle kiss. It was soft, it was sweet, and it did more to warm Leo than the blankets piled on top of him.

“Now rest,” Elliott said. “The sooner you fight off this infection, the sooner we can get you out of here.”

Leo nodded and closed his eyes. He dozed with Elliott caressing his hand, soothing him, placing gentle kisses on his fingers, his palm.

“How’s he doing?”

It was Luc, keeping his voice low as he came back into the room, and Leo continued to drift.

“Good,” Elliott answered, his voice equally soft. “Pissed.”

“Pissed angry? Or pissed drunk?” Luc teased.

Leo heard the scrape of another chair that Luc must be moving into place alongside Elliott’s, and then Luc’s hand touched his. Leo kept his eyes shut, breathing deeply at the swell of warmth that rose in his chest.

“Angry,” Elliott answered.

“You thought he would be.”

“I was hoping to be wrong.”

“This sucks,” Luc said.

“It does. I think he’s going to try and break up with us again.”

“To hell with that. We’re not going anywhere.”

“No, we’re not.”

Leo heard the rustle of clothing and a quick kiss pass between the husbands, and then Luc sighed.

“Listen, El, I want to talk to you about something, but I want you to think about it before you give me an answer.”

There was a smile in Elliott’s voice when he said, “I think I know what you’re going to say, but go ahead.”

“Last night scared the shit out of me. I thought we were going to lose him.”

“Me too. It seemed to take an eternity for the EMTs to get to the condo.”

“Yeah.” Luc blew out a gust of air, and Leo felt it ghost over his face like the softest of caresses. “I don’t want him to be alone ever again. I don’t want him to be at the mercy of people hired to care for him who may or may not show up.”

“You want him to move in with us, don’t you?”

“More than anything.”

Leo opened his eyes. “No.”

The two men stared at him, Luc’s face flushed with the knowledge Leo had heard them talking.

Elliott met his gaze full-on without flinching. “Leo...”

“No,” Leo said. “Your house isn’t set up for me to maneuver in, and unless you want to move your bedroom downstairs, we won’t be able to sleep together.”

“But, Sir...”

“Let him finish, Luc.”

Luc flashed his husband one of the most pissed-off expressions Leo had ever seen cross his beautiful face. It was a look that would have earned Luc a paddling, and not the fun kind, but that, Leo thought just before he spoke again, was what this triad was about. Each of them having their own relationships with each other, respecting each other’s needs, and developing something together. Something for the three of them.

“What if you moved into the condo with me?” Leo asked.

Elliott’s nod was slow and contemplative while Luc gasped, then asked, “What about the dogs?”

“I’d be happy to have them move in too.”

“That would be...”

“Temporary,” Elliott said, cutting Luc off.

“El!”

Giving his spouse a serious look, Elliott turned his attention to Leo. “You value your independence. I don’t want you agreeing to this because we’ve all had a scare and you feel you need us to be there. The condo is also not the best place for the dogs, nor is it the easiest commute for me.” At a sound of protest from Luc, he glanced at him. “I’m being honest, Luc. The condo is a better choice than our house, I agree, but it’s still not the best choice for our entire family. I want all of us to make this a choice of desire rather than convenience. We haven’t had a lot of time to figure out the dynamics of our relationship yet. What I’m proposing is that we move into the condo until Leo’s cancer treatment is resolved and then reassess. I might find that the commute is less onerous than I anticipate, or Leo might find he detests having us in his space twenty-four seven and having to deal with Jericho and Bey. Or you, my dear” — he reached out and tweaked Luc’s chin — “might find you’re tired of us.”

“Not possible.” Luc pouted. “I love you both too much.”

Despite himself, Leo smiled. “I don’t know, boy. I might decide to take out some of this pent-up frustration on your ass when I get out of here.” He held out his hand to the other two men. “But I agree. My home is your home until my oncologist gives me the all clear or...”

Quick as lightning, Luc was out of his chair and pressing his lips to Leo’s. “Do not even go there, Sir.”

Leo kissed Luc back, then grinned at him. “We may need to review protocol, boy. You’re taking advantage of my weakened condition a bit too frequently for my liking.” He turned to Elliott. “Perhaps I can persuade El to help me with your discipline.”

“I’m open to persuasion,” Elliott said, then stood and leaned over Leo as well to give him a kiss. He wrapped an arm around Luc’s waist and hugged him close. “It will be a pleasure to gain the upper hand with you, *boy*.” His hand slipped downward to Luc’s backside, and Luc gave out a squeak of protest as Elliott pinched his ass.

“Impressive,” Leo said.

“I’ve always been a good student and a quick learner,” Elliott replied.

“I’m going to regret this, aren’t I?” Luc said and rubbed at his right ass cheek.

The three of them laughed and were still laughing and talking when the doctor stepped into the room to give Leo an update on the infection, which was retreating with the course

of antibiotics. Despite the good news and the pleasure he felt at being able to see more of both Luc and Elliott, Leo knew the lift in his spirits was temporary. He could feel the heaviness in his body and was already dreading when Luc and Elliott would need to leave. Even the promise of having them in his home when he was finally discharged didn't raise his spirits.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

Luc

Jericho whined, but Luc told him he couldn't be let off leash to chase the plovers that followed the retreating line of water looking for food.

"Sorry, kiddo."

Luc leaned down and scratched one of the dog's ears as he gazed at the ocean. After a particularly stressful day, he'd hoped the Pacific would work its magic so he didn't compound the stress he felt around Elliott and Leo, but it was doing little to help. The sky was leaden with gray clouds that blocked the sun, and the sea was a murky, sickly green. A storm somewhere on the ocean had driven sea life toward the coast, and the beach was littered with sand dollars and tiny jellyfish. While Luc appreciated the mirror to his mood, he would have preferred a blue sky.

In the weeks since Leo had returned home from the hospital, and he and Elliott moved into the condo, their physical relationship as a triad had progressed slowly since Leo didn't have the energy for much beyond kissing and cuddling. Luc was starting to feel like Jericho, whining after something he wasn't allowed to enjoy. To make matters worse, with the three of them sharing the same bed, his sex life was basically nonexistent since Elliott didn't think it was fair to engage in activities if Leo wasn't able to participate as well.

All in all, Luc was not a happy boy as he grumped his way along the sand. Even the sight of a tall, gorgeous man with

shining, spun-gold hair practicing dance moves failed to raise his spirits.

“I am lousy company today, Jer,” Luc told the dog.

Jericho barked at him and wagged his tail as if he understood. He alerted on a raven that landed nearby, then pounced as close as the leash would let him.

“I don’t think that’s a good idea, bud,” Luc said when the raven barely turned its head in the dog’s direction. “See that beak? Those guys can do serious damage to you.”

Again, Jericho barked, and Luc finally gave in. He jogged down the beach, Jericho bouncing at his side as if he rode a pogo stick, finally settling into a trot after a couple of minutes. Again, Luc hoped the physical activity might burn off some of his frustration along with Jericho’s energy, but it didn’t. An hour later, he returned to his car with a happily panting dog at his side and wished he felt as blissed-out. His mood soured further when he got back to the parking lot.

One of the concessions he’d made when he and Elliott moved into the city was to leave his Camry in Berkeley. Elliott was able to take BART when he needed to spend time on campus — something he’d discovered he enjoyed because it gave him more time to read — but he refused to leave his Karmann Ghia unprotected. While Luc didn’t dislike the sporty little Volkswagen, he missed his own car. The Ghia was low-slung, which was fine for Elliott, who was almost six feet tall, but at five eight, Luc felt like a kid driving one of those stupid tourist go-carts. He acknowledged that some of his

resentment about driving Elliott's car was due to feeling out of sorts about the new living arrangement.

It was not what Luc had fantasized about when he'd imagined having both his husband and his Dom in the same house.

With a sigh, he started the car and headed back toward downtown and another evening of watching TV and thinking longingly about the playroom that lay behind the closed door at the end of the hall.



The smell of something delicious hit Luc as soon as he opened the door. Jericho sat patiently while Luc took off his leash, but it was clear he wanted to go investigate the source of the scent. As soon as he was free, he darted toward the kitchen, a black blur moving at warp speed. Luc smiled as he heard Jericho's yip of greeting and Bey's low rumble in return, but the smile faded as he took off his jacket and shoes and left them at the front door.

His funk settled deeper as he walked down the hall toward the living room. Under other circumstances, Luc would ask Leo for some playtime so he could get out of his head. That wasn't possible right now, so he kept his desires to himself, even though he knew he was reaching a crisis point with his Zoomies obligations and his job at the vet hospital. The response to his initial posts for Zoomies had been fantastic, with one video even going viral. An image from that video had

been turned into several memes already, and it thrilled Luc every time he saw Jericho's adorable face with different words labeling his expression. But he'd also attracted another potential sponsor, Zoomies wanted to expand his contract, and the vet practice was hinting they wanted to give him a promotion and more responsibilities. Everything he'd wanted was happening for him, except...

The hallway opened into the living room. Leo was lying on the couch, covered by a blanket. He was sleeping while Elliott made dinner. This was the week after Leo's chemo, and it always knocked him out. His fatigue had been worse since the infection, either because it had taken a lot out of him or because he wasn't trying to hide the side effects of the chemo. It was probably a combination of the two.

Deciding to leave Leo to rest, Luc tracked his husband down in the kitchen. Both dogs lay in a corner: Bey resting his head on his paws as he stared at Elliott with soulful eyes, while Jericho impersonated the Sphinx with his paws outstretched and his head up, ears alert, eyes tracking every movement Elliott made as he stirred something on the stove. He was clearly waiting for something to drop to the floor.

Elliott had been amazing since Leo's hospitalization. Despite his fall semester starting, he'd jumped into their move from Berkeley to the condo. He'd even pulled off a minor miracle by arranging to get some long-overdue work done on the Craftsman while they were staying with Leo, so they didn't have to deal with the mess of a major overhaul to the house's plumbing system while they were trying to live in the house.

Once they settled into the condo, Elliott quickly took on the majority of tasks associated with Leo's care. He told Luc it made sense as Luc's schedule was more demanding than his. Once the semester got underway, his days fell into a regular routine, and there were plenty of things Elliott could do from the condo rather than being on campus, including attending faculty meetings via video, which wasn't a hardship at all. Luc's job, on the other hand, necessitated him being at the vet hospital or in the studio back in Berkeley.

It made sense, and Luc was pleased seeing his spouse and his lover form a connection, but the awareness that Leo was turning more and more to Elliott to take care of him was difficult to deal with. Luc was trying his best not to be jealous but knew he needed to try harder, or the whole thing would blow up in his face and put his relationships at risk.

Luc watched Elliott as he bent over the stove, then crept up behind him. He wrapped his arms around El's waist and rested his head between his shoulder blades.

"That smells amazing," Luc said, loving the feel of Elliott's muscles moving beneath his cheek as the man continued stirring. This. This was what he needed to feel calm and centered.

"Thank Simon. I'm just following his instructions."

Peering out from behind Elliott's back, Luc looked into the pot on the stove. "What is it?"

"Right now, it's a roux, but in about half an hour, it's going to be a creamy chicken soup with white beans and roasted

sweet potatoes.” Elliott paused in his stirring to turn in Luc’s arms and give him a kiss. “We’ve got a loaf of Simon’s Italian bread to go with it.”

“Sounds delicious.” Luc tightened his arms around his husband and pulled him close. “You know what else could be delicious?” He straddled Elliott’s leg and rubbed against it, his cock instantly alert and hopeful.

“Luc...” Elliott let out a sigh that sounded equal parts frustration and desire.

“I know.” With a grumble, Luc let El go and stepped away from him. “I’m going to change.”

Elliott called after him, but Luc didn’t respond. He was in a bad place, and that made him spiral deeper because then he felt guilty for feeling angry. He should be thrilled his men were bonding, as well as grateful Leo’s tumors were shrinking and that the infection hadn’t caused more serious issues. Leo’s health and recovery should be his focus. He knew this, but it didn’t help his mood.

The smart thing to do would be to say he needed to get some editing work done on his videos, head across the Bay to Berkeley, and try to get his head on straight. Even as he thought about doing it, Luc knew it wasn’t a solution. All those same issues would be waiting for him the next time he opened the door to the condo. No, what he needed to do was suck it up and be strong for his Sir and help his husband take care of him. The problem was his Sir was nowhere to be found, and his husband didn’t need his help.



Things came to a head the following week.

With Leo's energy coming back enough for him to work most of the day, Elliott stayed on campus more often doing research for a paper. Luc was still putting in sixty-plus hours a week between his job and his social media channels and feeling pressure from all directions, but he was doing his best to suck it up and be there for Leo as much as he could.

On Thursday afternoon, he was at the Berkeley house with both dogs to edit a new episode for his YouTube channel and film some TikTok videos for Zoomies. The new sponsor prospect, a premium dog food manufacturer, wanted to see a sample reel from him, so he was also brainstorming what to send them while he edited. Even though the house was a demolition zone, Luc's recording studio was untouched by the work. The soundproofing they'd put in when they renovated the space meant it was shielded from most of the construction noise.

His anxiety level was already high when he received a text from Leo: **Do you know where Elliott is?**

Luc stared at his phone for a full minute while questions bombarded him before he answered: **Isn't he on campus?**

Leo: **I thought so, but he's not answering his phone.**

A quick glance at the clock on his computer told Luc it was a little after three. On Thursdays, Elliott taught his graduate

seminar in the morning, then held office hours until two.

Luc: **He's probably in the library. There are dead zones.**

Leo: **True.**

Luc: **Anything I can help with?**

The three dots appeared, disappeared, then reappeared, and stopped. Luc sent his own text to El asking what he was up to before Leo's text appeared.

Leo: **It's fine. I can handle it.**

Luc: **Are you sure? If you need something, it's not a problem.**

Leo: **Stay and get your work done. Don't worry about it.**

Which, of course, meant Luc was going to do nothing but worry because something was going on, and he wasn't being told what it was. Without telling Leo, he packed up his things and headed back across the bridge.

His Sir hadn't explicitly ordered him to stay where he was because his Sir still hadn't surfaced. If it had been an order, his Sir would have called him *boy*. With a start, Luc realized he hadn't been called *boy* since Leo was in the hospital. He'd also fallen out of the habit of calling Leo *Sir* and hadn't been corrected or punished. Even though they weren't a high-protocol D/s couple, Leo still expected Luc to address him properly as a sign of respect. It was a part of submission that came easily to Luc because Leo usually inhabited his Dom space so completely.

As Luc drove across the bridge and Leo's building came into view, an ache began in Luc's chest, and his eyes misted, temporarily blurring the other cars on the roadway. He rubbed his eyes and chided himself. Here he was, feeling sorry for himself because Leo had texted looking for Elliott. There probably wasn't anything wrong, but Luc had spun it into a big deal and cut his workday short so he could rush across the bridge. All because he wanted to be the one to take care of Leo this time.

"I'm an idiot," he told the dogs as he took the Fremont Street exit off I-80, but the thought that something *could* be wrong nagged at him all the way into the parking garage and up to the front door eighteen stories above the city streets.

As soon as he stepped into the condo, Luc smelled vomit, and any doubt he'd had about coming home disappeared. Without taking off the dogs' leashes, he headed toward the main bedroom but stopped short at the sight of Leo's chair in the entrance to the guest bath. Leo wasn't in the chair — it wouldn't fit through the doorway — but as he got closer, Luc saw Leo's feet on the floor and then heard retching. He sprinted the rest of the way to the bathroom and found Leo holding himself over the toilet, arms braced on the seat and trembling with the effort of keeping himself upright. Out of deference for his guests, Leo had never renovated this bathroom for his own use, so there were no handrails or supports for him.

Luc was instantly by his side, lifting him so he could reach the bowl easier and brushing his hair back from his forehead to

check if Leo was running a fever. The man's skin was cool, even a bit clammy, so it didn't seem as if his infection had flared back up. Luc held him while Leo heaved a few more times into the toilet, then let him sink back to the floor, shifting him slightly so Leo could sit with his back against the tub rather than lie on the floor.

“What happened?” he asked as he stood and ran a washcloth under warm water so he could clean off Leo's face.

Leo waved a hand as if to dismiss the question. “It's nothing.”

“Is this why you were looking for Elliott? Jesus, Leo, you texted me an hour ago. Why didn't you say anything?” Luc knelt beside Leo and wiped at his mouth.

“Boy...” Leo started, but his voice was thin. It had none of his usual power behind it. It made Luc's heart flutter with fear and then filled his body with anger.

“No.” He stood and flung the washcloth into the sink. “You want to do all this by yourself? Fine. But don't try acting like you're my Sir because you're not.”

Luc turned on his heel and marched out of the bathroom. The dogs had followed him, their leashes trailing on the floor. They looked at him with expressions that betrayed their own anxiety, and Luc's frustration vanished as he knelt on the floor.

“You're both good boys,” he said as he unhooked their leashes. “This isn't about you.” He ruffled Jericho's fur and scratched his ears, then did the same to Bey, taking a moment

to smooch the big dog's jowls and rub noses with him. Bey responded with a swipe of his tongue while Jericho tried to get between the two of them so he could lick Luc's face too. Luc laughed. "Such good boys."

Behind him, Luc heard the scuff of Leo's legs on the floor and the shift of the chair on the poured concrete floor, but he didn't turn around or offer to help.

"Boy," Leo called after him, but Luc didn't respond. Instead, he stood and walked toward the kitchen to get something to drink. "Luc..."

The use of his name and Leo's tone almost made him stop, but anger and frustration were riding him, along with the stress of his to-do list and worry about Leo's health. He poured himself a glass of water and downed it in one swallow, then filled the glass again. As he raised the glass to his lips, his phone rang with Elliott's ringtone. Luc thought about letting it go to voicemail but realized he was just being petty.

"El," he said in lieu of *hello*, and the hesitation in Elliott's response let him know his pissed-off mood had come through loud and clear.

"What's going on?" Elliott asked. "I have a bunch of missed calls from Leo, but he's not answering his phone."

"*Leo* is indisposed at the moment."

"What does that mean? Luc, where are you?"

Luc silently counted to ten, trying and failing to get his irritation under control. It was irrational, and he knew he was

behaving like a child, but this was why he'd needed a Dom in the first place, why Leo had been such a lifesaver for him. He got stuck in his head, thoughts whirling so quickly and emotions riding him that he needed the steadying hand Leo had provided to help him find his way out. And then he felt ridiculous for needing it because he was a grown-ass man and should be able to handle his own shit, especially because he had *two* people who were there for him. Two people who...

“Luc.”

The sharpness in Elliott's voice cut through Luc's whirling thoughts.

“I'm here. At the condo. With Leo, who was just puking his guts out.”

Elliott drew in a deep breath, and Luc knew if he could see his husband, El's face would have a deep line between his eyebrows. He might even be rubbing that spot with his thumb.

“Shit,” Elliott cursed quietly. “He ran out of the antiemetic yesterday. I was supposed to get it for him, but I forgot.”

On any other day, Luc would make a joke about Elliott being an absent-minded professor, but not today. Today, the fact that Leo had asked Elliott to pick up the prescription refill and reached out to Elliott when he started feeling ill just fueled the fire that had been steadily growing inside him for the past several weeks.

“I'm on my way home now. Tell Leo I'm sorry, and I'll pick it up for him.”

Luc tried counting to ten again, but it was as successful as the first time. “Why didn’t either of you ask me?” he snapped.

“We...”

“Because you’re already overwhelmed as it is, and we didn’t want to add to it.” Leo’s voice came from behind him, and Luc turned. “Don’t lie to me and tell me you’re not.”

It crossed Luc’s mind to do just that, but he resisted. “I’m fine,” he said, and that could sort of be true. *Maybe?* He’d been this busy before, hadn’t he? He’d survived and still been able to be there for his Dom.

“Tell your husband we have things to discuss when he gets home,” Leo said and turned away.

“Leo...” Luc started, not sure of what he was going to say.

Turning his chair so he faced Luc again, Leo fixed him with a stare that sent shivers down Luc’s spine. There was his Dom! As quickly as Leo’s expressions sparked, though, it faded.

“I am your Sir,” Leo said. “We will discuss this when Elliott returns.”

“We’ve never needed to wait for Elliott before.”

“Elliott has never been an intimate part of our dynamic before, *boy*. We’ve never been a triad before. Even if he’s not a part of your discipline, what we do affects him as well. Right now, I am embarrassed and angry, as well as in danger of being sick again. That is not the space I want to be in when we talk about your punishment. Tell Elliott, then get something to eat or go rest. I’ll be in the bedroom. We’ll talk after Elliott

comes home.” Leo drew himself up, his shoulders square, and fixed Luc with his fierce blue eyes. “Do I make myself clear?”

“Yes, Sir,” Luc whispered.

Leo gave a nod, then turned his chair again and headed for his bedroom while Luc raised the phone back to his ear.

“Did you hear all that?” he asked.

“I did. But aren’t you supposed to tell me something?”

“You’re not my Dom.”

“No, but your Dom asked you to do something, Luc.” When Luc remained silent, Elliott sighed. “I guess Leo’s right. We need to talk. See you soon.”

Elliott hung up before Luc was able to say goodbye.

Well, shit. Now Elliott was pissed with him too.

Jericho nudged Luc’s hand with his nose and pushed his head under Luc’s fingertips. Absently, he knelt down and ruffled the hair on the dog’s dark neck.

“I think I just royally fucked up, Jer.”



Luc tried to wait patiently for Elliott to return, but it was a losing battle. He reviewed the videos he’d been able to get done that morning, then clicked through his social media to see how his most recent posts were doing. His mind kept wandering, though, spinning out on what was going on with Leo, what it meant for their relationship, and how he’d

overreacted to...well, basically everything, and then feeling guilty for making this all about him when Leo was dealing with all his issues without complaining or going ballistic.

By the time Elliott arrived, Luc was curled up on the couch with his cobalt-blue pillow pressed against his chest, staring out the window at the Bay Bridge. Jericho had snuggled into the crook of his legs. Bey came trotting out of the bedroom, where Luc assumed he'd been keeping watch over Leo, and Jericho jumped off and headed toward the front door to greet Elliott.

“Good afternoon, boys.”

The sound of Elliott coming home was so familiar to Luc he didn't have to see it to know that El was crouching down to hear the soft huffs Bey gave out as greeting. Jericho's excited yips and tap dance as he waited impatiently for his turn to say hello only made Luc curl tighter in on himself. He adored the tiny moments that spelled home and family and love, but he couldn't take comfort in them right now. Finding Leo crouched over the toilet, having Leo turn away from him after he'd reached out to Elliott for help, those moments had unmoored him.

Although, Luc thought as he tightened his hold on the pillow, it wasn't just those moments; it was all the moments leading up to this one, and he knew it was his fault. He'd been too greedy, wanted too much, couldn't be content with how perfect his relationships were, and pushed for more. And now? Here he was, about thirty seconds from completely falling

apart because he couldn't handle Leo asking someone else for help. He was truly pathetic and *so not in a good place*.

“Sweetheart?” Elliott’s gentle voice preceded his warm hand touching Luc’s cheek. When Luc lifted his head, Elliott sucked in a breath. “Oh, honey. Leo’s right. We all need to talk.”

Luc fought to keep himself from flinging his arms around his husband’s neck, even as he nuzzled his cheek against Elliott’s hand and found comfort in the soft caress of El’s fingers as they traced his cheekbones and lips.

“Let me get this to Leo, and then I’ll be back to be with you.”

“No,” Luc said, even though he wanted nothing more than to have Elliott’s body wrapped around his own. “Stay with Leo if he needs you.” He risked a glance at El’s face when he didn’t get a response. Elliott was torn, he could see that, and it just made him feel worse that he was asking his husband to choose between him and Leo. “I’m fine, El. I promise.”

Elliott hesitated, clearly holding back something he wanted to say, but he nodded, patted Luc’s cheek, and stood. He leaned down to give Luc a kiss before he walked away, the sound of his footsteps indicating he was heading for the bedroom, Bey and Jericho following. Luc heard the murmur of voices but couldn’t make out any distinct words. Putting his head back down, he let himself drift and tried not to let his thoughts spiral again, but that was a losing battle.

Within a few minutes, Elliott was back at Luc’s side.

“I have a message for you from Leo,” he said as he pushed Luc’s legs to the side so he could sit on the couch.

In spite of himself, Luc’s immediate thought was *Joy, now Leo won’t even talk to me*, but he nodded.

“Leo’s going to take his medication, and then he’s going to sleep for a bit. He wants us to eat dinner — he suggested fettuccine alfredo since that’s one of your favorites — and then we’ll talk. Do you want to make dinner, or do you want me to?”

“I’ll make it.” Luc stood and headed for the kitchen.

“Luc...”

“I said I’ll make it. I’m not totally useless, you know.”

Without waiting for a response from Elliott, Luc continued into the kitchen to get dinner underway. He knew he was being a brat, but he couldn’t help it. *This* was why he’d needed a Dom in the first place. This and how good it felt to submit and the way Leo made him fly. And it wasn’t just that Leo wasn’t available for him right now. Elliott wasn’t either. Between the two of them, it had been over a month since Luc had had a good cuddle or an orgasm from anything other than his hand. Which was just another check in the *unworthy* box. God, he was a needy mess.

He filled the pasta pot with water and banged it onto the stove hard enough to make the water slosh over the side. Which meant he had to take the pot off the stove and clean up the spill, and then the burner wouldn’t light because the starter

was wet. Luc cursed under his breath as he found the fire starter in one of the drawers and clicked the flame to life so he could get the burner lit.

The whole time, he heard his inner voice chanting a list of reasons he was an idiot and a spoiled brat and should be able to handle his emotional self on his own. He grated parmesan cheese to a litany of his failures, made the roux while vacillating between arguing with that voice and letting each word drive him deeper inside himself, and put together a salad while formulating reasons both Elliott and Leo should let him walk out the door. By the time dinner was ready, Luc was so full of self-loathing he didn't think he would be able to eat a thing.

He still plated the pasta and called Elliott to the table. Bey walked ahead of him, taking his usual place by Elliott's chair. Jericho finally gave up trying to get Luc's attention and curled into a dark ball in the corner, with only the tips of his black ears twitching to show he was still aware of everything going on around him.

They ate in silence, but Luc kept glancing at Elliott and then in the direction of Leo's room.

"I'll bring him something when we're done," Elliott said. "Finish your dinner, and then I have instructions for you."

Luc gulped but turned his attention back to his plate.

He hazarded a glance at El, but Elliott was staring out the windows toward the Bay Bridge while twirling pasta around his fork, his expression neutral and distant. Luc sensed Leo's

handiwork in his husband's demeanor this evening. It wasn't like Elliott to remain silent during a meal, and given what had happened earlier in the day, Luc had expected some discussion.

And then there was the way Elliott had all but channeled Leo in his instructions. That had to mean his Sir was going to take care of him later, right? Although Luc was worried, a tingle of excitement flared to life in his belly. He tried to concentrate on eating, but it was no use. His mind was off and galloping free in the land of fantasy, imagining all the ways in which the evening might go.

By the time Elliott had finished his meal, Luc's plate was still half-full.

"Are you going to finish?" El asked.

Luc twirled his fork around in the pasta, then laid it on the edge of his plate. "Probably not." He glanced toward Leo's bedroom. "How upset with me is he?"

With a shake of his head, Elliott stood and gathered both their plates and utensils, then walked away without saying a thing.

Why am I such a needy little bitch sometimes? Luc rubbed the bridge of his nose and tried to find even a molecule of patience and calm inside his body, but it was a losing battle.

Elliott returned to clear their glasses.

"How upset with me are *you*?" Luc asked as he turned in his chair to face Elliott.

His husband paused, then put the glasses back on the table. Stepping in between Luc's legs, El cupped his chin in his hand and drew it upward so Luc had no choice but to look him in the eyes.

"It's not a question of being upset with you, sweetheart. It's more that we're concerned because you aren't talking to us."

"Oh." Luc couldn't help the disappointment that flooded his belly, all but drowning the butterflies that had caused him to lose his appetite. Did this mean they were just going to *talk* this evening?

Elliott chuckled and leaned down to kiss Luc. "I love you. Now..." El's voice pitched lower, and Luc was instantly on alert as his spouse stood up, still holding Luc's chin in his hand and keeping Luc's head tilted back, forcing him to maintain eye contact. "I have instructions for you from your Sir. Are you listening?"

"Yes," Luc whispered.

"Good." Elliott used his free hand to stroke Luc's head, then tangled his fingers in the curls and pulled back hard enough to make Luc gasp. "You are to go to the bedroom. Shower and get thoroughly clean. Dry off, but stay naked. You are to kneel on the rug in the bedroom. Present and wait. Do you understand?"

Luc nodded, trying to keep the smile off his face.

"Do you agree?"

"Absolutely."

Elliott's usually calm eyes seemed to flash with fire, and he tightened his grip on Luc's chin. He pulled Luc forward, then dipped his head and brought their mouths together. Hard. A sudden crash of lips, and then Elliott's tongue was licking into Luc's mouth, forcing its way inside, and Luc was in heaven. His body seemed to melt as he yielded to Elliott's assault. It had been too long since he'd been touched with this much desire or passion, and Luc nearly swooned with the endorphins that flooded his body.

And then he nearly toppled out of his chair as Elliott released him and stepped away.

"I love you," he said again. "Now, go."

Luc didn't need telling twice. He was out of his chair and heading for the bedroom as quickly as he could move. Almost to the hallway, he turned and looked over his shoulder. Elliott didn't quite have a chance to wipe the amused look from his face and try to regain the domineering expression he'd had a minute ago before Luc came to a stop.

"I love you too, El," Luc said, then turned and almost ran to the bedroom.

He stripped off his clothes, pausing to fold them neatly and place them on top of the dresser. Then it was into the shower to get thoroughly clean inside and out as he'd been instructed.

Twenty minutes later, he was on his knees, legs spread, ass on his heels, hands on his thighs with the palms up. Luc closed his eyes and breathed deeply. Calm breaths. In. Out. In. Out.

Oh, hell, where are they?

Though Leo never left Luc in this position for long, Luc was always aware that he was a mindfuck Dom. It was one of the reasons he loved being in a D/s relationship with the man. Leo always kept him on his toes. That, and Luc had trusted him implicitly from the moment they'd met. The same way he'd known Elliott was his person, Luc had known it with Leo.

The thought struck him like a physical blow.

Trust.

It was at the heart of his relationships with both men.

Before he could ponder the thought much more, he heard someone enter the room. It had to be El because of the footsteps that made their way across the floor to him.

“Eyes stay closed,” El said, his voice deep and strong. “Before you get too deep into your head...” He gave a low chuckle, and Luc knew they'd been watching him from the doorway. “I'm going to put a blindfold and headphones on you. Nod if this is okay.”

Luc took a deep breath, determined not to let his mind race ahead of the present moment. No more thinking about what was going to happen, no more anticipatory fantasies. They were in a scene. He exhaled, then nodded slowly, holding himself still as Elliott placed the padded blindfold over his eyes and then the headphones over his ears. He was mildly disappointed that the headphones were silent but then

Then the rod was back, tapping on his shoulders, his jaw, down his arms, across his back — a slow, insistent tap that was never hard enough to cause pain.

The faint, high-pitched tone changed to whispers — indistinct, half-formed words and nonsense sounds — as if Luc was surrounded by a crowd and people were talking in quiet voices around him. His breathing hiked up a notch. It reminded him of when he was at one of the parties he and Leo attended in the early days of their relationship, playing in public until they knew each other well enough, *trusted* each other enough to play in private.

Trust.

There was that word again. It seemed to be coming up a lot tonight. Which — Luc was sure — was why Leo had decided to play the scene as he was. *Trust me to take care of you*, he seemed to be saying, and Luc had to admit he hadn't been. The diagnosis, the hospitalization, not to mention the changes in their relationship because of Elliott's inclusion: it had all left Luc reeling, and instead of turning to his partners, he'd withdrawn.

Luc was on the precipice of a downward spiral when the tapping came back.

This time, it was on his back. Then a hand touched his shoulder, nudged him forward until Luc realized he was being asked to get on all fours. He hoped this was going where he thought it was, but then he remembered that his role here was to submit, to let himself give up expectations of what would or

wouldn't happen and trust that Leo and Elliott would take care of him.

As soon as he was in position, the tapping moved to his ass, and Luc sighed. He could tell now that Elliott — because it had to be Elliott — was using a metal cane from the set Leo had purchased a year ago. It was a beautiful set with ratan, metal, and synthetic canes ranging from whip thin to a half inch thick. The cane Elliott was using felt like one of the medium ones, light enough to have some flex but thick enough to sting if used with force. Elliott's taps, though, weren't hard enough to do more than build up the heat in Luc's skin from the repetition and make him squirm from anticipation. He trusted that Leo would have shown Elliott how to use the cane properly, wouldn't let Elliott do anything that would hurt Luc — and it wasn't like Elliott was going to suddenly crack it across his ass hard enough to draw blood — so he relaxed and let himself feel his body.

A steady hand stroked his shoulder while the taps on his ass continued, which was how Luc knew Leo *was* in the room. He leaned into the touch, trying to let Leo know he was sorry, but the soft touches only continued, along with the contact from the cane. Luc could definitely feel heat where the cane had struck him now, and the combination of Leo's gentle touches and Elliott's taps with the cane were keeping him in a constant push and pull of wanting more of both.

Then came the lightest flick of leather over his cheeks and lips. It was nothing more than a light slap, but Luc hadn't expected it, and the intensity of it was ramped up by the loss

of his other senses. With his eyes shielded by the blindfold, Luc couldn't tell what Leo had used, but it left behind a slight tingle on his lips.

Luc gasped, then gasped again as he felt the metal cane slide between his legs and tap against his balls. The leather slapped over his mouth again, and Luc distinctly felt the thin tails on his skin. It was Leo's cock-and-ball flogger, a sinister little thing with tails that were only about six inches long but which, when flicked against his dick and scrotum just right, were excruciating. Luc had gotten it as a joke for Leo, thinking it was a toy, only to have Leo educate him on its real purpose. The tiny flogger had been a very vivid lesson on the irrelevance of size when it came to BDSM.

With a groan, Luc arched his back and sighed as the cane struck him on the back of his right thigh, and the flogger's tails danced along his neck. He shifted on his knees and rolled his shoulders as his body responded to the attention Leo and Elliott were paying it. Every touch was light and gentle, but the sensations were building on each other, and Luc was beginning to lose himself in that lovely floaty sensation he craved.

He breathed deeply. It did no good to chase after subspace or try to think his way into it. The harder he strove for it, the further away it got from him and the more frustrated he would become. It was a lesson he'd learned almost as soon as he started exploring kink.

Relax.

Experience.

Trust.

Luc breathed deeply again and let himself slide into that place where he was aware but not trying to control. Where he knew what was happening to him but not invested in or trying to anticipate a particular outcome.

He yelped at a sudden blow to his left ass cheek. *Elliott had used the fucking paddle?* Luc couldn't believe that, but before his shock faded, a similar blow to his other ass cheek nearly sent him sprawling forward into Leo's hands, which were now caressing his face. Luc's ass tingled with bright spots of pain, the nerves sending protests to his brain, but right on the heels of that came the first wave of pleasure as the endorphins rushed to soothe his body.

Then the tapping was back, this time causing flares of pain that sparked in his mind and made him rock backward, seeking more of it. The taps became faster, though they didn't change in intensity. That metal cane could really make his nerves sing, but Elliott wasn't wielding it hard enough to do that. Instead, he was using the cumulative effect of the repeated taps to keep Luc's skin from falling back to sleep.

Leo pressed down on Luc's head, and Luc knew he was supposed to bow down, elbows on the ground, ass in the air. He had a fleeting thought of what was coming as he did as Leo commanded, the simple act of submitting to his Sir helping Luc's mind to grow quiet.

When he was in position, there was a pause, and the sound in his ears shifted from the whispered voices to the thud of heartbeats — several of them — no, three. There were only three heartbeats echoing in his ears.

He sighed and waited.

The first touches to his shoulders stung, and his mind tried to figure out what Leo was using on him. But then, as the cane — a thinner, whippier one this time, with much more sting than before — worked over his ass and thighs, Luc gave himself up to the sensations.

He was floating, aware of the blows, aware of the flares of pain, aware of the way his body accommodated that pain, absorbing it or moving to disperse it but always resuming its original position. It was heaven, and Luc lost track of time and self as he floated on waves of pleasure and in and out of conscious awareness. He was in the room with Elliott and Leo and...elsewhere at the same time. Floating but still on his knees, with the floor rough beneath them. He wanted it to stop, but at the same time, he wanted it to go on and on and on. He wanted to stay caught between Elliott and Leo and the delicious sensations caused by their attention, but those sensations were building within him, building to the point where he couldn't stop moving, couldn't stop...

With a sudden cry, Luc pushed himself forward into Leo. He couldn't help it. He wanted to continue, but his body was saying no.

Everything stopped.

The headphones went silent and were gently lifted from his ears, letting him hear the sobs he hadn't even been aware he was making and the soft, soothing words of praise Leo offered him while Luc huddled against his knees.

"Come here, sweetheart," Elliott said quietly as he bent to lift Luc into his arms.

"El..." Luc curled his arms around Elliott's neck, let himself be carried to the bed.

"Shhhhh," Elliott said as he lowered Luc to the mattress. He took a bottle of water from the nightstand and held it to Luc's lips. "Drink."

Luc was still blindfolded, for which he was grateful. He didn't know if he could stand to see the expressions on Elliott's and Leo's faces, wasn't sure he deserved the care and love they'd shown him this evening.

After several swallows of water, Luc shook his head slightly, and Elliott took the bottle away. While he lay on the bed and tried to get his breathing back under control, Luc began to come back to himself. He heard murmurs between Elliott and Leo, then the sound of Leo's chair moving to the side of the bed. Clothing rustled, and then the mattress dipped as Leo shifted from chair to bed. Then his Sir was lying next to him, and Luc rolled to face him, reaching out and finding himself pulled into Leo's arms.

"I'm sorry, Sir," Luc said. Or tried to say. His voice cracked, and as he opened his mouth, he tasted salt as tears he'd been unaware of shedding dripped between his lips.

“Nothing to be sorry about, boy.” Leo’s hands stroked his face, his hair.

He made to remove the blindfold from Luc’s eyes, but Luc shook his head. Everything was still clouded in his mind, but he wanted the spell of subspace to last as long as possible.

The mattress dipped again on the other side, and Luc felt Elliott’s long body spoon him from behind. He attempted to turn over, but El held him tight, his chest to Luc’s back, and ran a hand over Luc’s thigh.

“Just relax, sweetheart. We’ve both got you,” El whispered in his ear, and Luc felt the tears begin a fresh course down his cheeks.

The blindfold was already soggy, but Luc didn’t care. How could he have been so angry at these men a few hours ago that he’d almost walked out the door? And over what? With horror, he remembered that Leo had been vomiting when he got to the condo.

“Sir?” he asked. “Are you okay? You didn’t need to...”

“I did, boy.”

Elliott rocked Luc toward Leo, a subtle nudge for Luc to close the distance between himself and his Dom.

“We wouldn’t have done anything if Leo wasn’t up to it,” Elliott said.

“And El did most of the work.” Leo chuckled darkly. “He’s a very good student.” Then Leo’s hand cupped Luc’s jaw and lifted his chin so Leo could place a kiss on Luc’s lips. “And

this was necessary. I haven't been a very good Sir for you lately, have I?"

"You've been ill, Sir."

"Yes, but you've needed me. Don't lie to me, boy. You've needed me, but I haven't been paying attention."

"It's okay, Sir. I understand."

"Luc..." Elliott ran his hand over Luc's ass, and Luc shivered at the touch.

His ass was quite raw, and he thought there might be a couple of places where the cane had broken the skin. He also suspected there might be a bruise from the paddle Elliott had used to send him over the edge. That was fine. Luc loved to see the marks from a play session for days afterward.

Luc pushed his ass against Elliott's groin, loving the licks of fire that touched his skin as the coarse hair around El's cock brushed against it. Elliott rocked his hips against Luc, letting him feel how hard he was. If Luc had any doubts that his spouse had been an enthusiastic participant in the scene, they faded.

"El..." he sighed.

"Just relax, love," Leo whispered as he caressed Luc's face.

With a heavy exhale, Luc did as he was told and let himself drift, held between the two men he loved and was loved by in return.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

Elliott

Elliott lay on the bed, his arms cradling Luc, his chest against the heated skin of Luc's back. Leo lay on Luc's other side, facing the both of them, his gaze shifting between both Luc and El, keeping an eye on both of them as Luc recovered from what had been an intense scene.

Although Elliott had little to base his assessment on, he'd seen enough in the dungeons when he'd accompanied Luc to know intensity didn't go hand in hand with force. One of the most intense scenes he'd ever witnessed had been a young woman suspended by her arms so that she could only stand on her toes. She was at the mercy of her Dom, who proceeded to gently push her from side to side, changing her position so slowly it was like watching someone do Tai Chi. The look on her face had been utter bliss, and Luc had been totally in awe as the scene progressed without any increase in physicality. The Dom gently guided her body to one side, then the other, as the woman drifted, and her body grew more and more slack as she submitted to her Dom's demands. At the time, Elliott hadn't understood what was going on, but, he thought, after watching Luc tonight, he could appreciate the woman's willingness to let go and the Dom's control and attention to her reactions.

Luc still dozed between him and Leo, his breathing even and his body completely relaxed. Elliott stroked his hair, shifting a stray curl behind an ear, brushing another from his

forehead, and then he glanced up and caught Leo watching him and smiled at the man.

“This is why aftercare is one of my favorite parts of BDSM,” Leo said. “He’s beautiful, isn’t he?”

“I had no idea.”

Of course, Elliott knew his husband was attractive, but that wasn’t what Leo was referring to. It was the way Luc surrendered that was beautiful. Even if the impact play itself didn’t do anything for Elliott, he could still appreciate the effect it had on Luc. And on Leo, for that matter. When Leo had proposed this scene, Elliott had resisted because he knew Leo was still recovering from the latest round of chemo, and he’d been ill earlier in the day. But then Leo told Elliott that Luc needed this, that he was worried Luc was becoming overwhelmed and frustrated with their new arrangement, and that he, too, needed a chance to let his Dom play. It had been too long for both of them.

“If you can do the more physical work, I can handle the rest,” he’d said, and Elliott agreed. Now, he was glad that he had.

“It was amazing,” Elliott said quietly. “The way you anticipated him, the way you knew what he needed and how much, the way he responded, and the sounds...” El suppressed a shiver. “The sounds he made. Is he always like that?”

Leo chuckled. “Most of the time.” His fingers joined Elliott’s in tracing Luc’s lips. “Sometimes he whimpers more, sometimes he sasses me.” With a frown, Leo lifted his gaze to

catch Elliott's eye. "He had a harder time letting go today than he usually does."

"Do you think that's because of me?"

"Or me," Leo said with a dry laugh. "But no, I think that's some of it, but not all. I think our boy has been withholding from us again and trying to deal with things on his own because he doesn't want to cause us stress." He leaned in and kissed the tip of Luc's nose. "The brat." Then he looked up and took hold of Elliott's hand and squeezed. "Thank you for trusting me."

Elliott squeezed back. "Always." He rose up on an elbow and leaned across Luc's shoulder. "I love you, Leo," he said and gave the man a quick kiss.

When he resumed his place, Leo reached over Luc and ran his fingers down Elliott's face, lingering on his lips. "I love you too." He draped his arm over Luc's waist, fingers stroking at Elliott's chest.

"Love you two too," Luc said sleepily as he stretched.

The movement brought Luc's ass back into contact with Elliott's cock. His erection had softened as Luc dozed, but the friction as Luc continued to wiggle against him reminded it of its previous interest.

Leo slapped at Luc's left ass cheek. "Brat. Behave."

"Yes, Sir," Luc giggled, then sighed. "Thank you, Sir." He turned slightly so Elliott was able to see his face. "And thank

you, El. That was..." He frowned. "Were you okay using the cane on me?"

Elliott wrapped his arms tighter around Luc's chest and pulled the man against himself, letting his now hard cock ride the crease of Luc's ass. "What do you think?" he growled in Luc's ear.

With a moan, Luc went boneless and pliant in El's arms.

"Are you hard, boy?" Leo asked while the hand that had been stroking Elliott's chest disappeared under the covers. Elliott had a pretty good idea of what Leo was going to do, and it was confirmed when Luc moaned louder and bucked his hips forward. "Oh, yes, very hard." Leo's voice was almost a growl. He glanced over Luc's shoulder. "Do you think we should do something about this, El?"

"I'd like to do something about my own..." Elliott thrust forward, his now rigid length loving the friction as it slid between Luc's cheeks. The head of his cock rested against Luc's tight hole, and Elliott rocked back and forth a couple of times, making both him and Luc gasp. "...issue," El finished.

"Please, Sir," Luc panted as Elliott thrust against his ass, painting Luc's skin with the precum leaking from his cock.

Elliott was watching himself move against Luc, enthralled by the sight of his reddened skin and the faint lines that marked Luc's buttocks. Running a hand down Luc's flank, he felt where his blows had landed, felt the slightly raised and abraded skin, the rise in temperature from the increased blood

flow. He had no idea how arousing it would feel to be the author of those marks. Perhaps he was a bit kinky after all.

Luc shivered against him, pulling Elliott out of his thoughts, and El took hold of his shoulders. He pulled their bodies together, his hips bucking against Luc's backside, still watching his cock slide against Luc's ass.

"El?" Leo's voice came to him as if from a distance, bringing Elliott's attention back to him.

"Yessss," he hissed as Luc reached between them and stroked his cock. He glanced up to find Leo with an amused smile on his face.

"I guess that answers that," Leo said and turned his focus back to Luc. "Yes, boy, but you're not allowed to come until I say so."

"Sir," Luc whined.

Leo cupped his chin in his hand. "I want to watch you fall apart, boy. I want to see you sweating and moaning and out of your mind with desire, and then I want to watch you come all over the both of us."

Fuck. Fuck. Bloody fuck. Elliott's brain nearly short-circuited at Leo's words. Not only did Leo want to watch Elliott fuck Luc, but he was going to make Luc wait to climax? *Hell, yes!* Now, the only worry Elliott had was lasting long enough to make it worthwhile. He wasn't sure he had enough self-control to edge Luc for more than a few minutes.

With a kiss to Luc's lips, Leo reached under the pillows for the bottle of lube and handed it to Elliott.

"Fuck our boy, El, but make him wait for it."

"Yes, sir." Elliott grinned as he took the pump bottle and squirted a generous amount on his fingers.

When his fingers were suitably coated with slick, Elliott delved under the covers and sought out Luc's entrance. He slid his fingers between Luc's cheeks and found the tight knot of muscle he was looking for. With a glance over Luc's shoulder at Leo, Elliott tapped lightly against Luc's hole.

Luc bucked backward, but Elliott kept his fingers dancing along his rim, laughing as Luc's breathless moan turned into a gasp as Leo did something to his front. Another quick glance showed him Leo with one of Luc's nipples between his teeth. The nub was pulled taut, the skin stretched out from Luc's chest. Elliott shivered and slid his fingers back, this time letting the tip of one circle Luc's entrance and dip ever so slightly inside.

"Oh my God," Luc groaned. "Please. Please. Please."

"What do you want, boy?"

"Touch me. Fill me. Fuck me. Pleeaasse."

Luc's final word was a wail as Elliott finally slid a finger into the man's tight, hot channel. *Fuck*. Elliott had always loved the way Luc felt. It didn't matter if it was his fingers, his tongue, or his cock; sliding inside Luc was like being wrapped in silk. Hot fucking silk. The man burned like an inferno.

This time, both Elliott and Leo chuckled, and it was Elliott who leaned close to Luc's ear to whisper, "Patience, love."

Luc wailed again as Leo bit down on a nipple, and Elliott pumped his finger a few times before sliding in a second one.

Together, he and Leo built up Luc's arousal, then backed off. Leo soothed him while Elliott teased Luc by thrusting his cock against his ass and sliding inside his crack but not entering him. Luc humped back against Elliott, then thrust his hips forward as Leo took hold of his cock. They brought him to the brink again, then backed off.

"Oh my God, I'm gonna die," Luc moaned as Leo began to jerk him off again.

"It'd be a hell of a way to go, wouldn't it, boy?"

Elliott felt the tremor that passed through Luc's body and knew that Luc's mind had suddenly fixed on a decidedly unsexy thought. He slid down his husband's body, kissing his way down the center of his back, then pulling his cheeks apart with his hands. Lube wasn't Elliott's favorite thing to taste, but he needed Luc to let go, and this was the best way to do it.

Flicking his tongue against Luc's hole, Elliott grinned when Luc moaned. In this position, he could feel Leo's hand at work on Luc's cock and timed his motions to Leo's, working in rhythm with Leo to ramp Luc's arousal to another peak without toppling him over. No. Elliott wanted to be buried inside his husband's body when that happened, wanted to feel Luc's channel spasm and grasp at his cock, wanted to have his body release into that tight space... Elliott lost himself in the

motion of his tongue, the rhythm of Leo's movements, and Luc's moans.

When the head of a cock poked through Luc's thighs and bumped into his chin, Elliott paused in surprise. It took him a moment to realize it was Leo's. Just as he was about to run his tongue over the slit, Luc thrust forward, and Leo's cock slid out of reach. Elliott huffed out a breath against Luc's hole, and the man thrust forward again with a squeal.

“El!”

Elliott laughed softly but didn't apologize. Instead, he pushed Luc's left leg over Leo's hip. The new position exposed Luc more fully to him, but it also let him see Leo's erection. He knew the man didn't usually get hard and that, when he did, it was from friction, not necessarily arousal, but still, the sight of a small bead of precum in the slit made Elliott groan. He wanted to taste Leo so badly, but should he ask first? If it were Luc, he'd just do it, but this was Leo, and the rules weren't as clear yet.

While he was debating with himself about what to do, Luc moaned and thrust forward into Leo's hand. The bead of precum grew and dripped onto Luc's thigh.

Problem solved, Elliott reached forward and gathered the precious fluid on his fingers and lifted them to his mouth. He moaned at the salty taste on his tongue. It was bitter, probably due to Leo's medications, but it was still an intimate part of Leo that El was taking into his body. When another bead appeared, Elliott reached out without hesitation, then rose

from underneath the covers and held his fingers up to Luc's mouth.

"It's Leo's," he said gruffly.

Luc greedily sucked the fingers into his mouth, making both Leo and Elliott groan at the sight. Then Luc sighed and let El's fingers slip out. He glanced down between his body and Leo's.

"You're hard, Sir," he said and reached down to adjust Leo so their cocks were aligned. He was about to start jerking them together when Leo batted his hand away.

"Mine," he growled.

At first, Elliott thought he was referring to his own cock, but when he pumped lube into his hand and closed it around both his and Luc's cocks, Elliott realized he'd meant both of them. While Leo continued to jerk them off, Elliott reversed his previous position so he could lick and suck on the underside of their erections and tease at their balls. His own cock rode against Luc's back, thrusting against the groove between his shoulder blades, and together, he and Leo brought Luc up to the peak again.

"Ple...ea...se, Sir," Luc stuttered, and Elliott knew from the way his balls had drawn up that he was reaching the point of no return.

"El?" Leo questioned.

With a grunt, Elliott switched his position so his chest was again flush against Luc's back, his cock lined up with Luc's

hole. He pumped more lube into his hand and slicked himself up, then nudged his way to that tight ring.

“Oh...fuck...oh...oh.” Luc was nearly beyond speech, and as Elliott pushed inside him, he lost the ability altogether, his words reduced to mewls of pleasure.

Elliott thrust, Leo’s hand worked Luc’s cock alongside his own, and Luc threw his head back against Elliott’s shoulder. It was something neither Leo nor Elliott could resist, and they both latched onto the skin at the base of his throat, nipping and sucking. Luc moaned, his body tense as he tried to hold back his orgasm. Leo caught Elliott’s eye, and El nodded.

“Come for me, boy,” Leo whispered. “Come for Elliott.”

With a wail, Luc convulsed, thrust his cock hard into Leo’s fist, and came all over them both as his ass clamped down on Elliott’s dick, a silken vise that toppled Elliott over the edge as well. His vision went white as blood thundered in his ears, and his cock swelled, then filled Luc with liquid heat. As his orgasm crested, he was dimly aware of Leo’s voice rising alongside his own, both of them groaning into Luc’s neck. When Elliott met Leo’s gaze, the fire in his blue eyes matched what Elliott felt in his entire body.

Elliott leaned forward and captured Leo’s mouth in a blistering kiss, and he groaned through a final spasm of climax at the same time as Leo. Then Luc was nuzzling into their space, asking to be included, which they happily did, trading kisses and caresses as they recovered from their orgasms.

When Elliott's cock slid from Luc's body, he kissed both men, then got up to retrieve a washcloth with which to clean everyone off. Holding the damp cloth in his hands, he watched Luc and Leo as they kissed softly.

Six months ago, Elliott had thought his life was complete. He had a job he enjoyed, a comfortable life, and a spouse he adored. Now, staring at the two men who meant the world to him, Elliott's heart was so full he was afraid it was going to burst, and he finally, truly, understood what Luc meant when he said that love shared made love infinite.

Dimming the bedroom lights, Elliott climbed back into bed and gently ran the washcloth over Luc and Leo's bodies. Luc wriggled and complained that it was cold, but Leo laughed.

"One of the benefits of being paralyzed," he said. "I can't feel wet spots either."

"Good," Luc pouted as he scooted toward the center of the bed. "You can have that one."

Elliott slapped Luc's ass. "Brat," he said. "I'll bring a hand towel back so neither of you have to sleep in the wet spot."

"You enjoyed that too much," Luc called after him as Elliott made his way back to the bathroom.

After depositing the washcloth into the sink, Elliott retrieved a towel from the linen closet. He laid it between Luc and Leo, then climbed back into bed. Luc instantly curled into his arms, back to Elliott's chest, then helped Leo scoot closer. He sighed.

“Thank you, both. I’m sorry if I’ve been a brat this week.”

Leo kissed him. “We’ll talk about it in the morning, boy. Tonight is for sleeping.”



When Elliott woke in the morning, his arms were still wrapped around Luc, but Leo’s side of the bed was empty. A quick glance at the clock showed him it was nearly noon, so it wasn’t surprising Leo had already gotten going. Nor was Elliott unhappy with the late-morning lie-in after their previous evening’s activities. He was just grateful that he didn’t have to be on campus until three and Luc had the day off. Canceling class because he was exhausted from having sex with his boyfriend and husband probably wasn’t an acceptable excuse.

Luc stretched, and Elliott pulled Luc closer to his chest. When his spouse yawned, Elliott covered his mouth with a hand, laughing when Luc kissed his palm.

“Good morning,” Luc said as he rolled over to face Elliott.

“Good morning.” Elliott smiled, then kissed his husband. “How are you this morning, beautiful?”

“Like jelly.” Luc wriggled in El’s arms. “I just want to be spread and devoured.”

“That was awful.” But he still kissed Luc, lingering this time to enjoy the feel of Luc’s soft lips and the warmth of his

tongue as he explored. When they broke apart, Elliott smiled again. “But you are amazing.”

“Yeah?” Luc looked suddenly shy. “You were okay with everything we did?”

“I wouldn’t have done it if I wasn’t okay with it. You should know that about me.”

“I do. I just needed to check in.”

“I know. And thank you.” Elliott rolled onto his back and pulled Luc across his chest. He tangled his fingers in Luc’s curls with one hand and traced his lips with the other. “It’s strange, but nothing about being with Leo has been awkward. Maybe it’s because you and I talk about what the two of you do, or maybe it’s just that it...”

“Feels right,” Luc finished the sentence for him.

“Yes. That’s it exactly. It feels right. The only thing I’m confused by is that it took two years to figure it out.”

Luc crossed his arms over Elliott’s chest and rested his chin on top of his hands. “Maybe Leo and I needed to have our relationship and you and I needed to know we were okay before we could be a triad.” He shook his head. “Either way, I don’t really care. What’s important is that we’re together, all of us, and that Leo now has twice the love to help him get better.”

“And that you will not be able to hide things from either of us as easily.” Elliott booped Luc on the nose, and Luc flushed from embarrassment.

“I wasn’t...”

“We’ll talk about it this evening, Luc,” El said, borrowing a bit of Leo’s Dom voice. “I know you were just trying to figure things out on your own, and that’s fine. But we’ve talked about how you need to let us know what’s going on and then tell us if you want space to work through the issue yourself. Don’t worry about it for now, though. I’ve got to be on campus in a few hours, so it’ll keep until I get back. Okay?”

“Okay.” Luc sighed and rubbed his cheek against Elliott’s chest. “I wish you didn’t have to leave today.”

“Me too, sweetheart, but Becks has something he wants to talk to me about after my class, so I can’t not go in. And you’d better go round up the mutts before they pester Leo to distraction. I’m surprised they haven’t been in here with their leashes yet.”

Luc grumbled, but he let Elliott get out of bed. With a huge sigh, he followed suit, and Elliott watched him leave the bedroom — buck naked and his ass still lightly marked with pink stripes — before he headed into the bathroom for a shower.

Getting to shower at Leo’s was definitely a perk of living in the condo. The stall was spacious, and the multiple showerheads could be adjusted in a variety of ways from a control panel on the opposite wall from the water.

Every time he encountered one of Leo’s modifications, Elliott marveled at how much he took for granted having full use of both his legs. He also tucked it into the back of his head

for ways in which they might create a space in which all three of them could live comfortably when they decided to make this living arrangement permanent. It wasn't a question of if in Elliott's mind; it was a matter of when. Until Leo got a clean bill of health, he knew the conversation was moot, but he also knew he wouldn't like it if they went back to living in separate houses with a bridge in between them.

Elliott was facing the spray when Luc slipped inside the shower stall and wrapped his arms around El's waist. Turning, he pushed Luc's curls away from his face.

"What about the dogs?"

Luc grinned. "Leo had the concierge walk them when he woke up. He says the man's expression was priceless when he came to the door and got handed Bey's leash."

With a matching grin, Elliott shook his head. "Poor Bey. Jericho's the one who's the troublemaker."

"Yeah. Leo set the guy straight. When he came back, he told Leo he'd be willing to take Bey for walks anytime, but he'd need hazard pay to take Jericho out again."

They both laughed.

Elliott's hand hadn't left Luc's face, and as they stared at each other, the laughter quieted and was replaced by something much more potent. Elliott moved to cup Luc's chin and tilt his head up as he pulled Luc closer.

"I love you," he said, then brought his mouth down on Luc's.

With a sigh, Luc adjusted his body so his chest was flush against Elliott's and melted against him as Elliott devoured his husband's mouth. He loved how pliant Luc became after a good fuck. Without all that tension in his body, Luc was almost liquid, his lithe muscles flowing against Elliott's in a sinuous roll as he took whatever El had to offer.

At least, he was until Luc's desire ramped up, and he became insistent, almost climbing Elliott's body in an attempt to get more skin against his.

Groaning, Luc broke the kiss, panting as he nuzzled against the sandy-colored hair on El's chest and mouthed one of Elliott's nipples. "Fuck. I can't get enough of you."

Elliott drew Luc's left leg up to his thigh, and Luc took the hint, hiking himself up El's body until he was wrapped around his waist, ankles locked behind El's back, arms behind his neck. Elliott supported Luc with his hands under Luc's ass and turned them so Luc's back was against the wall.

"The feeling is absolutely mutual, sweetheart," El said before he resumed his assault on Luc's mouth.

His cock rode the seam of Luc's ass, and Luc's dick was hard against his chest as they kissed and thrust against each other. Their panted breaths and moans echoed off the hard tiles of the bathroom as their hands roamed and rolled nipples, caressed muscles, tangled in hair.

Elliott took hold of Luc's ass and spread his cheeks so his cock could rub against Luc's hole, and Luc went wild. His hands were everywhere as he threw his head back and

groaned. The precum leaking from his slit made Elliott's chest slippery, which made it easier for Luc to thrust and slide against the furrow between Elliott's pectoral muscles. Luc loved the scrape of Elliott's chest hair against the sensitive skin on his dick. If he could have stood the itchiness of a beard, Elliott would have grown one just so he could rub it against Luc's body because it drove his husband wild.

Case in point, Luc was rubbing his face against Elliott's stubbled cheeks like a cat marking its territory, humming as if he was trying to purr as he did so. Elliott arched his neck and pushed Luc more firmly against the wall so he could reach for the conditioner. He wanted inside his spouse, and there wasn't any lube in the shower, something Elliott was going to have to rectify as soon as...*oh, hell*. Elliott pushed the thought aside. He'd deal with that when he didn't have his arms full of a wriggling and fully aroused Luc.

A couple of pumps from the dispenser and Elliott's fingers were slick enough to slide one, then two inside Luc. A loud moan burst from his husband's mouth as he left off driving Elliott wild with kisses and soft nibbles on the side of his neck. Luc threw his head back against the wall, which brought his weight down on El's hands, driving his fingers deeper inside Luc. He curled them against Luc's prostate and stroked, drawing more delicious sounds from his husband.

"Oh, shit, oh fuck," Luc gasped. "You. I want you. In me."

"You've got me," El replied, but he knew what Luc wanted.

Shifting again, Elliott withdrew his fingers and positioned Luc over his cock. He wanted to ease in slowly, but Luc had other ideas. It was Elliott's turn to gasp as his cock slid into Luc's body all the way to the root. Groaning against the intrusion, Luc fixed his eyes on Elliott's. They were glazed with arousal, his pupils blown wide. His lips were swollen and red from their kisses, slightly parted as he breathed out soft noises of pleasure.

"You are so beautiful," Elliott told him. The water had uncurled Luc's hair, and Elliott raised a hand to brush it back from his eyes before lowering his mouth to Luc's again. He caught Luc's moan in a vibration against his tongue as he stroked inside, timing his thrusts into Luc's body as if they were one movement. His hips pistoned upward, driving his cock as deep as it could go, and his tongue plundered Luc's mouth. Luc was at his mercy, holding on for dear life as he rode Elliott.

Dimly, Elliott was aware of Leo's presence, but his attention was wholly engaged with making Luc fall apart. He slid a hand between their bodies and wrapped it around Luc's cock. Setting a ruthless pace, he jerked Luc as his hips slammed into his husband's tight body. When Luc went rigid and began to come, Elliott swallowed his husband's scream. He thrust hard until his balls tightened, and he tipped over the edge into his own climax, his voice mingling with Luc's as he worked them through the aftershocks of their orgasms.

They kissed softly as they came down, the feel of water cascading over his shoulders bringing Elliott back to

awareness. He rested his forehead against Luc's. "We had an audience," he said softly.

Without losing contact, they both turned their heads to find Leo watching them from the shower stall's entrance. This close to Luc, Elliott felt his husband's face flush with heat and nuzzled his nose against Luc's, letting him know he was okay with Leo having seen them. For a long moment, no one spoke, but then Luc greeted Leo.

"Hello, Sir." Luc's voice sounded almost shy.

"Hello, boy. El."

Again, the three men fell silent. Luc squirmed in Elliott's arms, causing his softening cock to slide from Luc's body, but he didn't let go of Luc. Instead, he carried Luc out of the shower stall until he reached the seat that Leo used. It was on a track like one of those stair-climbing chairs, but this one moved into the shower stall. Once he reached it, Elliott lowered Luc to the seat, then grabbed one of the towels Leo held and wrapped his husband up in it. When Luc was mostly dry, Elliott took the other towel, dried himself off, then tied it around his waist.

"Do we need to talk about this?" Elliott asked Leo, then realized the man was fighting a grin.

Leo shrugged. "Do we need to talk about how hot you and Luc are together? If you want. I'm just wondering why it took you two so long to make use of the shower."

“Sir?” Luc was off the seat and climbing into Leo’s lap in a flash. “You’re not upset with us?” He wrapped his arms around Leo’s neck and snuggled against his shoulder.

“Why would I be upset with you, boy? We were together last night, all of us, but I would never demand that you and Elliott change your physical relationship because of me.” He lifted Luc’s chin with his fingers. “Did you think the only way we could be intimate or play was if it was all three of us?”

“That’s what it seemed like,” Luc grumbled.

Leo met Elliott’s gaze over the top of Luc’s head. “All the more reason we need to have a conversation tonight after El gets back home.”

“I agree.” Elliott came over to the two of them, kissed the top of Luc’s head, then gave Leo a more lingering one on the lips. “Good morning. Thank you for taking care of the dogs.”

As Elliott pulled away, Leo reached out and drew him back in for another kiss. “If this is the way I get repaid, I might be willing to pay for someone to walk the dogs every morning.”

Another kiss and Luc was nudging his way in between them.

“Did you need some attention, boy?” Leo growled, but Luc just looked up at him with innocent eyes.

Elliott ruffled Luc’s hair. “I think you’re going to have your hands full with him today.” He kissed the top of Luc’s head again, then stood up. “I’ve got to get going so I’m not late for my class.”

“I should probably get dressed too,” Luc said and made to get off Leo’s lap.

“Not so fast, boy,” Leo said as Elliott exited the bathroom.

He smiled as he headed for the guest room’s closet. Prior to their scene the previous night, Leo told Elliott he was planning to begin Luc’s punishment while El was at work. Elliott had no idea what Leo had in mind, but he could guess from the man’s expression when Luc mentioned clothing that Luc was going to spend most of the day naked. He anticipated it would be...interesting when he got home that evening.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

Luc

In theory, Luc thought cock cages were sexy. The way they wrapped around a guy's dick and prevented him from coming even when he was on the edge? Delicious. He loved watching guys at play parties who were trapped in a cage. It didn't matter if they were elaborate or simple; Luc thought they were beautiful.

In practice, he wasn't quite so keen, especially when it was *his* equipment that was bound up and he was at the mercy of his inventive and somewhat sadistic Dom.

As soon as the door had closed behind Elliott, Leo told Luc to get dressed and walk the dogs. It had been hours since their morning excursion with the building's concierge, so he didn't think anything of it until he returned. Leo was waiting in the condo's entrance, the cock cage in his hand.

"Strip and present," Leo had commanded.

Luc responded as quickly as he could, remembering to fold his clothes neatly and placing them carefully on the table where they left their keys and the daily mail. When he was kneeling in front of Leo with his head bowed, the end of the metal cane Elliott had used the previous night slid under his chin and tapped ever so lightly. Luc shivered and lifted his head.

"Why do you submit to me, boy?" Leo asked.

“Because you’re my Sir.” Luc was confused by the question. He couldn’t tell if Leo wanted reassurance or was checking in.

“Why am I your Sir?”

“Because...” Luc frowned. “I don’t understand the question, Sir.”

“We’ve been in our D/s relationship for nearly two and a half years. I’ve been in this chair for all of that time, and you’ve never questioned my orders. Yesterday, I told you to stay in your studio and finish your work. What did you do instead?”

“I came home, Sir.” Luc looked back at the floor, but the cane touched his chin again and made him meet Leo’s piercing blue eyes. “It didn’t sound like an order, though. You didn’t call me boy or use your Dom voice. And I was worried.”

“And?”

Luc huffed out a breath and screwed up his mouth. “And I was frustrated because you’ve been relying on Elliott to help you. I felt left out.”

“Frustrated?” Leo cocked an eyebrow.

Luc’s dick twitched and began to thicken, and he suppressed a shiver. This wasn’t going to be about arousal or play. Leo had a point to make, and Luc was about to receive his punishment. Keeping his chin raised, Luc focused on a spot over Leo’s shoulder.

“Look at me, boy,” Leo growled. “Frustrated is not what you were feeling, was it?”

“No, Sir.” Luc fixed his gaze back on Leo’s face. “I was jealous. Of Elliott.”

“So, you disobeyed me.”

Anger flared in Luc’s chest. “But it wasn’t an order. You haven’t given me an order in weeks. You’ve barely called me boy or touched me.”

“I’m going to ask you again, then. Why do you submit to me?”

Luc tried to figure out what Leo was getting at. He’d obviously been wrong the previous day in coming home. Even if it had been to Leo throwing up in the bathroom, he hadn’t done as his Dom had told him. That was clear, but it hadn’t been an order. Even as he thought it, Luc knew it had been, and he’d known it yesterday as well, even as he’d tried to rationalize it on his way across the bridge.

“But you were sick, Sir. I was worried.”

“And while I appreciate and understand that, our relationship is based on a power dynamic we’ve both agreed to. Even when I’m healthy, Luc, I don’t have any special power that makes it impossible for you to disobey me. So, I’m going to ask you again. Why do you submit to me, boy?”

The light bulb finally lit inside Luc’s head as he understood what Leo was really asking him. “I submit because I choose to, Sir. Because it gives me pleasure.”

Leo nodded. “And I choose to be your Sir for the same reason. So, when I tell you to do something, I’m still your Dom telling you to do something, even if it doesn’t sound like an order. You always have the choice to say no, to renegotiate, or to obey. What you don’t have the choice to do is disobey without there being consequences unless you want to end our relationship. Are we clear, boy?”

“Yes, Sir.”

“Do you want to call red on our relationship?”

Staring at Leo in horror, Luc shook his head. “Absolutely not, Sir.”

“Then you are choosing to continue our D/s relationship as we’ve previously agreed?”

“Yes, Sir.”

And with that, Leo had let Luc get off his knees, given him a kiss, and told him his punishment was going to be wearing the cock cage until Elliott got home. Luc was also going to sit at Leo’s feet while Leo got some work done, and he was required to finish the editing work he’d interrupted the day before.

Luc had known it wasn’t going to be that simple, and he’d been right.

Three hours later, his videos were done and scheduled, but he was kneeling on the cobalt pillow, and his cock was still encircled by metal bands, his balls trussed up by a thin leather strap. And he was hard because Leo kept leaning over to

fondle him or pinch his nipples or pull his hair. Every time Luc started to slip over the border into subspace, Leo stopped what he was doing and focused on his computer. Luc loved it. He hated it. He wanted to come. And he was thrilled it would go on for at least another hour while they waited for Elliott to return.

Occasionally, Leo's hand drifted to caress Luc's neck and throat. Leo had talked about eventually collaring Luc when they started their relationship, and Luc had worn a collar when he was with Leo, but Leo always removed it when their time was at an end and Luc had to return to Elliott. It was part of the delineation they'd made between Leo-time and Elliott-time, but Luc had hated the moment when Leo unbuckled his collar. It always felt too final, as if he was never going to return, so they'd stopped using it. If their living arrangement became permanent, Luc wondered if Leo would be willing to discuss it again. The thought of wearing Elliott's ring and Leo's collar made Luc shiver and arch into Leo's touch as his fingers teased at Luc's collarbone.

"Are you cold, boy?" Leo asked without looking away from his computer screen.

"No, Sir."

Leo sat back in his chair and stretched his arms over his head. "I think I would like some coffee."

"Would you like me to make it for you, Sir?"

"Please, boy," Leo said, but he didn't tell Luc to go, so Luc remained kneeling on the cobalt pillow. With an amused

chuckle, Leo ran his fingers through Luc's curls. "Very good, boy. You may make a cup for yourself as well, if you wish. Now, go."

"Thank you, Sir."

Luc rose to his feet, gave Leo a kiss, then headed for the kitchen. His caged cock strained at its restraints, but Luc knew better than to touch himself. If he was uncomfortable, he needed to tell his Sir.

The dogs followed him into the kitchen and begged for treats while Luc made the coffee. Bey sat placidly in the doorway and gave Luc his best droopy-eyed, pitiful look, and Jericho planted himself in front of the cabinet where the dogs' food and special treats were kept. He sniffed the cabinet, then looked at Luc, who was quite used to the Mudi's tactics. Although he tried to be strong, Luc knew he'd toss them a couple of flippies to keep themselves occupied when he returned to Leo's office.

As Luc moved around the kitchen, his cock bobbed in front of him, almost mocking him in its attempts to get noticed. In its own way, it was almost as bad as Jericho about asking for something Luc couldn't give it.

"When El gets home," Luc told his cock, then looked at Jericho, who was practically rubbing the side of his head against the cabinet door. "You too," he said, trying to sound stern, but a rumble from Bey made Luc laugh. "Fine." He opened the cabinet door and pulled out two treats, a medium one for Jericho and an extra-large for Bey, though he was

aware that Jericho would probably try to trade once the dogs hunkered down in the living room.

Sure enough, as Luc was heading back to the office with the fresh mugs of coffee, Jericho was happily gnawing away at the larger of the two flippies. It wouldn't hurt him. Jericho would be lucky if he could soften it up enough to try swallowing it before Elliott got home.

Thinking the word "swallowing" made Luc's cock twitch, and he looked down in disgust. "Really, dude?"

As if in answer, his cock twitched again, and Luc was smiling as he passed through the open door of Leo's office. Leo was engrossed in the spreadsheet on his computer screen as Luc placed the mug in front of him, then made to place his own on the floor so he could resume his position on the pillow by Leo's feet.

"What's so amusing, boy?" Leo asked.

Luc silently cursed Leo's ability to see everything as he felt his cheeks grow hot. He knew he was blushing, and telling Leo it was nothing was not going to result in everyone going back to work. Neither was trying to avoid the question, unfortunately.

Leo turned his chair to face Luc. "Boy?" The growl in his voice told Luc that Leo was in full-on Dom mode. "Come here."

Luc turned and faced Leo, taking a step forward to bring him within touching distance of his Sir. His ever-helpful dick,

instead of behaving, gave a quick jerk in Leo's direction, and Luc closed his eyes. He expected Leo to tell him to open them again. What he didn't expect was to feel Leo's hand on his thigh.

"Move closer, boy."

Doing as he'd been told, Luc took another step forward until his shins brushed the support bar on Leo's chair and his knees touched the front of Leo's seat.

Leo's hand tracing up Luc's thigh made him bite his lip as blood raced to his captive dick. *Fuck, fuck, fuck*, Luc chanted in his head as Leo used his other hand to fondle Luc's balls. Leo was going to torture him until he broke.

"Talk to me, boy. What were you thinking when you walked into the office? I'll bet it was something naughty."

With a shake of his head, Luc risked a peek at Leo and quickly slammed his eyes shut again. Leo was staring at him as if he were something delicious. The fire in the man's vivid blue eyes did nothing to help Luc's cock calm down. But then, that was exactly the point, wasn't it?

Luc groaned as he rocked forward into Leo's touch, which immediately disappeared. *Fuck*.

"I was..." Luc started, then faltered as Leo's fingers resumed their tease of his balls. He took in a shuddering breath. "I was thinking...how...much...*gah*." Luc gasped as Leo's hand closed around his sac. "...how...*fuck*..."

"Language, boy." Leo's chuckle was pure evil.

“Yesssss, Ssssir.” Another deep breath. *Focus, focus, focus.* On his exhale, Luc spewed, “I wasthinkinghowmuchmydickwaslikeJerichowhenhewantsso mething.”

“You were what? I didn’t quite catch that. Say it again. Slower this time. And look at me.” Leo gripped Luc’s balls just tight enough to be uncomfortable and pulled down on them until he opened his eyes. The corners of Leo’s mouth tipped up in a smirk. “Good, boy. Now, tell me.” He tugged on Luc’s sac again.

The stretch made Luc groan. He hated when Leo was in this kind of a mood, but he loved it even more. It had been too long since his Sir wanted to play with him. It crossed Luc’s mind to worry that Leo wasn’t up to it, but then he dismissed the thought. If Leo weren’t feeling well enough to play, he wouldn’t have started the game. So, okay, it was playtime.

“I. Was thinking.” Luc timed his words to Leo’s tugs. “My dick is like Jericho. When. He. Wants something.”

“Good, boy. Well done.” Leo’s fingers stroked him this time, even as his other hand crept up Luc’s thigh and teased along the delicate skin between his hole and his balls.

With Luc’s legs caged by Leo’s, it was a tight fit, and Luc wanted to spread them so Leo had better access, but he didn’t. Leo would tell him what he wanted, and until that happened, Luc knew to remain as he was.

“Thank you, Sir.”

Another tease of Leo's fingers, a tug on his balls, and a quick caress of his caged cock from root to leaking tip that left Luc panting.

"And how is your dick like Jericho? Explain, please."

Leo raised his fingers to his mouth, and Luc shivered as he sucked on them, tasting and smelling himself on Leo's skin.

"Tell me, boy," Leo commanded, but he didn't take his fingers from Luc's mouth.

The result was slobbery and ungraceful as Luc told his Sir about Jericho in the kitchen, begging for a flippy, and how his dick had twitched at the word *swallow*. His cheeks were flaming by the time he got to the end of his explanation, and he doubted Leo had understood most of the words, but Luc knew that was all beside the point. Spit was dripping down his chin, and Leo's fingers were slick with it.

"Lean closer, love," Leo commanded. "Since your dick wants to be swallowed, let's see what we can do."

It took a couple of tries and finally required Luc to balance on either side of Leo's legs, his knees braced by the wheels of Leo's chair and his hands gripping Leo's shoulders, but then his cock was inside Leo's mouth. Leo's tongue played over the metal bands that encircled Luc's trapped length while his slicked-up fingers slid up Luc's crack to play with his hole. Luc was teased and tormented, his cock straining at the cage as it tried desperately to respond, and Luc trembled with each wave of pleasure that washed over him.

The precarious position he was in made it nearly impossible to move without the risk of falling over, but that only ramped up Luc's desire. He loved predicament bondage, the constant need to weigh one option — moving to get more of his cock in Leo's mouth — against another — the risk of falling — as Leo did his best to make the choice as difficult as possible for Luc. Leo was well aware of how much Luc loved to thrust against his mouth, loved to wiggle and squirm in a subtle topping from the bottom as Luc tried to get Leo to get him off. Luc did his best not to, but he couldn't help it when everything Leo did to him felt so good. But right now, Luc could only hold on to Leo's shoulders and let the man's mouth tease him until he was so turned on he was trembling, and his balls ached with the need to fill Leo's mouth.

Jericho gave a happy yip from the living room, and Bey's booming bark made Luc turn his head so quickly he nearly fell over. His cock slid from Leo's mouth as his Sir grabbed him by the waist to hold him steady.

“Never mind the dogs, boy,” Leo growled before swallowing Luc's cock once more.

“Oh, shit,” Luc breathed as he settled back into the position he'd been in before. His thighs were starting to ache, and his knees were protesting their proximity to the metal rims on Leo's wheels, but all that was noise in the back of Luc's head. He breathed deeply as Leo's hands kneaded his ass cheeks and a finger slid against his hole, teasing at the puckered skin before sliding inside him.

“Fuck,” a quiet voice said behind them.

This time, Luc didn't startle quite as badly. At least, he didn't until he felt Elliott's tongue slide over his hole and the tip tease in alongside Leo's finger. Luc cried out and rested his forehead on top of Leo's head. He was overwhelmed by the sensations flooding his body, and he cried out again as another finger probed at his entrance, then pressed inside him.

“Oh, shit. Oh, fuck,” Luc chanted. “Please, Sir. El. Please.” He was begging — he didn't know if it was for release or for this moment to keep going forever — his voice taking on a life of its own as sounds fell from his mouth. “Please.”

With a groan, Leo let Luc's cock fall from his mouth, and Elliott's tongue left his hole. The fingers were still there, thrusting, massaging, teasing at him, but then they, too, went away.

With wild eyes, Luc looked down at Leo. Tears blurred his vision, but he couldn't miss the smoldering expression on Leo's face just before Leo raised his hands and pushed him backward.

Luc couldn't help the squeal of surprise that burst from his lips, but instead of falling to the ground, he was scooped up by Elliott's arms.

“I've got you, love,” Elliott said as Luc flung his arms around his neck and attacked El's mouth with a hungry ferocity.

It felt as if it had been years since their shower that morning. Years since Elliott's hands had been on his body. Luc's skin was so sensitive that he trembled at Elliott's touch, at the feel of the air on his skin. He couldn't speak, couldn't form words, but he was sure both Elliott and Leo knew how turned on and needy he was.

"Bedroom," Leo said quietly. "Our boy deserves his reward."

Without a word, Elliott carried Luc down the hallway, Leo following after them. Luc couldn't stop kissing Elliott, his lips skimming El's jaw and throat, his hands teasing at the hair at the nape of El's neck. His hands tugged at Elliott's tie, loosening the knot, then fumbling with the buttons of his shirt. He whimpered with frustration because he couldn't get to Elliott's skin fast enough and needed to feel it under his fingers. It was as if all the touches and caresses and teasing Leo had lavished on him in the past hour needed to be released onto Elliott's body.

At last, they were in the bedroom, and Elliott placed Luc in the center of the bed, then turned to strip off his clothes. The tie, the vest, the shirt were quickly disposed of as Leo brought his chair close enough to the mattress to shift from one to the other. As soon as he was on the bed, Luc straddled him. He pulled Leo's polo shirt from his jeans, then lifted it over his head, depositing it onto the floor just as he heard Elliott's pants hit the ground.

Luc put a hand on Leo's waistband. "Please, Sir?" he asked. He wanted Leo naked but knew Leo wasn't always comfortable about displaying his unclothed body.

Elliott, now fully divested of his clothing, lay down on the bed and rolled close to the two of them. He leaned in to give Leo a kiss, his hand on Luc's thigh, then accepted a kiss from Luc. There was a pause at the end, their foreheads touching, as Luc hoped Elliott would help convince Leo. His husband did not disappoint.

"Please, Leo?" he asked.

For a long moment, Leo seemed to glare at Luc, the scowl telling Luc he might have crossed a line. "You were doing so well, boy," he grumbled. Luc huffed, and Leo lost his stern demeanor as he laughed. "Undress me the rest of the way, brat."

"Thank you, Sir!"

Luc didn't waste any time getting Leo's pants undone. He slid them down Leo's hips, along with his briefs, and wiggled them out from under his ass, then started to pull them off Leo's thighs.

Elliott stroked his hands down Leo's pale skin as his knees came into view and helped Luc strip them the rest of the way.

"I love you, Sir," Luc said and stroked his hands up Leo's legs. He kept his focus on Leo's expression and saw the moment he relaxed. With a smile, Luc resumed his position

straddling Leo's waist. He kissed his Sir. "And I love your body," he whispered as his lips left Leo's.

Turning his head, Leo fixed Elliott with a scowl. "Two against one is not fair."

Luc laughed. "But it's a lot of fun."

Elliott's arrival, with its subtle shift of the dynamic and the distraction of everyone getting situated on the bed, had taken the edge off Luc's arousal, but that was short-lived as soon as they were all naked.

"It definitely is, boy," Leo said as he pulled Luc down for another kiss.

Luc moaned as Leo's mouth opened to his. His body went pliant, submitting to Leo's explorations, as Elliott shifted closer, his body curling around theirs, his hands caressing them both.

"That was a glorious thing to come home to," he whispered, his tone reverent. "The two of you are amazing together. Leo so passionate, and Luc almost delirious with desire. I could feel you both and how much you wanted each other."

Luc moaned as Elliott continued to talk, his words full of praise and love for both himself and Leo. Beneath him, he felt Leo's upper body arch, and then Elliott's knuckles grazed Luc's stomach, and he knew that El had touched one of Leo's erogenous zones. He broke the kiss so he could see what his husband was doing to his Dom and was rewarded with the sight of Elliott rolling Leo's nipple between his fingers.

Knowing how sensitive Leo was there made it as arousing as if El had been stroking Leo's cock, and the way Leo rolled his head back, exposing his throat, told Luc everything he needed to know about how turned on his Sir was. He made short work of attacking Leo's neck, nipping at the taut tendons, licking up the side until he reached Leo's ear and could tease the tip of his tongue inside those whorls in a way he knew would drive Leo crazy.

Sure enough, Leo groaned, a deep, rumbling sound that echoed in his chest. Both Luc and Elliott chuckled, then went back to work. Luc loved how they'd turned the tables on his Sir and was more than happy at the change in plans. Elliott was a tender lover — attentive, sometimes gentle and sometimes rough, but always devoted to giving as much pleasure as he could — and Luc adored how he'd learned Leo's body so well.

Luc bent his head and took Leo's other nipple in his mouth. A flick of his tongue drew another groan from his Sir, and Luc grinned as he teased at the nub with the tip of his tongue, then caught it between his teeth and bit lightly. Leo arched his back, his hand threading into Luc's curls. Instead of pulling Luc away, he pushed Luc closer to his chest, asking for more. Luc was only too happy to oblige and concentrated on torturing Leo as much as he could. He sucked, swirled his tongue, nipped at the flesh, caught Leo's nipple in his teeth again, and ground down. A thrill ran through him when Leo gasped, his upper body bucking against Luc's lips, and curses fell from his Sir's mouth.

Turning his head, he took in the sight of Elliott engaged in similar activities. He grinned at his husband, and Elliott grinned back, reached out and caught Luc's hand in his own, then brought both their hands to Leo's waist. They caressed his abs and chest while continuing their assault on his nipples, encouraged by the sounds coming from Leo.

"Fuuuuck," Leo ground out and let his head fall back against the pillows. His chest was dotted with love marks from waist to neck. With a sudden gasp, Leo went tense and still, his mouth open in a silent scream, his eyes closed tight, but Luc saw the thin line of tears creeping out from under his lashes. For a long moment, Leo seemed unable to draw in a breath, and his chest flushed dark red. Stunned, Luc stopped what he was doing. He turned to Elliott, a sudden fear that Leo was in distress, but Elliott shook his head and continued caressing Leo with his hands and mouth.

With a tortured gasp, Leo exhaled and slumped back against the pillows. He reached down and pulled Elliott's face to his own, connecting their mouths and moaning so deeply Luc felt the vibration of it under his hands. His cock gave a painful twinge, straining against the confines of the cage, as he watched his Sir and his spouse devour each other. He was beyond turned on by Leo's orgasm, and he whined when he saw a bead of precum leak from the slit on Elliott's dick.

Leo broke the kiss and turned to Luc. His cheeks were still flushed, and his lids were heavy. "Do you need something, boy?"

“No, Sir.”

“Don’t lie to me. Do you want to suck Elliott’s dick?”

Licking his lips, Luc nodded. “Please.”

He was desperate for a cock in either his mouth or ass, but when Leo ordered him to turn around and sit with his back to Leo’s chest, Luc couldn’t move quickly enough. He gently moved Leo’s legs so he could sit between them.

“Fuck my boy’s mouth,” Leo said to Elliott as he wrapped his arms around Luc’s waist.

“With pleasure,” Elliott said as he got up on his knees. “I’m not going to last long, Luc, just so you know.”

“I don’t...gah!” Luc panted as Leo bit his shoulder. He shivered. “I don’t care.”

Elliott grinned as he got himself into position between Luc’s legs. His dick waved in front of Luc’s open mouth, but he didn’t let Luc close his mouth around it. Instead, he slapped it lightly against Luc’s cheeks.

“Is this what you want?” El asked, grinning down at Luc.

“You know I do,” Luc said, then moaned when Leo grabbed hold of his curls and tugged.

“I don’t know if I should let you have it to keep you quiet or make you wait to punish you,” Leo growled, and Luc shivered.

“Please, let me have him, Sir,” he said.

“El?”

“Fuck. I’d love to make him wait, but I don’t have the patience,” he said and took hold of Luc’s jaw. “Open for me.”

Leo tugged on Luc’s hair again as if he needed encouragement to open his mouth and swallow Elliott to the back of his throat. Hardly. He wanted El’s cock as deep as it would go, and as soon as he felt coarse hair touch his lips, he swallowed. Elliott groaned.

“Damn, sweetheart,” he breathed and then closed his eyes as Luc did it again, and again, each time trying to get Elliott further into his throat.

He was so intent on what he was doing, so focused on getting El to the edge, that he didn’t realize Leo was taking off the cage until he felt warmth close around his own cock. The blood rush was so intense Luc thought he was going to pass out.

“Come for us, boy,” Leo growled. “Come for El and me.”

And Luc did. His climax barreled through him, racking his body with wave after wave, each one more intense, and then he spilled into Leo’s hand as Elliott cried out. Luc felt his release, hot and copious, flowing from his cock as El’s filled his mouth, and it seemed as if the three of them — Elliott, Luc, and Leo — had become one being. He couldn’t tell where he stopped and Elliott began or whether it was Leo’s or El’s arms that held them. He didn’t know whose voice was calling out, who groaned, whose mouth was hot on his. And it didn’t matter. It simply didn’t fucking matter. They were his, and he

was theirs, and he was never letting either of these men go because he needed them like he needed air to breathe.

As he came down, Luc's head fell against Leo's shoulder. Elliott rolled to the side and pulled Luc with him. Luc went, boneless and pliable, facing El with a sigh and then a hum of pleasure as Elliott's mouth connected with his. Leo adjusted behind him so Luc was cradled between the two men he adored. El's mouth was on his, and Leo was painting his back and neck with kisses while both men clasped hands over Luc's waist.

Luc drifted, aware of Elliott and Leo talking but too blissed-out to make sense of their words. He fell asleep with the two men entwined around him, their bodies expressing their love for him and each other as clearly as if they had spoken the words out loud.

CHAPTER NINETEEN

Leo

“**Y**ou’re making great progress, Leo,” the oncologist said as he looked at Leo’s latest test results. “Your body’s responded much faster than I thought it would. At this rate, I’m thinking you’re only going to need a few more rounds of chemo, and then it’ll be a waiting game. But I’m pretty confident you’re going to be cancer-free by the new year.”

Elliott squeezed Leo’s hand, and Leo squeezed back. This was the first appointment in the seven months since his diagnosis that Luc hadn’t been able to accompany him, but that was fine. His boy was in LA for another photo shoot with Zoomies and negotiations with another sponsor. He was also meeting with an agent who’d reached out to him after seeing his YouTube channel and seemed confident that he could get Luc a show on the Pet Channel. Luc was meeting with him to talk about representation. It had given him enough confidence he’d reached out to several other agents and had two more meetings set up while he was there. It meant everything Luc had ever hoped to achieve was within his reach, and Leo and Elliott couldn’t have been happier or prouder of him.

Despite Leo having shown up to all his appointments with Luc, the oncologist had seemed to take it in stride when Leo arrived with Elliott instead. But he noticed that the man kept glancing at his and Elliott’s clasped hands. From the clasped hands to the way they had had their heads together, it was

clear Elliott was more than a supportive friend. When Leo decided to poke the bear a bit and brought El's hand onto his thigh so he could wrap both his hands around his boyfriend's, the doctor's gaze fell to their clasped hands. His lips thinned and eyes narrowed briefly as he seemed to focus on Elliott's wedding ring. Then he cleared his throat and continued going over Leo's latest test results.

Leo wondered if he thought both of them were cheating or only Elliott, as the doctor glanced at their hands again, then ran a finger over his own wedding ring. The man might have been a fantastic doctor — and Leo was grateful that it looked like he was going to have a long and full life to share with Elliott and Luc — but that didn't mean he had to put up with the man's bullshit judgment.

As if hearing his thoughts — or perhaps only sensing the tension in Leo's body — Elliott squeezed his hand, which pressed his ring against Leo's fingers and made him glance down at that simple gold band that symbolized the commitment El and Luc had made to each other. What was it Elliott had said to him in the hospital? Leo frowned as he tried to remember Elliott's words.

Elliott glanced at him, his expression concerned, then turned to the doctor, who had been droning on about the test results. He cleared his throat. "I think Leo is getting tired," he said. "Is it possible for you to send us an email with the details and next steps?"

The doctor looked momentarily taken aback, as if Elliott had no right to speak to him because he was only supposed to be Leo's support or ride or some other BS. But Elliott had spoken like a spouse rather than a friend or casual lover, and Leo felt his heart swell at the feeling of being taken care of by him. And that was it, what El had told him: *I made a vow to love Luc no matter what came our way when we got married, and that vow extends to you now. For better or worse, in health and sickness, I love you, Leo.*

Leo's eyes misted with tears at the memory, and when the doctor asked if Leo wanted to end the appointment, he could only nod because what Luc had said about sharing love had also risen to the surface of his memories. *The more you share love, the more it grows. Love is infinite, Leo.* And suddenly, the symbolism of the gold band that encircled Elliott's finger, the band whose mate Luc wore, became clear. It wasn't a symbol of heteronormative bullshit, of ownership, of some arcane property rite that people had elevated to be the ultimate expression of relationships, as Leo had always thought. It was a symbol of the infinite nature of love shared between people who had, against all odds, found each other and loved each other. A perfect circle without a beginning or end. Whole. Infinite.

A collar is also a circle.

The thought turned his arms to jelly and made it difficult for him to grasp his wheels and maneuver out of the doctor's office.

As Leo rolled himself down the hallway toward the elevators, he found himself eyeing Elliott's ring again and realized he wanted that. Not only did he want something that symbolized the commitment he shared with Elliott and Luc, he desperately wanted to collar Luc as a more formal indication of their relationship. He wanted both things to show the world how he felt about these two men and wanted them to know he was in this for the long haul. Forever, if they would have him.

Just before the elevators, Elliott motioned Leo into an alcove with chairs and sat down so he was at eye level with Leo when Leo came to a stop in front of him.

"Are you okay?" Elliott asked.

The question took Leo aback. He was feeling great, albeit a little gobsmacked by the whole tectonic shift in his way of thinking. Not to mention the part about his cancer being in remission by the new year and not having to deal with any more chemo.

"I'm fine."

"Yes, I know. You're grinning like a fool."

"I did get some fantastic news, El."

"Yes, Leo, you did. But you zoned out after the great news, then looked like you'd been hit by a lightning bolt, and now you've got this maniacal smile on your face. I have to admit it's freaking me out a bit."

Leo laughed and took hold of Elliott's hands. He stroked his fingers over the ring on El's left hand. "I think there's a

conversation we three need to have when Luc returns,” he said, and when he looked at El’s face, the man’s expression had turned from concerned to hopeful.

“I won’t ask,” Elliott said, “because you’re right — we need to wait until Luc returns. But if you’re thinking what I think you’re thinking, just know my answer will be yes as long as it means the three of us will still be together.”

With a tug on Elliott’s hands, Leo brought the man to his feet and then tipped his face up as El leaned over to kiss him. “I promise it will,” Leo said as they parted.

“I love you, Leo,” Elliott said before he stood upright.

“I love you too, El.” Leo let go of El’s hands so they could resume their trek toward the elevators.

While they waited for the lift to arrive, they discussed where to go for lunch until Elliott’s phone buzzed with a text. He took his phone from his pocket, and Leo could tell he thought it was from Luc from the tender smile he gave as he looked at the screen.

“Shit,” Elliott muttered as he scrolled through the message.

“Is everything all right?”

The elevator dinged its arrival, and the doors slid open to admit them. Leo pressed the button for the ground floor of the medical complex while Elliott grumbled at his phone some more before tapping out a reply.

“El?”

“Yeah. Everything’s fine.” He pursed his lips and shook his head. “I’m afraid lunch will have to wait. Becks has an emergency that requires my presence on campus.” Elliott shrugged. “Classicists. They default toward pre-tech ideas about communication. Of course, to be fair, there are still a number of them that became professors before computers were ubiquitous, let alone cell phones, but Becks isn’t one of them.”

They arrived on the first floor, and the doors slid open.

“Would you like me to go with you?” Leo asked as they moved into the building’s lobby. He had to admit the idea of seeing Elliott’s office appealed to him. For the past year — with the exception of the trip to wine country — Leo had pretty much restricted himself to his home or his various doctors’ offices. Sometimes he ventured out with Luc or Elliott to check on the Berkeley house or to pick up some dinner, but that was rare due to his compromised immune system and fatigue. Today, though, he felt energized as he watched Elliott ponder the question.

“You sure you don’t want to go home and rest?” El asked.

Leo shook his head. “I’m fine, and if I go with you, we can still get something to eat after. I have to admit I’m not as familiar with the East Bay as I should be after living here for over a decade. It sometimes seems like a completely foreign land, and outside of Emeryville, I don’t get over there that often.” He nodded in the direction he thought the Bay Bridge was located.

“You’re sure?”

“I am.” Leo sighed. “I’m kind of tired of living in my ivory tower. I’d like to visit yours.” Then he gave Elliott a wicked grin. “Just as long as there are no long-haired radicals wandering around. I don’t think my Cardinal heart could take it.”

Elliott chuckled. “There aren’t a lot of them around anymore. I think they might have one or two in the history department for old times’ sake.” As they started for the door, Elliott cast an appraising eye at Leo. “Hope no alarms go off when you cross onto the campus, though,” he mused as they exited the building.



Dwinelle Hall, in which Elliott had his office, was pretty much smack-dab in the middle of the Berkeley campus, and Leo had a great view of the bell tower and the students scurrying to and fro on the pathways below from its window. Elliott had brewed him a cup of tea using the kettle next to his desk, then left for his meeting with the department chair saying he hoped this wouldn’t take long. That was half an hour ago.

Leo had amused himself for about ten minutes taking in Elliott’s bookshelves and various artifacts and wondering what he would have thought of Professor Porter if he’d met this version of him first. This was a side of his lover he knew existed but hadn’t seen much of because they were living in Leo’s very modern, intentionally minimalist condo. Here, in El’s office, Leo found his diplomas from Oxford. They were

displayed on the wall in a space between the two towers formed by the bookcases that looked like it had been designed just for this purpose. Which Leo supposed it had. He remembered similar displays in his professors' offices at Stanford, though he had to admit to feeling impressed by Elliott's academic achievements.

He was also impressed by the books whose spines faced him from the dark wood bookcases. Along with more scholarly titles, Leo saw a few he recognized, like *The Canterbury Tales*, *Gawain and the Green Knight*, *The Divine Comedy*, and *Beowulf*, of course, but there were also contemporary titles such as *A Song of Ice and Fire*, *The Penelopiad*, and *Grendel*, alongside *The Sandman*, *Fun Home*, *Persepolis*, and other graphic novels as well. Luc had often talked about how popular Elliott was as a professor, and Leo wondered if this was a part of the man's appeal.

Leo took another sip of his tea and cast his glance around the office. It was quite comfortable, with a thick shag carpet on the floor and a love seat to provide students a place to sit. It was adorned without being overdone, and while Leo appreciated the artwork and small artifacts Elliott had arranged on the remaining wall space and shelves, Leo was much more enamored of his desk. It was a solid, hulking wooden affair, stained dark and made darker with age.

Carefully setting his cup down on the small table that held Elliott's kettle, Leo moved closer to the desk and ran his hands along the surface. It was velvety smooth and surprisingly warm. *This*, he thought, *is where Elliott's heart truly lies in*

this office. He knew without asking that the desk meant something special to El. From the way he planned his outfits to the flowers he chose to give Leo and Luc, everything Elliott did was purposeful and had meaning.

In the few months since they'd gotten together, Leo had learned this essential fact about his lover. In this way, he and Elliott were very similar. Leo's gestures and actions might not carry the symbolic weight of centuries, but he rarely did things without thinking them through. Partly, it was his personality, but it also came from needing to think deliberately and thoroughly whenever he needed to go somewhere. It was a skill set that had served Leo well in the business world.

Thank God for Luc. With his lively sense of humor and generous brat streak, Luc kept both his men on their toes. Leo smiled at the thought of the curly-haired man and pulled his phone from its pocket, intending to send Luc a message about how much he was missed.

A knock on the office door interrupted Leo, and before he could decide whether to ignore it or answer, the handle turned, and the door opened. A student — it had to be a student given the young man's age, the jeans with strategically placed holes, and the Cal sweatshirt adorning his upper body — poked his head into Elliott's office.

“Oh.” The student stepped across the threshold into the office and gaped at Leo. “I... Prof... You're not...”

Despite the scramble of words attempting to exit the young man's mouth at the same time, Leo got the gist. “Professor

Porter will be back soon. Would you like to wait?"

The young man nodded, then looked around the office uncertainly. *God*, Leo asked himself, *was I ever this young?*

When the student remained standing by the door, Leo gestured toward the couch and asked if he'd like a cup of tea. Since Elliott had offered him one, he figured it was only polite.

"Oh. Sure. Thank you. Do you want me to...?" The young man was moving toward the corner, but Leo waved him off.

"I've got it," Leo said. It was a bit tricky maneuvering in Elliott's office, but he'd managed so far without knocking anything over. As he filled the kettle from a pitcher of water and set it to boil, Leo asked the young man what his preference was, the same as Elliott had asked him.

"Um...? Tea? I guess."

Leo chuckled to himself and selected an English breakfast tea from Elliott's assortment. He figured asking about sugar and milk would be pointless, so he made the decision for the boy and placed a couple of sugar packets on the saucer next to the teacup and extracted the container of half-and-half from the tiny refrigerator hidden in the cabinet below the table.

"What are you studying?" Leo asked as he prepared the tea. His back was to the young man, but he could picture the boy staring at Elliott's office with wide-eyed wonder and then his attention snapping back to Leo at the sound of his voice.

"Um...I don't...I haven't figured out a major yet."

Well, that explained a great deal. The young man was probably only eighteen, nineteen at the most. Leo glanced over his shoulder. Maybe twenty. By the time Leo had started college, he'd been twenty-three, having missed most of his junior and senior years of high school while recovering from the accident both mentally and physically and learning to navigate his drastically altered body. He finished high school at home, then attended community college for a year before his first bout of cancer put a halt to his studies. He finished a year later, then transferred to Stanford as a junior.

“Uh...sir?”

The boy's voice brought Leo out of his memories, and he realized the kettle was boiling. He poured water into the cup, watching the tendrils begin to swirl outward from the tea bag as the transformation of hot water into tea began. It was one of the things Leo had learned to appreciate while living with Elliott and Luc. This little miracle of one thing becoming another as the hot water caused the tea leaves to release their flavor.

He lifted the saucer and cup from the table and held them out. “If you could,” he said, and the boy was on his feet instantly to take the items from Leo's hands so Leo could turn his chair to face the young man as he carefully returned to his seat. He balanced the saucer on one knee that he was trying desperately to keep still, the other jiggling up and down.

“What interests you?” Leo asked and smiled as the young man nearly jumped from his seat. The boy's innocence

reminded him of Luc, and Leo was enjoying playing with him for a bit. In a different setting, and with the boy's consent, Leo might have been tempted to push a little more, to test out if the boy were truly submissive or if he was merely deferential. There was a difference, and Leo knew several Doms who'd mistaken one for the other and ended up trying to make a D/s situation work with a partner who wasn't truly submissive.

With a bit more prodding, the young man finally loosened up and talked about his interest in art, which was at odds with his parents' desire for him to focus on communications and aim for an MBA. While he spoke, Leo's thoughts drifted back to Luc and how precious Luc's submission was to him. It was a gift Leo cherished. Elliott's generosity and love was another gift, and Leo was suddenly overwhelmed by gratitude for the two men with whom he was sharing his life.

Even as he talked to the young man about ways to combine his passion with a business degree and how the most innocuous of courses could be life-changing, Leo's thoughts returned to the idea of collaring Luc. But he also wanted something more with Elliott, he realized.

Almost as if he'd summoned the man, Elliott pushed open the door to his office. The student leapt to his feet, nearly tipping over the teacup as he stammered out a greeting. The amused smile on Elliott's face matched the one Leo knew was on his own. For Leo, it was the thought that anyone would be intimidated by his loving and generous lover, who was one of the most caring souls he'd ever met. Elliott cast an affectionate glance at Leo before letting his features resume a more

professorial configuration. Even if Leo hadn't spoken with the young man, he'd have known in an instant that this was one of Elliott's problem students simply by the man's tone of voice as he made his greeting.

"Good afternoon, Jeremey," Elliott said as he stepped through the doorway. "What can I help you with today?"

"Oh...um...Professor Porter...I...uh..."

"If it's about your paper," Elliott said as he crossed the office and took his seat behind the desk, "I've already given you one extension. If I give you another, I fear you'll be ending up with a failing grade even if you turn the paper in, which means you'll most likely fail the course."

"But I don't know what to write about." Jeremey was nearly crying.

Elliott glanced at the ceiling, then longingly at the kettle. Leo raised an eyebrow, and El gave him a slight nod.

"What's the assignment?" Leo asked as he set about making a cup of tea for Elliott. He reached for the same delicious plummy Earl Grey that El had made for him before heading off to his meeting.

"It's open," Elliott said, "but we're reading *Canterbury Tales*, so the paper has to be some commentary on at least three of the tales."

Leo nodded as Jeremey reiterated his inability to find a topic, then glanced at Elliott before turning his attention to the young man. "Forgive me if I'm overstepping here, but aren't

there a lot of artworks that depict the tales?” He looked at El again. “Could your student write a paper on the way the tales are represented in visual art?”

“Could I?” Jeremey asked. “We talked about medieval art in my art history class.”

Elliott pondered his response with his palm cupped in his chin. Sitting behind his mammoth desk, dressed in his subtly striped vest and trousers, he looked so much like the quintessential humanities professor Leo nearly laughed as he handed El the cup of perfectly brewed tea.

“Never pictured you as the one to play mother, Leo,” Elliott said with a gentle smile as he accepted the cup.

“Mother? Is that a British thing?”

Elliott took a sip and nodded. “It’s the one who serves tea and hands around the biscuits. Of which there are none, by the way. I haven’t had a chance to restock.” Another sip of tea, and he turned his attention back to the student. “All right, Jeremey. Ten pages on the depiction of three tales in artwork. But I don’t want you merely reiterating what your art history professor said nor ignoring the tales themselves in favor of the art. Tell me how the art is informed by the tales, how they offer an interpretation.”

“I can do that,” Jeremey said. “Thank you.” He barely put the cup and saucer down before he was out the door.

Elliott chuckled, then rose from his chair and crossed over to Leo. He leaned his hands on the wheels of Leo’s chair and

drew him closer. “You are amazing, Mr. Galvan. How did you do that?”

“I’m a businessman, El. It’s all about understanding your market so you can give the customer what they need. Your young man there has a passion for art. I simply found a way for him to combine that passion with the task you’ve set him.”

“Well, thank you. I hate having to fail students.” Elliott leaned forward and kissed Leo.

If it was meant to be a quick kiss, Leo had other plans. He looped his arms around Elliott’s neck to keep them connected while he plundered El’s mouth. Braced on Leo’s chair, El had little choice but to accept Leo’s attention. Not that it seemed as if Elliott minded based on the enthusiasm with which he met Leo’s questing tongue or the sounds that were coming from his mouth.

Leo was about to ask if Elliott and Luc had ever played out a teacher-and-student fantasy in El’s office when the sound of a throat clearing made them both pause. With their foreheads still touching, they looked to the doorway, and Leo felt Elliott’s body tense. A tall, slender man in his midforties had pushed the door open and was regarding them with curiosity and wariness.

“Becks,” Elliott said as he straightened up. He turned slightly so he was facing the doorway, a hand resting on Leo’s shoulder.

“Professor Porter.” The man stepped all the way inside El’s office and closed the door behind him. He extended his hand

as he walked toward Leo. "I'm Harold Becks, English department chair."

Leo took hold of the man's hand with a firm grip. "Leo Galvan." He stole a glance at Elliott, wondering if he should name the elephant in the room, but he didn't have to worry.

"My boyfriend," Elliott said. "Mine and Luc's."

"Ah." Becks looked between the two of them. "I suppose that does explain things better."

Leo could tell the man wanted to ask more questions but was holding back out of politeness. Instead of asking anything, he turned to Elliott. "I guess that's that, then."

"I gave you my answer, Becks."

"You did. Yes. Well, then." He crossed back to the door. "Enjoy your evening, gentlemen." With a nod to both of them, he exited and closed the door firmly behind himself.

Elliott let out a long breath.

"What did he ask you to do?" Leo asked.

At first, Elliott prevaricated, turning Leo's question away and trying to direct the conversation to where they were going to eat, but Leo refused to let the matter go. For one thing, he was a stubborn motherfucker when he wanted to be, but for another, he got the feeling Elliott was holding something back from him.

They were halfway to the faculty parking when Elliott came clean.

“Becks asked me to take a group of grad students to the UK this summer to do primary research at the Bodleian Library.”

“And you told him no.”

“I told him I’d think about it, that I had commitments that took precedence, and that, given current circumstances, I couldn’t leave the Bay Area for that long for the foreseeable future. I didn’t specify what those circumstances were, but I’m sure Becks can figure it out after following me to my office.”

“You said no because of me.”

Elliott sighed. “I said no because of us. Because you’re not out of the woods yet. Because Luc’s not here to discuss it. And because I don’t want to be away from the two of you while we’re still figuring out how this thing between us works.”

“You know we’re always going to be doing that, right?” Leo joked, but Elliott didn’t smile. “Is it important to your job to do this?”

With a shrug, Elliott started walking toward the parking lot again. “It isn’t *not* important. There’s research for my next book that would be easier to do if I were at Oxford. Becks knows this, which is why he asked me. I also have somewhat better access to the more fragile collections than another professor would because I did my dissertation research on those books, so I know where the bodies are buried, so to speak, and I’m an Oxford peer.”

“Then it sounds like you should go.”

“Leo...” Elliott shook his head. “It’s too early in our relationship to think about being away from you for that long.”

“El. We’ve told Luc hundreds of times that he needs to pursue what’s best for his career. The same applies to you. We’re all in this together, and we’ll make it work.”

When Leo got another head shake from Elliott, he let the matter rest. They couldn’t resolve anything while Luc was away, but Leo wasn’t going to give up.



Leo had started to fade by the time they reached the restaurant, so they decided to head back to the condo. They’d taken the Tesla, but Leo asked Elliott to drive. He recognized his limits and knew he was too tired to be safe behind the wheel. Though Leo operated the car with hand controls, the pedals still worked, so Elliott didn’t have a problem getting in the driver’s seat. By the time they reached the freeway, Leo was already starting to doze off, lulled by the movement of the car and NPR on the radio. He didn’t wake until Elliott placed a gentle kiss on his lips.

“Time to wake up, Sleeping Beauty. Let’s get upstairs and eat so we can curl up on that big bed and get some rest.”

“That sounds like an excellent idea.” Leo stretched as Elliott got out of the car and took his chair from the back seat. Even though they’d taken the Tesla, the chair lift was set up for Leo in the driver’s seat, so El had stowed the chair on the

passenger's side. Leo shifted himself from the car to his chair, his arms trembling slightly with the effort.

By the time he'd gotten himself settled properly in the seat, Leo was worn-out. He lifted his arms, intending to grab hold of his wheels, then let his hands drop to his lap. "Today seems to have taken a lot out of me," he said. "Would you push me, please?"

Without a word, Elliott moved into position behind Leo and took hold of the back of the chair. The chair was designed for Leo to be able to maneuver without help, so Elliott gripped the frame alongside Leo's ribs as he moved them toward the elevator.

Leo was quite shocked by how wiped out he'd gotten. His upper body ached from the exertion of propelling himself across the Berkeley campus. They may have been able to use his handicapped placard to park close to El's office, but they'd still had to go uphill and halfway across the campus to get to the building. That had been on top of the doctor's appointment, which was supposed to have been their only task today. See the doctor, get lunch, return home.

This was more activity than Leo had had in months, and he could feel it in the way his shoulders drooped, his abs fatigued from the effort of holding himself up. As much as he hated being propelled rather than maneuvering under his own power, he was thankful Elliott had been there to help him. Thankful, too, that the end of his chemo was in sight. He would be

overjoyed to put this chapter behind him and get back to his regularly scheduled life.

As they waited for the elevator, Elliott put his hands on Leo's shoulders and gave him a gentle massage. Leo leaned back as those strong fingers dug into the tired and overworked muscles. Even after his cancer was fully in remission, his life wasn't going to go back to the way it was before. And that was a very good thing.

The elevator dinged, and the doors slid open. They rose to the eighteenth floor in silence, but it wasn't awkward. Elliott's hands rested on the back of Leo's chair, and Leo let his head fall back against Elliott's arms.

Leo reached up and placed a hand over one of Elliott's. "I love you, El."

"I love you too." Elliott leaned down and kissed Leo. "I'll need to take the dogs for a walk when we get home, but I want to get you settled into bed first."

Too tired to argue, Leo nodded. "As long as you come join me after the dogs are taken care of."

"Absolutely. If you're asleep, I've got some reading and grading that I need to do."

And that was exactly what they did. Elliott helped Leo get into bed and into a comfortable pair of sweats and a T-shirt, then took the dogs for their walk. Leo tried to stay awake until El returned, but he quickly realized it was a losing battle and let his eyes close. When he opened them again, Elliott's face

was the first thing he saw. The man was lying on his side, one arm over Leo's waist, the other tucked under his head, and he was asleep. Leo sighed and moved close enough to Elliott he felt the brush of the man's exhalations across his skin.

The doctor had said that Leo's cancer had diminished quicker than anticipated and that his physical condition was better than expected. The hospitalization and today's fatigue aside, Leo had stayed remarkably healthy throughout his treatment, which had probably gone a long way toward helping his body fight the cancer.

Hadn't Luc said something about the benefits of having two people love him when he'd argued for them living together? That love was exponential, not linear, and that three people in a relationship was more than love times three; it was love to the third power. *We're the three L's in love. El times L times L.* The memory made Leo smile. If love truly had the power to heal, then love cubed just might have made this challenge easier than he could have hoped.

Leo had never been sentimental about his lovers. He was romantic, loved quiet moments spent over good food and wine, and wanted his partners to feel special and cared for, but he wasn't sunshine and roses and *i*'s dotted with hearts. At least, he hadn't been until a certain sub walked up to him at a munch and asked if Leo would be interested in a scene.

Still asleep, Elliott snuffled and moved closer, drawing his arm tighter across Leo's waist. His eyelids fluttered, movement behind them suggesting that El was dreaming, and

his lashes brushed Leo's cheek. *Butterfly kisses? Isn't that what they were called?* Leo wasn't sure, but it was a surprisingly intimate moment, and he felt the quiver of arousal in his belly.

Elliott's hips shifted, soft undulations pressing against Leo's hip. He was wearing loose sweatpants, and Leo felt the tip of El's cock press against him above the line of his injury. The man was hard. Leo could guess the nature of Elliott's dream, and he smiled against El's mouth before leaving a gentle kiss on his lips. Elliott's breath was a soft moan ghosting over Leo's cheek as he leaned in to steal another kiss.

This time, Elliott kissed him back, his mouth opening and tongue teasing along the seam of Leo's until Leo gave him access. He groaned as El's tongue stroked against his, and the hand El had on his waist crept under his T-shirt and began to caress his back in slow circles. Letting Elliott take control was easy in a way it never had been with any other lover, and Leo relaxed into the slow build of arousal in his body until he couldn't hold back and changed the direction of the kiss.

He licked into Elliott's mouth, groaning as El allowed him to do what he wanted, and Leo took full advantage. Shifting his weight so Elliott had to roll onto his back gave Leo a moment to take in the beauty of the man lying beneath him. He stroked his fingers through El's hair, brushing the sand-colored strands away from the man's eyes.

"You need a haircut," he murmured.

Elliott chuckled and reached up to play with the hair that was now long enough to cover Leo's ears. "You do too."

"I thought I wasn't going to have to worry about it."

Leo's smile faded, concerned his attempt at humor would strike Elliott as maudlin, but El smiled. "I'm sure Luc could take care of it for you." He made a buzzing sound and pretended to shave Leo's head.

Slapping Elliott's hand away from his head, Leo laughed. "I'm not about to let Luc cut it all off. I'm quite happy it didn't fall out."

Elliott's smile turned from humor to affection, and he stroked his fingers through Leo's hair again. "I am too." The expression on Elliott's face turned serious. "I'm grateful for a lot of things today."

They resumed kissing, hands exploring and caressing, their touches growing gradually more insistent along with the sounds they made. Elliott writhed beneath Leo's hands. His hips rose and fell as he sought more friction for his cock, and he held tight to Leo's head, keeping him from pulling away. Not that Leo was going to.

"Leo, please," he whispered.

"Please, what, Professor?" Leo teased.

Elliott groaned. "Make love to me. Please."

The request made Leo falter, and he knew El felt his hesitation when the man's eyes opened in confusion.

“Leo?”

When Leo still didn't respond, Elliott trailed fingers over Leo's cheeks and lips, eyes searching for an answer in Leo's expression.

“What's wrong?” he asked.

“I realized it's never been just us before.”

As the truth of the matter fell from Leo's lips, he stared at the man sharing his pillow. After Luc's meltdown, they'd had several conversations about the sexual dynamic of their triad and talked about what each of them wanted from their relationship. Of course they had. Elliott and Luc had a relationship independent of the triad, as did Leo and Luc, and they'd discussed needing time for those relationships even as the three of them forged something new. In truth, Leo was amazed at how seamlessly the dynamic moved between the three of them together and the days when Luc or Leo needed a more defined D/s scene or Luc and El needed time together. It only made sense that he and Elliott would have intimate moments for just the two of them as well. The wonder of it was that it hadn't happened before now.

Elliott smiled. “It hasn't. But to be fair, there hasn't been much of an opportunity.”

“No, there hasn't.”

He kissed Elliott, slow and lingering, and helped El work his way out of the sweats. As much as the heat between them flared to life again, Leo kept his movements deliberate. He

wanted Elliott begging again, wanted El to plead for release. It wasn't a dominance thing, though. Not like it was with Luc when Leo pushed him to the limits of his control. This was about wanting to know he could bring Elliott the kind of pleasure the man deserved. El was giving and sensual and took such care with Leo's body, loved Leo's body despite its many complications — maybe even because of them — and found him beautiful. Elliott's love was a gift Leo wanted to mirror back to the man, show him how hard Leo had fallen for him.

“Leo.”

His name was an invocation sent forth on Elliott's breath, a prayer whispered in heavenly tones forged in the exalted halls of academia and in the tradition of kings. Leo chuckled as he kissed his way along Elliott's jaw, up the line of his neck, until he nuzzled at El's ear in the place Luc had taught him drove the man wild. Perhaps spending time in Elliott's office with the smell of old wood polish and aging paper and the rarefied vellum on which his degrees were printed had turned his thoughts poetic.

Then Elliott groaned and whispered baser words as Leo wrapped a hand around his cock, and Leo pushed away all those thoughts as he concentrated on the way Elliott sounded as he fell apart. Forgot about all of them except for a fantasy that came to him as he listened to his very proper boyfriend's voice chanting words of love and desire interspersed with a liberal smattering of *fuck* as Leo worked the rigid length of his dick. He stroked and teased at El's shaft as he thought about how much he wanted to see Elliott walking those hallowed

halls and stone walkways that had been worn smooth by centuries of students' feet following the same paths. He wanted to see his lover in a scholar's black robe, to listen to Elliott speak with his fellow dons, to watch their faces in awe of his lover's intellect. It was an image he couldn't shake, even as he played with El's body until the man was trembling with the effort of keeping himself from coming.

“Let me...let me...” Elliott gasped out. “In the drawer. Leeeeooooo.”

The drawn-out vowels of his name made his body flood with heat, but he paused to let El catch his breath and complete his thought.

When he had himself under control enough to speak, Elliott said he wanted something from the nightstand on his side of the bed. Leo assumed it was lube, but when the man rolled away and came back with a dildo, he couldn't help his shout of surprise. It brought the dogs running, Bey's soft wuffles a counterpoint to Jericho's yips.

Elliott chased them out of the bedroom with a command to go settle, which sent them back to their beds in the living room, then turned to Leo with the dildo in his hand.

“Fuck me,” he said as he held it out to Leo.

Leo did not need to be asked twice. He took the silicone phallus from Elliott. “Lube?” With a nod, Elliott turned away again to retrieve the bottle of lube from the same drawer. His movements were uncoordinated, as if he didn't have full control of his limbs, and his eyes were hazy with desire when

he rolled back and handed Leo the bottle. Elliott's gaze was riveted as Leo slicked up the dildo. He licked his lips, and Leo groaned.

“Come here, Professor,” he said as he lay back. “I want you to fuck my face while I fuck your ass.”

“Fuck,” Elliott whispered.

Leo chuckled. “That was the idea. Now, come on, El.”

Without any further words, Elliott got up on his knees, then straddled Leo. The man's thighs were lightly furred with the same sandy-colored hair Leo had been running his fingers through before. His thighs were lightly muscled, slender, and strong. Leo seriously doubted he'd ever carried much extra weight, but after maneuvering around the campus this afternoon, he didn't wonder at the strength in Elliott's legs as he knee-walked up Leo's body.

His cock left a trail of precum on Leo's chest, and once his knees were nestled against Leo's arms, he sat back, the majority of his weight on his legs. When he and Elliott were lying side by side, they were nearly the same length; like this, Elliott seemed to loom over him, a giant come to life as Leo looked up the expanse of his flat stomach, sleek chest, and broad shoulders.

“You're beautiful, El,” Leo whispered, raising his hands to let them dance along the lines of flexed muscles in Elliott's thighs. His words caused another bead of liquid to appear at the slit of Elliott's dick, and he swiped it with his finger, brought it to his mouth.

Elliott cried out as Leo licked his finger, hummed in approval of the taste. “Fuck,” he panted.

“I have to say, Professor, I thought your vocabulary was better than this.”

With a rueful chuckle, Elliott shook his head. “You turn my brain to porridge.” He reached down and grabbed hold of his dick, pinching at the flushed head. “God, Leo. I didn’t know how much I wanted this, wanted you, all to myself until now.”

“I know,” Leo said. “We’ve been idiots, haven’t we?”

Elliott nodded, and Leo reached up, drew him down so he could claim El’s mouth in a deep and thorough kiss. When they broke apart, Leo flopped back on the pillow. “Not idiots, just careful with Luc because we love him.”

“Because we love him,” Elliott echoed. He rose up on his knees again and braced his hands on the headboard, positioning himself so his cock brushed Leo’s lips. “Now, lie there and let me do all the work.” He quirked a wicked grin at Leo. “Sir.”

“Not fair, Professor,” Leo growled just before he opened his mouth and slipped his lips over the tip of Elliott’s dick.

The plush head slid into his mouth, and he swirled his tongue into the slit, then teased at the glans before he relaxed and took El to the back of his throat. The groan that came from Elliott’s mouth made Leo chuckle, which only caused a curse to explode from El’s lips. At least, Leo thought it was a curse. The guttural sound was close to a word, but not one Leo

recognized, which meant it was probably Old English or ancient German. The idea that he had the power to reduce Elliott's brain to a nearly preverbal state turned him on more than he could say.

Working by feel — because there was no way he was going to let El's cock out of his mouth — Leo found the lube and pumped more into his hand, slicking both his fingers and the dildo. He'd nearly swallowed his own tongue when Elliott produced the phallus, unaware that his lovers were in possession of the object. They were going to have a conversation when Luc returned, but for now, Leo let his hands find Elliott's ass and tease along his crack until he found the tight ring of muscle he sought.

Elliott gasped as Leo slid a finger inside him, his hips jerking forward hard enough to make Leo cough. When El tried to withdraw, Leo chased him, raising his head to keep Elliott's dick inside his mouth. He glared up at Elliott and shook his head slightly. Elliott understood his meaning and braced his weight on his arms again so he could continue fucking Leo's mouth as Leo worked him open enough for the dildo.

The sensation of having Elliott's cock in his mouth and his fingers in El's ass was extraordinary. As a Dom, he often found his pleasure in his submissives' reactions, in their increasing desire and desperation. Luc often lovingly called him a sadistic bastard because of the way he could edge Luc until the man would come as soon as Leo gave him permission, his orgasm prolonged by the buildup.

Working Elliott with his mouth and hand, listening to the sounds falling from his lover's lips, feeling the flex and clamp of El's ass as he thrust his cock deeper and cried out as Leo's fingers grazed his prostate, as Elliott *used* Leo's body to bring himself pleasure, Leo found his own arousal dizzying as Elliott's climbed toward its peak.

Leo couldn't wait any longer. His growl made El throw his head back and moan, and *fuck* did Leo want to feast on that neck. He pulled his fingers from Elliott's body at the same time he let El's cock slide from his mouth. The man cried out in shock and frustration, trembling as Leo reached up and pulled on El's arm to get him to lean over, to lie down next to Leo.

Lube smeared on El's arms, the dildo got lost in the bedding, but Leo didn't care because his mouth was on Elliott's. Leo couldn't get enough of the man's taste, his scent, the feel of his skin. They moaned at the same time, his deeper voice merging with Elliott's tenor to create a new sound that was all theirs.

And then, the most extraordinary thing happened. Elliott pulled back. He looked deep into Leo's eyes. "I want you in me, Leo," he whispered, his voice hoarse from desire.

"I can't. Not without help. You know this," Leo whispered back, anger and hurt souring his stomach and tinging his words as old scripts from past lovers made a slow incursion on his heart, but he didn't have time for those emotions to spread far before Elliott was shifting their bodies. He repositioned

them with his legs on either side of Leo, one of them braced against Leo's side. And then, Elliott spread his legs, bringing the free one to his chest to expose his hole to Leo's gaze. He found the dildo in the covers and held it out to Leo.

“Yes, you can. I want your mouth on me and your hand controlling this in my body. It will be you, Leo, in me, on me, loving me.” He thrust his hips up so his cock brushed Leo's mouth. “Do you want that? Do you want me?”

Leo growled. His desire for this man roared back to life and burned away the lingering sickness in his belly. “What kind of a question is that?” he asked and swallowed Elliott to the back of his throat before he gave the man a chance to reply.

“Fuck,” Elliott breathed out, and Leo chuckled.

The dildo had gone dry again, so Leo held it up to Elliott. He let go of El's dick long enough to command the man to spit and was amused with the eye roll he got in response. Elliott reached for the lube and slathered a generous amount on the silicone before handing it back with an impatient snap of his hand.

Leo got the point El was making. He took Elliott's cock back in his mouth as he lined the dildo up with El's hole. As he sucked, he began to push into Elliott's body, the groans and shivers he got in response telling him how much pleasure his lover was taking in this act.

When the dildo was fully seated, Leo let go of El's cock and raised his head. He waited until Elliott opened his eyes and

stared at him, impatience giving way to heat as Leo said, “I love you, El.”

“I love you too, Leo.”

After that, there were no more words. Leo returned his attention to Elliott’s dick, sucking and teasing, his tongue caressing the thick shaft in time with his thrusts into El’s ass. He lost himself in the moment, in the movements of his hand and mouth, in Elliott’s body, and the sounds his lover was making. The gasps, groans, muttered curses, spurred him on, because he wanted to hear Elliott climax, wanted the hot spill of El’s cum in his mouth, and to feel the tremor of his orgasm as it exploded through Elliott’s body.

His mouth was full, but Leo’s mind chanted *come for me, El*, as he changed the angle of the dildo and his mouth, seeking deeper, harder, faster. Above him, Elliott drew in a harsh breath, then froze, but Leo kept going. His hand, his mouth, worked Elliott’s body until, with a groan that started deep inside his chest, Elliott came in a rush, filling Leo’s mouth, his ass clamping down on the dildo so hard Leo had to stop. He swallowed, then swallowed again, as the thick, salty liquid spurted from El’s cock a second time.

The taste of El’s cum hitting his tongue tipped Leo over the edge. So engrossed in what he was doing to Elliott, Leo hadn’t been aware of his own arousal peaking, but there it was, his orgasm rippling through his body in expansive waves. He gasped around Elliott’s cock but refused to let go as he continued to nuzzle and suck until El pulled back.

Leo withdrew the dildo from Elliott's body, then traced his hand up El's trembling thigh. Elliott flopped back on the pillow, letting his leg drop back to the mattress. He chuckled, then slid downward until he lay face-to-face with Leo.

"That was amazing," he sighed before closing the distance between them and kissing Leo.

They kissed and slowly readjusted their positions so they were sharing the pillow again, foreheads resting against each other. Their kisses grew languid as their bodies grew heavy, and Leo drifted in and out of sleep.

Just before he dozed off, his earlier thoughts came back to him: seeing Elliott amidst his peers at Oxford and Luc wearing his collar. The images jumbled together as he slept, dreaming of England beside one of his lovers.

When he woke, it was evening. He was by himself in the bedroom, but he heard Elliott talking in the kitchen, and his heart warmed as he recognized that El was speaking to Luc on the phone. There were things he needed to discuss with his men, important things about how they would spend their lives together. For most of this past year, he hadn't wanted to think about what lay beyond his chemo in case it never happened, but now he knew he was going to have a future, and he was going to have it with two of the most extraordinary men he'd ever known.

EPILOGUE

One year later

Elliott

The day Elliott's life changed again did not start out like any other day. For one thing, he was in England, and though he, Luc, and Leo had been in England since June, this was going to be a day unlike any that had occurred in the previous four months. Today, he was the apex point at the middle of their trio's V and the only one who knew the full scope of what the day was going to bring.

He had no idea how he was going to keep himself from bursting, but he'd been doing his best not to spill anyone's secrets. It was the least he could do, given the way his men had uprooted their lives so he could spend the summer and fall at Oxford.

After Elliott had turned down Becks, both Luc and Leo got on his case about giving up the opportunity. Elliott had argued that their relationship was new, Leo wasn't out of the woods with his cancer yet, Luc's career was just taking off, and he didn't want to be away from either of them for several months.

"What makes you think you'd be going to England without us?" Leo had asked, which was the beginning of the end of Elliott's resistance.

With some assistance from the university, they'd found a lovely rental cottage that was wheelchair accessible and had space for both Luc and Leo to set up offices so they could

work remotely. The dogs had a smaller yard in which to play, but there were plenty of paths along the river to keep Jericho's energy under control. They'd joined a local walking group that catered to people with mobility issues, and through them, Leo had found an all-terrain chair he adored.

The new chair was going to figure greatly in this afternoon's adventure and make possible the surprise Elliott was having a difficult time keeping to himself.

"Breakfast's ready," Luc called from the kitchen.

Elliott followed the dogs down the hallway to the back of the house and into the sunroom that had been added just before they moved in. Even though it was October, the sky was clear, and the room was filled with light. Elliott cast a glance upward with a quick prayer of gratitude for the beautiful weather that meant they wouldn't have to postpone their trip to Stonehenge, which neither Luc nor Leo had ever seen before. The lack of rain for the past week meant the ground wouldn't be too soft for Leo's chair.

Leo was already seated at the table, a cup of coffee in front of him. He smiled as Elliott and the dogs entered the room.

"Good morning, love," Elliott said as he bent down to give Leo a kiss. The man had still been asleep when El left to walk to the dogs. "Sleep well?"

"I did," Leo growled. There was a twinkle in his eyes as he glanced toward the kitchen, where Luc was assembling their breakfast of soft-boiled eggs, toast soldiers, grilled tomatoes,

and bangers. Leo leaned closer and whispered, “He still has no idea?”

“Not a clue,” Elliott said, adding silently, *neither do you*. Fortunately, Leo took his smile as that of a co-conspirator, which, technically, Elliott was. Leo just had no idea that El was also a double agent, working for both sides of this equation.

Jericho abandoned Elliott as soon as he took his seat at the table and made a beeline into the kitchen to see if Luc had dropped anything. Even if the Mudi was out of luck, Elliott knew Luc would give him a slice of toast or bit of sausage.

In the months since they made the decision to live in the UK, Luc’s job had changed. He’d made the difficult decision to leave the vet clinic in order to concentrate on his social media career, which had paid off with two more sponsorship deals. Though his YouTube channel was nearing a million subscribers, the chance to host his own show hadn’t materialized yet, but he had signed with one of the agents he’d met in LA.

When he told the agent he was going to be in the UK from June to January, the agent found him a spot on one of the British morning shows. Once a week, he gave training and pet care advice using Jericho and Bey as his demo dogs. Both dogs now had IG followings, and it was a running joke between Elliott and Luc as to which dog was the most popular. Elliott had taken to posting extra pics of Bey when he fell

behind, but he suspected Luc was doing the same thing with Jericho.

Luc carried their breakfast plates to the table, followed by his ever-present shadow. He laid a plate in front of Elliott and two in front of Leo, then went to his knees on the cushion that had been placed on the floor between their chairs. Leo reached out and ran his fingers through Luc's curls.

"Thank you, boy," he said, lifting his fork and offering Luc a piece of sausage from his own plate.

"You're welcome, Sir," Luc responded before taking the food.

Elliott smiled at the now familiar ritual. His appreciation for their D/s dynamic had grown over the past year. While he still thought Luc's submission was beautiful to watch, he now also admired the nuances of Leo's dominance and the sheer number of things over which he took control. It wasn't in Elliott to do that, even though he knew how much it meant to Luc, how much he needed to give that control to Leo. He also recognized that it wasn't what Luc needed from him. He was steadfast support and the most ardent cheerleader of Luc's success, while Leo was the limits and boundaries Luc needed to achieve it, and they were both a source of unconditional love when it happened.

It was the same way in which Elliott supported and challenged Leo, while Luc helped him know he had control. They created a balance in which Leo became more and more willing to try things outside his comfort zone. Like the

walking group. Leo had been reluctant at first, concerned he'd struggle and unwilling to look foolish or helpless. That response had faded as soon as Leo saw the all-terrain wheelchair that some of the group's members used, and he realized he'd limited himself based on a lack of knowledge and fear. The same way he'd held his sensuous side behind his Dom façade and used that role to keep his submissives from seeing it and letting himself be vulnerable.

There were some subs who saw that as weakness in a Dom, but not Luc. The more he saw of Leo's sensual side, the more he loved his Sir, and the more Elliott loved them both. Being a sensuous lover had always been a part of who Leo was — it was why he was so good at sensory stimulation — and Elliott was happy to have been a part of Leo reclaiming this part of himself.

Elliott sometimes wondered if Leo's need for control was a response to his accident and cancer or if he'd been that way before both of them altered his life, but then again, it didn't really matter. It worked for him, and Luc had been drawn to Leo from the beginning. So had Elliott, if he was being truthful with himself, and he was always grateful that the feeling had been mutual. As much as he recognized what he gave to Luc and Leo, he also knew that their relationship grounded him and gave him a feeling of wholeness.

It was difficult for Elliott to explain — even to himself — because there hadn't been anything lacking in any of their lives, but their lives were so much better as three than it had been as a V. As Luc said, love joined is love made infinite. He

just hadn't realized how right Luc had been the day they met. They'd come full circle since then and were about to start a new chapter of their lives.

“What are you thinking about?” Leo asked and aimed a teasing smile at Elliott over the top of Luc's head.

Elliott smiled back. Leo thought he knew because he'd been the one to come to Elliott back in August to ask if El would be okay with him collaring Luc. He'd talked about the symbolism of circles — complete without beginning or end — and how the collar would be a sign of his commitment and bond with Luc, much like Elliott and Luc's wedding rings. Elliott had agreed without hesitation. He knew it was something Luc wanted, a belief that was born out a few weeks later by Luc coming to him and asking if they could do something to symbolize their union with Leo.

“Just thinking about circles,” Elliott answered.



A few hours later, they got out of the car in the car park for Stonehenge. The dogs, unfortunately, had had to remain behind, but Elliott supposed that was fine because it meant he could focus on his men.

They got Leo's chair out of the boot, and he shifted himself into it from the front seat. Driving was one of the things Leo had had to give up while living in the UK. Finding a house that could accommodate a paraplegic was one thing; leasing a car that had been modified for hand controls was something

else, so Elliott was often the driver in their family. Especially since Luc claimed driving on the opposite side of the road made him nervous.

Leo propelled himself forward with his hands on the chair's pushrims. On flat or paved ground, Leo was able to use his upper-body strength to move the all-terrain chair like his regular one. It was when the path got rougher and needed more power that he used the levers to give it to him. There were times when he needed help on a particularly rough or steep part of a trail, but on the car park's smooth surface, Leo was giving Luc and Elliott a run for their money. They hurried to catch up.

"I had no idea you were so eager to see a bunch of rocks, Sir," Luc said as they reached his side at the entrance to the visitors' center.

Elliott was having a hard time keeping the smile off his face as Luc and Leo bantered back and forth all the way through getting their tickets and as they started toward the iconic standing stones. That was another thing that had changed between them all since Leo had gotten the all clear from his doctor five months prior. Leo had loosened up a great deal, accepting teasing from both Elliott and Luc and giving back as good as he got.

At first sight of the stones, both Leo and Luc fell silent. Elliott had originally seen them when he was about five or six on a trip with his parents, but he'd never forgotten the impression they made. First, because they were so strange:

these monoliths rising from a small hill on the Salisbury plain, silent and mysterious, impervious to most attempts to explain them and their construction, incomprehensibly old. That trip might have been what started Elliott's fascination with antiquities and the ancient world.

The second reason had to do with the bride and groom posing for photographs before the stone. They were so incongruous, the bride's white gown and the groom's black tuxedo. He'd been fascinated by the way the bride had worn trainers and then switched to heels when it was time to take the pictures. In his young mind, it felt like fairy-tale characters had come to life.

In any event, the stones still awed him. Their age was still unfathomable to him, but that endurance was what had led Elliott to choose this spot to exchange new vows with both of his men. Leo had talked about circles, and this was the oldest one Elliott could think of.

They moved around the main circle with the rest of the tourists who had come to see Stonehenge. It wasn't high tourist season nor a day of particular significance, and the weather had turned overcast, so the number of people out wasn't large at all. And that was a good thing too. Elliott dreaded the idea of their quiet moment ending up on someone's IG feed. Though, he mused, that would really be bringing things full circle since it had been a photo Luc took of his dog and posted to IG that had brought the two of them together.

Without thinking, he reached for his husband's hand and squeezed.

Luc turned to him with a quizzical expression on his face. "You okay?" he asked, and Elliott couldn't help but notice his shallow breath and the color that rose to his cheeks.

"I'm fine," El answered, then pulled Luc closer so he could kiss him. "Just thinking about how we started with your photo of Hrothgar on Insta."

"It was a good photo."

"The best."

Leo turned his chair to face them as they'd fallen behind. "What are you two talking about?" he asked.

"Just remembering when Luc took a picture of my dog."

The change in Leo's face made Elliott smile as the man went from impatient to loving in the blink of an eye. "That's how you met."

"Um-hm," Luc said and snuggled in closer to Elliott's side. "How could I resist someone who had that amazing dog?" He kissed El's cheek. "And a photo that went viral."

They'd come almost full way round the stones now and were standing near the Heel Stone with very few people nearby. Elliott looked at Leo and then Luc. He still held hands with Luc, so he took a step closer to Leo and held out his hand. Leo immediately took it and held his out for Luc so that they formed a circle, much like they had the night Leo was diagnosed and Elliott had realized he was attracted to the man.

“Circles are special things,” Elliott said. “They have no beginning, no end. I wanted to come here because this is the most enduring circle that I know of, and I thought it would be a fitting place for something we all want to acknowledge.” He nodded toward Leo, who reached into the utility pocket on his chair and pulled out a box.

“I won’t ask you to kneel, boy,” Leo said, “because the ground is too wet, but I have something serious to ask you.”

Luc squeezed Elliott’s hand while he nodded to Leo. “Yes, Sir.”

Leo opened the box to reveal a necklace made out of a thick braid of leather. It was choker length, and the clasp was closed with a small lock, the only indication that this was something more than a piece of jewelry.

“When you asked me to do a scene with you, I worried that you were simply interested in the crippled guy, the Dom in the wheelchair, a disability groupie. I shouldn’t have. From the start, you were special, a responsive sub who checked all my boxes, and then, amazingly, you turned out to be attracted to me.”

“Wasn’t that amazing,” Luc said. “You’re gorgeous. Why wouldn’t I want you? Sir?”

“Nice save,” Elliott snorted, but in truth, he was choking up.

Leo smiled. “In any event, I wanted you too, and with Elliott’s blessing, we started a relationship. And then I met your husband and realized I was attracted to him as well.

You've both stood by me and given me strength and more love than I could ever have expected."

"Of course we have, Sir," Luc protested. "We love you."

"I know. And I love you, which is why I asked Elliott if I could give you a permanent symbol of that love."

Luc's eyes went comically round as he turned to Elliott and then looked back at Leo, who was now holding the collar up.

"If you are willing, and with Elliott's consent, I'd like you to wear this as a symbol of our connection and love."

"Yes, Sir," Luc said and crouched down, balancing on the balls of his feet. "I'd be honored to wear your collar."

"Would you do the honors, El?" Leo asked, holding the leather circle out to Elliott.

Elliott drew in a deep breath. "I would love to." He took the collar and stood behind Luc while Leo held his hands out. Luc immediately joined his hands with Leo's.

"You are more than I ever expected in a partner," Leo said. "Your submission is such a gift to me, and I hope you know that. I adore you, and love you, and promise to take care of you as your Dom for as long as you choose to be my sub."

"Thank you, Sir," Luc whispered. "I will wear your collar as a symbol of your love for me and my submission to you for as long as you are my partner and my Dom."

At a nod from Leo, Elliott fastened the collar around Luc's neck. He drew it tight enough for Luc to feel it but not tight

enough to restrict his breathing, then fastened the clasp and pushed home the tiny lock.

He kissed the top of Luc's head and stepped back from him, expecting they would move to his and Luc's portion of the moment, but Leo had other ideas.

"Elliott," Leo said.

Elliott turned to see Leo holding up a thin leather bracelet. It was two strips of leather joined by the buckle and a hammered silver circle. It was a match for the collar Luc now wore, except there was a tiny key dangling from the buckle.

"I had no idea when I fell in love with Luc that I would also fall in love with you," Leo said. "You're not my sub, but you are my partner in every way that Luc is. I want to give you this as an indication of my commitment and love for you and for the connection we all share. I'm not your Dom. This is not intended to be a collar, but..."

"...you are mine," Elliott interjected. "And I am yours. I will be honored to wear this as a symbol of our love."

"Luc?" Leo held the bracelet out to Luc, who took it, then rose to his feet to face Elliott.

"You two are the most amazing men I have ever known, and I am in awe that I get to call you mine," Luc said as he fastened the bracelet around Elliott's right wrist.

"The key on the buckle fits the lock on Luc's collar," Leo said. "If he asks you to take it off, you can do so, but I'll ask

that, as his Dom, I be the only one to put it on him, if that's all right with you, El."

"Of course it is," Elliott said. He wiped the tears from his eyes, then bent down and kissed Leo. "I will always wear this as a symbol of what we share." He straightened and looked at Luc. "Are you ready?" he asked.

Luc's smile could have melted the polar ice cap. "Of course I am." He went back down onto the balls of his feet and pulled a small box from his pocket. "I'm not going to ask who had this idea first, and I will be talking to Elliott about keeping secrets." He flashed a teasing grin over his shoulder at El, then focused on Leo again. "But. Elliott and I wanted to offer you a symbol of our enduring love and connection to you, to show you how much you mean to us and make it clear that you are ours. If you want to be."

Luc opened the box to reveal a ring that was a match for the ones he and Elliott wore, the ones they had exchanged when they were married.

"I told you in the hospital that I was in this in good times and bad, in sickness and in health, Leo," Elliott said. "I meant every word. You are ours, we are yours. If you want to be."

"Of course I do," Leo said. His voice was gruff. "You two mean the world to me." He held out his hand, and Luc took the ring from the box and pushed it halfway up Leo's left ring finger, and then Elliott pushed it home.

The three of them held hands, letting the connection they shared fill them with joy and love.

“When we get back home, I want us to look for a house to share,” Elliott said. He kissed Leo’s hand, then Luc’s. “I want us to have a place that is ours.”

“That sounds like a very good idea,” Leo said.

“I agree.” Luc nodded. “A place for the three of us, and Bey and Jericho, and all the dogs to come.”

Elliott laughed. “Of course.”

—lll—

WANT MORE?

Though *Love Comes in Threes* is a solo title, I do have a couple of stories from this same universe of characters.

Might Delete Later

Elliott and Luc's meet-cute is the subject of my short story "Might Delete Later." From the moment Luc sees Hrothgar in the back of Elliott's car to Elliott contacting Luc after the photo goes viral to their first date, it's all here.

Please note that this story has been revised from the original that appeared in the Boys of Summer promotion to include a visit to the Castellanos' bakery. You can get here for free by signing up for my newsletter: [Might Delete Later](#).

Chef's Kiss

Elliott's boss, Becks, appears in the novella *Chef's Kiss* in which shy, intellectual Becks discovers there's more cooking

on private chef Simon's stove than delicious food. Chef's Kiss is a slow-burn, sensuous seduction of wine, food, and desire. Follow the link to sign up for my newsletter and receive it for free.

THANK YOU!

I hope you enjoyed getting to know Elliott, Luc, and Leo, as well as their dogs Beowulf and Jericho.

There's a lot in the works this year including a brand new series that debuts this summer. If you want to keep up with my books and news, please come join the Sin Bin community on social media. I always love to hear from readers.

Marie's Sin Bin Facebook group

Instagram: [marie.sinbooks](#)

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If you haven't already, please sign up for my newsletter either on BookFunnel or through my website. You'll receive a free short story as a thank you!

Also, if you enjoyed this or any of my books, please take a moment to leave a review or rating on Amazon, Goodreads, or BookBub – reviews and ratings help more readers find my books.

Thank you so much for reading! I hope to hear from you soon!

Marie

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ABOUT MARIE

Marie Sinclair is a queer, agender (pronouns she/they) writer living in San Francisco. Though she's been a writer all her life, it wasn't until she stumbled upon MM romance that she knew she'd found a home for herself and all the characters in her head.

Her focus is on contemporary romance, usually on the steamy side. While HEAs are guaranteed, it will always take some work for the characters to get there, and it might not look the way they (or the readers) expected at the beginning. As a member of the LGBTQ+ community, Marie believes in rooting her stories in the real world of queer culture and showing how love can survive even in challenging times. The power of romance lies in hope, and that is what Marie strives to show in all her books.