

A man with a dark beard and short hair is looking slightly to the left. He is wearing a black mesh tank top and a black choker with silver spikes. A blue shirt is draped over his shoulders. The background is a textured, brownish wall.

Sturd

MUFFIN

ALEX SILVER

Summer of Adventures 6

Stud Muffin
Summer of Adventures #6
Alex Silver

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Synopsis

When a ghost from my past walks back into my life, I jump at the chance to reconnect. My husband, Clark, and I are polyam, but for us that has never meant finding a third to join our happily ever after.

We weren't looking for a triad. It wasn't what either of us wanted. Until Ethan. My estranged childhood best friend walked out of my life ten years ago when his family rejected him for being trans. Having him back, it feels like he never left.

Now, I want everything with the man I promised forever and the first boy I ever loved. Too bad the timing isn't ideal. Clark and I are both struggling with work stress and it's taking a toll on my mental health.

Ethan might be everything neither of us knew we were looking for, but how can I convince Clark of that when I'm spiraling and all he sees is how badly losing Ethan the first time hurt my trust?

Stud Muffin is an M/M/M puppy play, former best friends to lovers, polyamorous romance with an established couple welcoming a third. It includes a beloved pet parrot, daddy kink, puppy play, CNC, ethical non-monogamy, light breath play, restraints, gamer geeks, and themes of loss and familial rejection due to transphobia. Nick struggles with his longstanding bipolar disorder, including an on page manic episode.

Chapter 1

Nick

Tonight's munch is my reward for getting through a miserable week at work. I can feel the stress melting away as I walk into the restaurant where we're meeting. It's hard to believe it was only a week ago that I got home with a stack of test papers that changed everything for me.

I pour my heart and soul into my students, so it was a gut punch when I read the first essay copied word-for-word from my answer key. It would have been bad enough if one student cheated. But it was so much worse than that.

My hands shook and my stomach dropped as I sorted through a dozen identical test sheets, unable to accept what my eyes were telling me. Daddy Clark sat with me and rubbed my back as I had to email the principal for guidance about the issue.

My sweet sixth graders stole from me and cheated. And Clark was there for me all weekend. He helped take my mind off it, but he couldn't delay his work conference this week. So I've been handling the issue alone the past few days and missing him while he's out of town.

Looking forward to tonight has helped me hold it together. When I step into the reserved event space, Q is already presiding over their usual table full of littles.

Everyone is in street clothes, but Connor is sporting a Pokémon graphic tee that makes me smile despite my crappy mood. This is where I need to be right now. A place where I belong, no pretense required. I don't want to think about work.

Except I can't seem to shake the intrusive thoughts about everything wrong with the situation. To add insult to injury, once the tests went home and the parents complained, my principal threw me under the bus.

Failing all the students involved wasn't even my choice. I just followed the school's policy. But apparently that policy

doesn't apply to the children of well-off parents who offer to re-floor the school gym if Junior doesn't have to repeat the 6th grade.

The kids I can forgive, heck knows that I've made more than my share of impulsive terrible choices over the years. It still hurts, but I understand caving to peer pressure and trying to live up to parental expectations. How many times did I console my best friends over crappy grades that they didn't want to show their disciplinarian of a father? So, yeah, I get it, even if the betrayal of my trust stings.

It's not even about the grades, I don't care that much about revising those zeros into fifties. I'd rather not teach any of the kids involved for another year if they get held back. No, it's the fact my admin didn't have my back that has me walking around with a hollow ache in my chest.

So I deserve a break. What I really want is a chance to relax into my puppy headspace. Maybe chase a ball for Daddy. Show off some tricks for him.

I desperately want him to fuck me into the mattress with his fingers wrapped around my throat, letting me put myself entirely in his capable hands. Surrender everything to him, down to my need for oxygen. I shudder at the heady emotions attached to letting Daddy choke me into a wondrous, floaty place where he's my entire universe.

Too bad he's out of town until Sunday, and I promised Q I'd be at the munch tonight. They've seen me and waved, so it's too late to back out now. Daddy suggested I should find a play partner for the night to help get me out of my funk, but I'm not sure if I want to.

It's not that we both don't play with other people, we do. That's always been a part of our relationship and it likely always will be. Boyfriends come and go; Daddy is my forever. There isn't a scene in existence that can change that for me. Or for him.

I've even got his collar around my neck to prove it. The day collar I wear all the time is a simple chain that I've threaded

my wedding ring onto and most people accept the adornment at face value. Our kinky friends know what it means.

I'm not really in the mood to find a distraction, much as the idea of losing myself in a sloppy BJ before bed appeals. After my latest meeting with the principal this morning, I just lack the motivation to act on that impulse. All the more reason to show up tonight and spend time around friends. If nothing else, I'll get a meal that I don't have to cook.

At first, the night goes to plan as I mingle and chat. Q's attention is wrapped up in their friends who are littles, all of them cluster around a stranger. I consider joining them, but Quent pretty much only has eyes for their fresh plate of cheesy fries at the moment, and I don't feel like meeting anyone new, so I look around for other people I know.

I'm not in the mood for a crowd and Daddy has strict rules about eating healthy. By which he means not indulging in excessive amounts of the sort of salty junk foods and caffeinated beverages that throw my medication levels out of whack. Basically, he helps me avoid life choices that make me miserable.

Hope and Angel walk into the restaurant after me.

"Niko! Hi, I was hoping you'd be here tonight. Are you coming to the next Littles' Night at Adventures? Mommy said I could ask to play with you, if you and your Daddy will be there?" Angel sways side-to-side as they deliver their barrage of questions.

"Hey, Angel!" I wave at them, flashing an indulgent smile. They seem to be in their little headspace. "You like playing with puppies, huh?"

"Yes!" Angel bounces on their toes, body language confirming my guess.

"I'm not sure if I can make it to that. I'll have to ask Daddy. Would you and Hope want to split some wings with me tonight though?" I put in the order with a server on the way in, so they should have it ready soon.

“Boneless?” Angel asks. “Puppies can’t has chicken bones. You might choke.” They say it with the utmost concern, and I have to suppress a smile.

“Good thing I’m human Nick tonight then,” I smile and tug on one of their adorable pigtails.

“Oh. Good. I don’t want you to get dead.” Angel rocks onto their heels, turning to face Hope. “Can we sit with Nick?”

“Sure thing, baby.” Hope guides their partner to an open table in the reserved event space, and I take a seat across from the couple.

“Where is Clark tonight?” Hope asks.

“Toronto. He’ll be back late Sunday night,” I reply, and just like that, I’m missing my husband and the comfort of him holding me after a bad day.

I wish he was here. We have plans for a video chat when I get home and he’s done with the big dinner with all the people he needs to schmooze for work. But that’s not the same as Daddy scruffing my neck and letting me snuggle into him on the couch. To say nothing of the less G-rated things I want from him.

He tries to give me virtual pup time. It’s just that putting my play collar on myself next to the day collar I wear to work doesn’t compare to his touch. As if thinking of the heavy chain around my neck draws the motion from me, I finger the place under my shirt where my wedding band lies nestled against my heart.

Rings bother me. I fidget and tug at them and take them off and lose them. Besides, wearing it on a chain gives me a ready excuse to wear the necklace all the time. A collar doesn’t have to go on my neck to symbolize our love, but I always get a heady rush of endorphins when I tug on the chain. I love the tactile reminder of Daddy’s control pulling at my nape.

Tonight, I need a distraction. More than dinner with friends and conversation. What I want is a scene to get me out of my head, which, honestly, I’m not likely to find here tonight. This

group skews heavier on the pups and littles than the caregivers.

I squirm in my seat and glance around the room, taking a quick inventory of my play options. Kylee is here. She and Q might be up for some fun after everyone else leaves. But they're hosting, so if I angle for that, I'd probably miss the window to call Daddy. I scan over and discard each of the other D types present. None of them are what I'm craving tonight.

My attention falls back on my tablemates when I hear my name. I blink at Hope. She doesn't Domme for anyone but Angel. She's also watching me with a knowing smile.

Hope pats my hand comfortingly. "You're a million miles away. What's wrong, Nick?"

"Nothing. Well. Work crap. And missing Daddy, even though he only left yesterday." I explain the situation with the cheating kids and the administration caving like a card tower under the slightest pressure from disgruntled parents.

My friends make all the right sympathetic sounds, but it all seems so hollow. I recognize that detached sensation, but I can't really make myself feel emotionally connected when I get like this. So I let it ride.

I share my food with Angel and Hope and say all the expected things and smile and laugh. And when Martin arrives with picture books, it's almost a relief that Angel hops up with a happy squeal and goes to pick something to color. Almost. If I was in a place to really feel much of anything. Hope excuses herself and follows her little, and then I'm alone.

I let my eyes rove over Martin's broad shoulders and the indulgent smile he's favoring upon all the littles clamoring around him for crayons. Licking my lips, I consider whether I should ask him for a scene tonight.

He's always fun to play with. And he likes pain play. A few lashes in one of the private rooms at Adventures, the club Martin owns and where Daddy and I are both members, might cut through the numb fog of my depression.

He's so focused on the littles tonight, though. I don't want to bother him. And then someone I never thought I'd see again walks through the door to the private room and I have to rub my eyes.

Nope, I'm not seeing things; it's still him. Or his doppelgänger. Leo.

My ex-best friend's dead brother. My heart beats faster, pulse pounding so hard I'm sure everyone around us has to hear how much I'm freaking out. Or maybe it stops altogether because I'm lightheaded, floating outside of myself, like I'm not getting any oxygen to my brain as I stare at an impossible apparition.

Caught between hopeful longing for someone who can't be real and a simmering resentment that they both left me when I needed them most. Tentative hope wins out. I want this miracle to be real.

This can't be possible. Can it? I used to be closer to Leo and his sister than anyone else on the planet. I'd recognize either of them anywhere. Or I thought I would. Wouldn't I? I'm not sure. It's been over a decade since we lost touch. Not long after Leo's funeral.

The Leo look-alike notices me staring and pales, as though he's the one seeing a ghost. I don't want to make him bolt. I need to know if he's really Leo.

If he somehow survived when we all thought he was dead. If he's heard from his sister after she left. Does she know he's still alive? Would that have made her come back home?

I stand abruptly and wave to him. Leo shakes his head, a hand going to his mouth, like he can't believe I'm here. As if I'm the one whose presence is shocking. Without conscious thought, I cross the room toward him.

"Leo?" I say his name as I reach him, but standing closer, I know it's not him.

He died. Drowned. We saw his body. Right before graduation. Right before the forever part of best friends forever got erased. I recognize the blobby butterfly birthmark

right below this stranger's left ear. Like an omen of the way they flew out of my life.

And now they're back. *He's* back? The first syllable of the name I knew them by gets caught on my tongue, but I'm pretty sure that's not right anymore. I swallow it back; I don't want to say that name if it might hurt him.

It's surreal to stand there, in an open area between tables full of my kinky friends, staring at each other for an eternal moment. And I feel something through the numbness. Disbelief. Hope. Fear, a whirlwind of conflicting emotions over possibly finally having answers about why she—they? or is it he now?—left.

"It's, uh, Ethan, now."

"Ethan," I repeat the new name, drinking in the face that I used to know better than my own. I suppress the urge to touch the stubble on those once baby-smooth cheeks. That sort of casual affection hasn't been my right in a long while.

"Nicholas? How are you here?" Ethan asks with the air of someone caught in a dream. Like he can't quite believe his eyes. Their eyes?

"How am I here? I never left!" I snap. And I hate that I'm angry at them, but I am. I leave the accusation that he left me behind unspoken.

"I'm sorry. It's just that I couldn't predict how you'd react, and I wasn't strong enough to find out."

"React to what?" I demand, but as soon as the words leave my mouth, I have an inkling that he means his transition. "Is that why you never came home to visit?"

Ethan nods. They look miserable, their lips wobble, and their eyes glisten. They sweep a hand toward themselves. "My dad didn't take it well when I told him I was his son. I couldn't bear to hear the same from you."

"It wouldn't have changed anything." I cringe internally at how defensive I sound.

I cross my arms over my chest, trying to block out the sting of his words. The matter-of-fact admission he believed I might meet his vulnerability with betrayal hurts, but I can't claim his long-ago assumption was entirely unjustified.

And he said son, but does that mean his pronouns are he/him now? I should ask.

Ethan shakes his head sadly. "You used to laugh at those scenes in *Dude, Where's My Car?* and *Ace Ventura*. Remember? I thought..."

And I do remember. That shit that once seemed like harmless jokes. I remember repeating things I shouldn't have years ago, when I was still a baby to the scene. The first time that Q gently but firmly took me to task over a similar 'joke' at a munch a lot like this one.

That was when I knew I wanted to be friends with them. Their fierceness drew me to them, and I had to work hard to earn their trust after my display of ignorance. They were so patient with me. Q is an awesome friend.

And Ethan might have a point. I might not have understood if he had told me he was trans when we were eighteen. As much as I want to believe it wouldn't have changed our interactions, I can't be sure of that. No matter how much I regret losing our friendship back then, maybe it's for the best that I've lived and learned since then.

If I'm lucky, I can have him back in my life now. That might not have been possible if he'd given me the opening to hurt him when he was at his most vulnerable. It's impossible to say for sure. But it's easier to let go of the old hurt if I accept that this is my second chance to get things right with him.

"You're right." I nod. "I didn't get it back then. Even if I wouldn't have called myself a transphobe, I get why you were afraid to tell me. I won't claim to understand entirely now, but for what it's worth, I don't laugh at transphobic jokes anymore. You can be sure as shit I wouldn't be here tonight if I was still that ignorant boy you knew."

I glance back over my shoulder at the two organizers of tonight's event. Both of them are among my closest friends. Both of them are trans, but I'm not about to bring that up. That seems too much like using them or worse, outing them.

"I don't expect you to take my word for it. But can we try to be friends again so I can prove it to you?" I ask, hoping he gives me a chance.

Ethan lets out a huge breath and flashes me a tentative smile. "You really mean that, huh? God, Nicky, you don't know how much I've missed you. How many times I questioned if I should have let you prove me wrong. Can I hug you?"

I open my arms, heedless of our surroundings or any attention we might garner. Everyone in the reserved event room is cool with queer PDA, so it's fine. Ethan clings to me, like when we were kids. I give him the biggest bear hug.

I can't really be mad at the choices he made to protect himself. Just grateful we found each other again. It doesn't even occur to me until he pulls back and gives me a wide-eyed look that the fact we're reuniting here of all places means something.

"So, I guess you're kinky?" Ethan asks self-consciously.

"Yep. Guess that makes two of us. I can't say I'm shocked."

"What gave it away? Was it the games we played?" The wicked glimmer in Ethan's eyes reminds me so much of who we used to be to each other it's a physical ache in my chest. I've missed him.

I laugh at the memory of lazy afternoons in his parents' basement when he'd challenge me to tie him up so he could practice escaping. He presented it like a Houdini thing, but even though I wasn't into femme bodies, sometimes I got hard watching him squirm in my restraints.

I've told myself for years it was the rush of having power over another person. Or because I was imagining a man tying me up and making me helpless. "Oh my god, remember when we played escape artists with Leo?"

“Yeah. Remember the time you bought rainbow duct tape?”

“Yeah.” I snort. “To celebrate my coming out. Your dad’s face was priceless. He just noped right back out of the room.”

“He was pissed after you left. To be fair, we used an entire roll of duct tape on his fancy ergonomic chair. He made Leo and me scrub off every trace of residue. Took us ages.”

“In my defense, you were such a squirmy little shit. It was the only way to make sure you couldn’t get yourself loose in less time than it took for me to restrain you.”

“Yeah, well, I guess it hit different as a parent walking in on a gaggle of teenagers tying each other up?” Ethan shrugs, shaking with suppressed laughter. “You know he recognized I had a massive crush on you, right?”

That stops me short. I hadn’t known that. I knew I loved Ethan, but it was entirely platonic on my side. And he knew I was gay.

“Oh.” The memory of telling him that I wished he was a boy so we could date, because he was my platonic soulmate, hits me hard in the chest. Did it slice like razors when I said that shit to him?

“Yeah. Well, I realized nothing could come of it. I used to fantasize about telling you I was a boy and you realizing we were perfect for each other. But I know you never saw me like that.” He shrugs, like it’s no big deal. Water under the bridge.

I try to imagine what I’d have said if he had told me. If instead of laughing it off like some big joke, he’d shared his truth. I don’t know how I would have reacted. But now I want to learn who he’s become over the past decade.

We have so much catching up to do. I glance around for open seats; I want to sit him down and hear everything that’s happened since he left.

“Um, so I should’ve led with this instead of assuming son means he/him, but what are your pronouns now? I don’t want to misgender you.”

Ethan smiles at me, the same mischievous grin that dimples his cheeks remains familiar no matter how differently he's presenting. "He/him. You really have changed, huh?"

"I have." I grin back. "But not my pronouns. I still use he/him, too."

"God, Nicky, I can't believe it's really you." He reaches over and claps me on the shoulder. "You have to tell me everything. How have you been? What do you do?" He pauses, like he's stealing himself for my answer to hurt and asks, "are you seeing anybody?"

"I've been good. I'm a teacher. And I'm married now, and collared." I tug at the chain with my wedding ring on it. "Come sit with me." I link our arms to guide him toward an out of the way table where we can hear each other over the raucous laughter of coloring littles.

Ethan's face falls, but he tries to hide it as he follows me around a few occupied tables. "Congratulations! I can totally see you teaching. What age?"

"Sixth grade science. Most of the time I love it, though I'm in the middle of some drama involving cheating on a test. So ask me how much I love my job again another time. Also, Daddy and I aren't exclusive. So, if you're looking to rekindle more than just our friendship, that isn't off the table. Just FYI." I wink playfully at him and brush my fingers over his hand.

Ethan takes a moment to process that. "So, if I asked you out for coffee?"

"When and where?"

Ethan chuckles. "Well, considering I just moved back to town recently and I've been dealing with my folks' estate, how about you pick the place and time?"

"You're on. There's a cool little coffee shop on West 3rd that's queer friendly. Sin and Chocolate. And Daddy is out of town this weekend, so how about we meet there tomorrow for breakfast? They have killer pastries."

“Oh no, shouldn’t we go some place with less deadly confections?” Ethan teases me.

Damn, I’ve missed his playfulness. We reach the free seats and I gesture for Ethan to take one. “Nope, they’re delicious enough to take the risk.”

Ethan chooses the seat with the better view of Martin and the littles crowded around him to color. I sit opposite him, intrigued by his interest.

“That good, huh? You’ll have to text me the address. Give me your phone.” He holds out his hand imperiously, and I place my phone in it. Ethan types in his digits and a moment later, his pocket chimes like he just got a coin in *Super Mario*.

“You are such a nerd.” It already seems like the gap in our friendship is evaporating, as though we can just pick up where we left off years ago.

“Takes one to know one.” Ethan hands back my phone. “So. Have you eaten? I should probably introduce myself to QutiePie in person, right?”

“I had some wings, but we can totally split something. And here, I’ll introduce you to them. Q’s a close friend.” I pop up from my seat, feeling silly that I didn’t think to do this before sitting. Oh well, Ethan seems intrigued by the impromptu art time and Q prides themselves on being a gracious host, so they’ll appreciate the introduction.

Ethan smiles and lets me guide him over to where Q is holding court amongst all the littles doing art. By the time Q introduces Ethan around, all my thoughts of finding someone to play with to blow off steam have fled. Ethan declines multiple offers of coloring books, but smiles at the folks using them. I wonder idly where he fits among the caregivers, pups, and littles gathered here tonight.

We chat with Quent for a while, then sit back down to eat. I get a burger and catch up with Ethan. The only reason I leave before the restaurant kicks us out at closing is the alarm on my phone reminding me I have to go if I don’t want to miss my call with Daddy.

When I explain the system of alarms Daddy sets for me when he has to travel, Ethan shakes his head at me. It's the same fond way he used to look at me when I was dashing around late for things when we were teens. And my heart is so full at having him back that I completely ignore the pang of loss at all the time we've missed.

"Don't forget, tomorrow morning, deadly pastries..." I remind him with a mock stern expression.

Ethan laughs. "I'll be there. Call me if I'm late; the bus in from Port Moody is still as much of a pain on weekends as when we were kids."

"I do not miss that part of living in the burbs." I grin at him.

On an impulse, I lean in to kiss his cheek in farewell and he smiles after me like he's just as thrilled as I am over our reunion. After one conversation, I've already got that electric buzz of interest thrumming under my skin. The eager anticipation and wanting to spend every moment with a new love interest. It's not a scene, but reconnecting with Ethan certainly jolted me out of my funk, at least for now.

Chapter 2

Clark

It's an effort to paste on my stern Dom face when Nicholas is late for our video chat. I want to beam at the sight of my boy smiling into the camera. With how stressed he's been since the cheating saga with his students began, I expected him to still be down. But that's his full mega-watt grin on display and it's such a relief to see it on him.

His brilliant smile warms my drab, generic hotel room like sunshine. I wish I could hold him as I ask how his day went, but this is the next best thing. I lean closer to my laptop screen.

"Why are you late, Nicholas?" I ask. "We had an agreement."

"I know, Daddy. Sorry. I left the munch as soon as my alarm went off. Promise."

"The one I set for when you needed to get ready to call me?"

"Yeah?"

"Babe, that means get your computer set up, not head home."

"Oops. It didn't seem like it took that long."

"I know. Okay. Next time we'll recalibrate the time. Sound good?"

"Yeah." He squirms in his seat, and I know he's bursting with news. Likely about whatever, or considering I know my pup, *whoever* has him bubbling with excitement.

"How was the munch?"

"Amazing!"

"You met someone." I lean back in the cheap hotel desk chair, settling in for him to regale me with his evening's entertainment.

“I did. Not the way you’re thinking.”

I raise a brow at him, and he giggles.

“Okay, yeah, the way you’re thinking too. But it’s Ethan. I mean, you know my best friend from high school?”

“The girl with the dead twin who moved to Toronto for uni and ghosted you?”

“Yeah. Well. Not so much a girl. He’s trans, and he’s back in town now.”

“Small world.”

“Right?” Nicholas bounces in his seat. “We’re getting coffee tomorrow. And I might invite him over after.”

“Have fun and be safe, pup.”

“Always. I miss you. Wish you were here. I want you guys to meet. I know you aren’t always into meeting my boyfriends, but he’s not really a boyfriend yet. And it was so good to talk to him again, Daddy.”

“Yeah?” I wish I was there with him too. Vince, my boss, springs for nice accommodations when I have to travel for work, but all the bland decor blends together after a while and none of it compares to home.

“Yeah. He made me laugh. He always did. But I laughed so hard my face hurts.”

“I’m happy for you, pup,” I say. And I am. Not just that he laughed, though I love seeing him happy. It’s the fact he laughed when he’s barely been mustering the energy to get out of bed the past week. His smiles have become forced things, trying to hide just how off he’s been behind a mask I can see right past.

I don’t care if his current buzz is just new relationship energy that will fade as fast as it does every time he starts seeing someone new. It makes no difference to me that someone else is putting that smile on his face. I just love that this Ethan helped my boy laugh. Helped him when I can’t be there to hold him together because I’m stuck halfway across the country.

The desk chair is getting uncomfortable. I glance at the perfectly made bed beside me, not looking forward to crawling between the cool sheets alone. Those perfect military corners make me miss my boy. He has a habit of leaving our bedding in a rumpled heap that frays my nerves, but I'd trade a tidy hotel bed for one of Nicholas's messy blanket nests in a heartbeat; if only it meant we were together right now.

Nicholas asks about my work trip and I tell him a few funny stories about the folks I've been meeting with. I tell him about a cool new tech demo at the conference I'm attending. I recap the keynote that I thought had interesting insights.

He's drooping, tired earlier than normal for him, another little sign he's depressed? That's what this is. I've seen it enough in our time together to recognize the signs in my pup.

"You're taking your meds, right?" I ask, because checking up on his health is part of what he needs from me as his Daddy.

"Yeah. Of course, Daddy. And I made an extra appointment with Maddy, like you suggested."

"Good boy."

Nicholas beams at the praise, tugging on his collar. I miss holding him while I drift off to sleep. I wish I could make the situation with his work go away, along with the signs I've been noticing that he's down lately.

Between extra sessions with his therapist, his meds, and reconnecting with his friend, hopefully this is an inflection point and he'll get back to his usual even keel soon. Hopefully, he won't tip too far the other way this time. Our rules and routines are usually enough to help him stay stable. But sometimes he still gets breakthrough episodes.

And if he does, well, I promised him in sickness and in health and I meant it. I still mean it. I'll be there for him, always. Somehow, that promise rings hollow when I'm sitting in a hotel room hundreds of kilometers away from the boy who owns my heart. As we say an extended goodbye, I resent

the heck out of my job for keeping me from him. It might be time for a change.

Chapter 3

Ethan

I found tonight's munch on a fetish site. Actually attending it was a bit impulsive, but I've been to kink events with friends before. And with my ex. Tailor is the one who said they could picture me as a little when I admitted I wasn't really into the D/s dynamic they wanted.

I'm still not sure that's for me, but I'm open to exploring. Hence coming to this particular munch that's geared toward pups and littles. I figure an event run by a trans pup who uses they/them pronouns is a safe place to dip my toes in the water here. If nothing else, it's a way to make friends.

I never expected that decision to lead me back into Nicky's life, but I'm unspeakably glad that it did. Even just one evening together proves that he's everything I remember from when we were young. Bold and outgoing. Gorgeous and fun to be around and full of a contagious energy that makes me want to stay in his orbit. Just being around him makes me smile more.

We talked for hours over soda and bar food. Until Nick's phone blared out a siren sound. He jerked away from me with an apology and an explanation that he had to go so he didn't miss his video chat date with his Daddy. That brought me crashing back to reality.

I sit alone at our table after he leaves, assessing what just happened. Nicky said he and Clark are polyamorous and open, but I'm not sure how I'll handle competing for his affection with someone he loves enough to wear his ring and his collar. I probably shouldn't frame it that way. He can love more than one person. He was always good at balancing time between Leo and me when we were kids.

But how open to a new partner are they, really? And even if Nicky can love multiple people like that, I don't know if I can. I've been called a needy lover by more than one ex. So it

stands to reason I'd be way too much for him to want to deal with when he already loves someone else.

Then again, that could mean I might do better with multiple relationships to meet my needs. That was a huge factor in my previous forays into polyam. I was open to trying it with people I met on an app, so Nicky shouldn't be any different. If anything, I trust him far more than internet strangers.

I pick at the last of our shared chocolate cake. Nicky only had a few bites, so there is plenty still on the plate in front of me now that he's gone. Q, the pup he introduced me to earlier, flounces into the open seat Nicky just vacated. They flash me a ready grin. Their blond bangs flop over their forehead, reminding me absurdly of a shaggy terrier. They've got that same puppyish energy and charm.

"Hey, Ethan, right?" they ask.

"Yeah. Hi, again." I give them a half-hearted wave.

"I'm glad you made it. Nicholas said you two grew up together?"

"We did." I nod.

"Cool. Well, I hope you had a good time tonight. And that we'll see you around again? He seemed thrilled to see you. I know he's been down with everything at his job and Clark being out of town. So, I just wanted to thank you for pulling him out of his slump." Q reaches across the table and pats the back of my hand. "Hope said she was worried about him earlier tonight."

"Yeah. I'll be around. Thanks for welcoming me."

"Always happy to welcome new kinksters into the fold." Q winks suggestively at me. Like they're implying they'd welcome me between their folds or something.

"Um. Yeah." I shift in my seat, uncomfortable with being their focus more than the content of what they're saying. Normally, I don't mind harmless flirting. I just wish Nicky was still here to buffer me from the strangers I don't know well enough to read yet.

“Sorry, you can tell me if I’m being too forward.” Q sits back in their seat and rubs at their neck. Their fingers brush the cute collar on their neck, a little metal heart gleaming where it holds together the thin leather band.

“Anyway, we hold this gathering bimonthly. That’s the every two months one, not the twice a month one. You ever notice that bi prefixes often have two meanings? Pretty meta, right?” They bounce in their seat.

“Uh, sure.” I nod slowly.

“Right. So, you seem uncomfortable. I won’t push you, but feel free to message me or Mommy online if you have questions about local clubs or other meetups or anything. It was nice to meet you, Ethan.”

“Nice to meet you, too. And thanks for hosting. Tonight was great.” It was too. I’m just peopled out and emotional from the unexpected blast from my past.

Q takes my words at face value and says goodbye, waving at me before flitting off to talk to someone else who is leaving the event room. I take the last few bites of my cake, slide a tip onto the table, and go home to the mostly empty house that echoes with memories.

I left out a few massive chunks of the story when I told Nicky about why I left and never looked back. The most glaring is that my dad disowned me when I came out. He said his only son was dead and buried. He asked me how I could do this to the family. From the way he acted, anyone would think I murdered his only daughter instead of coming out.

Mom took it better. Made sure I’d be financially able to make it through university before she lost touch, but I hadn’t ever planned on ghosting Nicky. I was going to tell him after I told my folks during that fateful winter break of my freshman year at U of T.

Instead of going over to Nick’s place afterward to come out to him, I was a sobbing mess. I didn’t have it in me to face another rejection. Not from him.

Mom helped me pack up everything I wanted to keep and took me to the airport for a last-minute flight back to campus. Where I couch surfed until the dorms reopened and practically groveled for acceptance when my mom called.

She explained she was transferring the money from Leo and my college funds into an account in my name, and promised to help me as much as she could. She swore if I gave Dad time, he'd come around.

I don't know if she would have convinced Dad to accept me if given that time. Or if she would have left him. She said she was choosing me. That she was leaving him if he couldn't accept me. Except she had an accident a month before my first year finals and I never saw her again.

I'd thought about going home for the summer, but with her and Leo dead, I couldn't face losing Dad all over again. Not when Dad didn't inform me about the funeral until it was already over. So I had no reason not to forget about the girl Nicky knew as I worked my way through school.

No reason to look back at all until I got the news earlier this year that Dad died. Pneumonia of all things. I hung up with his estate lawyer and sobbed on the kitchen floor in my condo, shocked and helpless at my raw grief over someone who wanted nothing to do with me. Bereft at knowing that I am the only member of my family left, and there is no more vague hope of a reconciliation. And pissed as hell at him for finding one final way to make me cry tears he didn't deserve from me.

It wasn't all bad. Not having to answer to my family gave me the freedom to find myself. I started my medical transition as soon as OHIP, Ontario's health plan, kicked in with my change in residency. I got my ID changed as soon as possible, and took a stable, steady job with a bank after graduation. Never looked back.

Except to wonder if Nicky would have accepted me as Ethan. To wonder what might have been. To fantasize about an alternate reality where my parents accepted me the same way his parents still loved him when he came out as gay.

I foolishly thought the fact our parents let Nicky's folks take Leo and me with them to Pride the year Nicky came out meant something. That my family would happily wave the rainbow flag for me.

They always paid lip service to being supportive. Never said a bad word about Nicky being gay in my hearing. Maybe they would have accepted me if I was a lesbian. Or if Leo hadn't died. Now that Dad is dead and gone, I'll never know if he could have had a change of heart.

I'm not sure why I moved back to Vancouver. I guess because Dad left me his house. Not just the house, everything. He didn't bother with a will, so it all came to me as his only next of kin by default. That hurt to hear from his lawyer, that he hadn't changed his mind about me so much as just not cared enough to write me out of his will.

It's strange for something that should feel like a major windfall to hurt so much. I own property now. Real equity. A house, free and clear, in a hot market with no mortgage hanging over my head. Not to mention the cottage in the Okanagan, where my grandparents used to live.

Considering the housing market in Toronto, it would be purest foolish pride to miss out on the chance to own a home. Just because the home in question is brimming with memories that cut like knives is no reason to turn down an unexpected gift.

I just keep most of the doors closed, unwilling to see the perfectly preserved rooms of the kids Leo and I used to be. When I first got the keys, I shoved most of dad's things into the basement. Along with all the boxes he stashed there full of Mom's stuff.

Sure, I could sell the place to a developer who will doubtless tear it down and replace it with some sort of mini mansion. But part of me wants this suburban white picket fence life. And selling my shot at that dream to buy in the GTA would mean either settling for condo living or a cookie cutter home with a several hour commute.

So, I transferred to the Vancouver offices of the bank where I've been working since graduation. Carved out a space for myself among the memories in the old house, and decided to make a go of coming home.

I want to make a life here. Connect with people, instead of just existing like I did in Toronto. And tonight—meeting Nicky again—marks a momentous start to those lofty ambitions of mine.

My plans with Nicky for coffee on Saturday are the most I've had to look forward to on a weekend since I moved here. Not counting the day my boxes arrived from Toronto. That hardly counts since all it did was drive home how little I have to show for my years in Ontario.

It was really a depressing hodgepodge of crap that came off the moving van. At least I had the foresight to get rid of all the things I didn't need when I cleared out the condo I'd been renting north of the city.

Gandalf was glad to have her custom wall mounted perch and the bigger cage she normally lives in back. And I had a relaxing day reassembling her play gym and cycling new toys into her habitat. Once my parrot was settled on top of her newly outfitted cage, I spent the day organizing my books onto shelves and setting up my computer.

Gandalf whistled and bopped along to the music I played while I unpacked the living room and made it livable. I inherited Gandalf from a former roommate who didn't realize that African Grays can outlive their humans and wasn't up for the lifetime commitment. That bird pretty much saved my life. Some days, early after my move to Toronto, she was the only one I had to talk to.

My phone alarm chimes from the tangle of laundry on the floor as I finger comb my hair out of my eyes and apply fresh deodorant.

“You're late.” Gandalf's scratchy voice warns with a hitch at the end and a whistle for good measure. Then she copies the

three rising notes of the ‘you’re running out of time’ theme from *Mario*. As though I missed my phone chirping that same sound at me and the uptempo background music still playing as I fumble for my phone in last night’s pants. I eventually find it and silence the alarm I set for when I need to be leaving the house to be on time to meet Nicky.

I should really change that sound; it never fails to get my adrenaline pumping though, hence I chose it to motivate my chronically late ass out the door.

“I know, Gandalf. Thanks for the reminder.”

I rush to swap out yesterday’s food for a fresh bowl of pellets and refresh her water. Then I offer her a head scratch as I move her from the small sleeping cage in my bedroom out to the larger daytime cage. She watches me as I make sure all three of the locks on her door are secure so she won’t get into anything she shouldn’t while I’m away. My escape skills have nothing on a bored parrot.

“Gandalf is good birds,” she trills, head bobbing and tail feathers fanning out for balance.

“Gandalf is best birds.” I peck a kiss toward her and she mimics the sound.

“Love you.” She lets loose a series of birdie chatter that I’m sure has some meaning.

“Love you, buddy,” I call back to her as I check that I have my keys, wallet, and phone. And my transit card. Won’t get far without that. “Wish me luck on my date.”

Gandalf whistles and then does a one-up mushroom sound. “Bye.” She trills.

“Bye, I’ll be back soon,” I call to her and then I leave, already texting Nicky to let him know I’m running a little behind schedule.

He texts back not to worry because he’s running late too. And I can’t help smiling that some things never change, no matter how long it’s been. We were never the most punctual as kids either.

I can't wait to see him again. The giddy excitement of it simmers in my belly, making me nervous and antsy on the SkyTrain into downtown. I hop a bus from the station. It takes me across a bridge and drops me off a few blocks from the address Nick sent to me for my GPS.

The coffee shop smells divine from the street. Chocolate, sugary sweetness, and coffee. I inhale deeply as I approach, already scanning the area to see if I'm the first to arrive. When I open the door, it chimes and there's Nicky, sitting at a table near the condiments with a view of the door. He stands and waves enthusiastically at me.

"Ethan! You made it. Hi!" Nicky crosses the cafe and envelops me in an enthusiastic embrace. Like we didn't just see each other at the munch. Like we haven't been apart for over a decade.

"Wouldn't have missed it. I still can't believe it's really you." I hug him tight, then step back.

He rubs his palms along my biceps. At first it feels friendly, but on the third stroke he squeezes and there's something flirty about it. Something I'd have given a whole heck of a lot to see in his eyes when we were both teenagers playing games we didn't fully understand in the basement. Desire.

"Same. So, I told you about moving to Toronto and my boring job in finance. And you filled me in on the latest school drama, but you haven't told me about your hubby." I gesture toward the necklace he showed me at the munch. The one that symbolizes his undying commitment to another man. I need to remember that he's not *my* Nicky anymore, no matter how much it feels like we never drifted apart the longer we talk. "Tell me everything."

"Everything, huh?" Nicky asks with a twinkle in his eye. "Let's grab drinks and then I can tell you all about Clark."

He hugs me around the shoulders and I rest my head against him for a second as we peruse the menu board. I step away from his hold when it's our turn to place our orders. It all feels so natural in the most surreal way.

I've missed him. Missed the closeness we used to share. And it's even better because the low thrum of attraction that always pulsed through me at his touch seems to be reciprocated now.

The barista flirts openly with both of us, making me lose any self-consciousness I'm belatedly feeling about showing Nicky affection in public. Even after almost ten years of living stealth, it still sometimes takes me by surprise to realize other people see me as who I am. A gay man.

There's a certain caution that comes with that. An awareness of my surroundings that's different from when I was navigating the world presenting as a girl. A shift in the types of dangers, and the sort of looks to be aware of, even in liberal cities like Toronto and Vancouver.

We place our orders and find a table. Nicky sits next to me, close enough for our knees to bump. He smiles at me when they do.

"So, Clark. I met him at a mosh when I was still new to puppy play. Sucked his dick before I ever even knew his name, if you'd believe it."

I rake my eyes over him in appraisal and snort. "I believe it. You were always a horndog."

"Right?" He laughs and I join him. "So I sucked him off and went about the rest of my night without thinking much about it. But then he kept coming back. And I kept sort of gravitating to him at events. Eventually, he offered me a collar of consideration."

"Did you accept?" I ask when he pauses with a rueful shake of his head.

Nicky chuckles. "Nope. I was still new and clueless about what that meant, that he basically wanted to date me, or like go steady? Something like that. I thought it was basically a marriage proposal. And instead of clarifying, I freaked out on him for trying to claim ownership of me when we were just fooling around and having a good time. He seemed so taken aback by my outrage, it gave me pause. So then I asked what

he meant by the offer. He laughed and explained the misunderstanding, and about a year later, he gave me this.” Nicky tugs on the silver chain with the simple gold band dangling from it. “We got married a little after the collaring. He’s my Daddy and I’m his pup and his boy and I love him.”

“I can totally picture you going off on a Dom for overstepping with you.” I laugh at the mental image of Nicky biting this Clark’s head off over his offer of a collar.

Nicky joins in. His laugh is still as infectious as I recall.

“Right? I still would. Daddy says I’m a handful.”

“I bet you are. He sounds perfect for you, if he took you in hand so easily,” I tease, but his fond words put a pall on my excitement.

My stomach clenches as he talks about the man he loves, and I come to the sinking realization that I don’t stand a chance with him. His love for his Daddy is clear and while I’m happy for him, I’m sad for the future we’ll never have together. We can be friends, but my childish dreams of what we could be aren’t coming true.

Coming to that understanding has my nerves jangling. And just like when I let Nicky tie me to a chair when we were kids, I’ll take anything he’s willing to give me. I’ll settle for any scrap of what I really crave from him. But I need to protect my heart, so I scoot my chair a little away from him. Try to create distance even though that’s the last thing I really want.

“Wait.” Nicky puts his hand over mine. Like he expects me to get up and just leave, and he wants to stop me. “Um, maybe I wasn’t clear before, but we aren’t exclusive. He’s my forever, but he’s not my ‘one and only,’ you know?”

I want to believe him, but I’m just not sure if I can take having my hopes dashed if they turn out to be like the other couples I’ve tried dating. A dysfunctional mess that drags my heart into chaos I have no control over. My nerves prickle at the thought of it. Fears that have nothing to do with Nicky or Clark and everything to do with my dating history drive me to lash out at him.

“So, what? Are you asking me to be a quick, meaningless fuck? For old times’ sake or because you’re bored and lonely while he’s out of town? I can’t do that. Not with you.” I tug my hand free, regretting the move even as I gather up my resolve to leave before I fuel this pointless crush more than I already have.

“No.” Nick releases me, but there’s a pleading in his eyes that I’m powerless to ignore. “What I’m saying is that I’m polyamorous and I date other people, and Daddy is on board with that. He’s my Daddy, and my husband, but he can’t be my *everything*. He’s fine with me finding the things he can’t give me with other people. Whether it’s sex between friends with other pups and their handlers or dating someone who brings out a different energy in me, or anything else I want to explore.”

“Really?” I ask, still trying to wrap my head around it.

“Really,” Nicky looks so earnest, I can’t help believing him. “I tell him as much as he wants to know and my other partners are comfortable sharing. And he’s the one I go home to. So, yeah. I’m not single, but I do date. And I have loved other people, not just sex, romantic love. So far, all those relationships have only lasted for a season, but Daddy and I are both open to something longer term developing.”

I stare at him. It’s not that I’m unaware of polyamory existing. It’s just not what I pictured when he said he had a husband whose collar he wears. The closest I’ve come to that is couples looking for a unicorn to spice up their sex life. Or worse, there was a gay couple I flirted with for a while who thought that bringing in a trans third was the perfect shortcut to getting an instant surrogate. Luckily, Taylor knew them and gave me a heads up when I asked what they thought of me playing with the couple.

The one time I let myself try dating a couple after that debacle, it was a pure and unmitigated disaster. I guess they thought sex with a third might save their floundering relationship. The two of them were always sniping at each other and using their time with me as some sick game of one-upmanship. I’m never doing that again.

But Nicky isn't the sort to play cruel games, so maybe it could be different with him and his husband. From everything he's said, they have a solid relationship. They don't need or want me to fix some perceived problem between them.

"He's really okay with that? You falling in love with another man?"

"Yeah. Sometimes he likes to join in, if it's casual, or my other partners are into a threesome. Other times, he just likes to see me all happy and glowy with new relationship energy. He loves me." Nick shrugs like, of course, his husband has no problem seeing him with someone else.

I waver, because what if he really is saying I can have more with him? That we can try to see what might grow between us? It's a wild idea. We don't really know each other anymore. He isn't the best friend I left behind. He's grown into so much more than that gangly boy.

I've grown too. I've seen firsthand that family doesn't have to mean shared blood or two people in love. It can be so much more than that, and really, that's all I want. A family to call my own.

Just because my first few attempts at polyamory ended poorly is no reason to write it off. Not when trying again might mean getting my heart's desire. Ethan and Clark aren't my exes and I'll never find love if I assume everyone I meet is just like them.

"Are you asking to date me?"

I take a deep breath and reassure myself that I've thought this through before and decided it was worth the risks. This isn't just me bending over backward to have him any way I can get him. Nicky is worth putting my heart on the line. If there is anyone left in the world who I can trust to be careful with it, it's him.

"Yeah. No pressure or anything. We can be friends if dating isn't for you. Or you aren't into polyam or me, or whatever." Nicky's serene acceptance of whatever answer I give him reassures me that I can do this with him.

“Ha, I’ve been into you since my libido switched on when you and Leo convinced me that mud wrestling by the creek would be fun. And I’ve been open to polyam for a while.”

Nicky’s eyes light up and he laughs. “Oh my god, I forgot all about that. In our defense, it *was* fun.”

“Yeah, until you freaked about poking me with your boner and suddenly remembered you had to go home right now to do your homework... during summer break.” I tease him. Nick laughs until tears leak down his cheeks at that.

“Oh my god, you’re still the only—” he licks his lips and cuts himself off with a sharp shake of his head. It’s like he’s trying to dislodge whatever thought he just had. Hilarity banished in an instant; he swallows hard. “I don’t want to say the wrong things. But that wasn’t the only time I was—uh— attracted to you.”

“Are you saying you’re like, bi?” I swallow hard and brace myself for his answer. Please don’t let him say he must like girls since he liked me. My chest feels like it’s in a vise as I wait him out.

Nick shakes his head. “No. But Q says I’m an androphile. Like I’m into masc vibes? Masculine presentations and that whole energy.” He gestures vaguely. “And I guess maybe a part of me saw that you weren’t a girl? Did you always know?”

“Not always. I mean, I knew I *wanted* to be a boy when we were like, eight. When you and Leo got to run around shirtless, but my folks made me put on a top.”

“I remember that. Your mom took us all to get those rash guards to wear, so you wouldn’t be the only one suffering in the sun.”

“Yeah, you and Leo were great. But you couldn’t fix everything, like when you guys could pee in the woods without worrying about getting it all over your pants, or could fit more than your bus pass in your pockets, or never had to deal with a bra and tampons and a million other things. All those minor differences that added up and made me feel all the

injustice of the world. But at the time I figured that was all normal rage against the patriarchy, or I mean maybe not that terminology, but normal girl problems. It was years before I learned what dysphoria was, even though I knew it intimately. I didn't know that I *could* be trans until we went to Pride with your folks. Remember the last year we all went together?" I leave unspoken the 'before Leo died.'

My brother's death still hurts, but the years have mostly dulled my grief. And being around Nick again helps. Knowing that the memory of Leo is still alive in someone other than me, it's cathartic to share these memories with someone who understands.

"Yeah." Nick nods. "You were obsessed with the drag show. I had to tear you away to dance with me." He chuckles as he reminisces about our flailing attempts at dancing when all three of us were drunk off our asses on our first taste of beer. We'd gone out with the fake IDs Leo got for us to use, unwilling to wait the extra few years until we were nineteen.

"Yep. Before we got sloshed. There was a drag king. And that was the first time I saw someone like me."

"Oh." He sobers immediately, inching closer to me.

I mirror the move, so our knees are brushing again.

He murmurs the next part with a hushed sort of revelatory understanding I never thought I'd hear from him. "So. After that, during senior year—when you told Clara and Lacy that you didn't want to room with them on the band trip because 'I'm a man'—that wasn't just a joke or a song quote. Was it?"

I shake my head, remembering how everything that had been simmering inside of me for years had come to a bubbling boil during that conversation at our lunch table. Our friends wanted me to go on the band's optional concert trip with them, but I'd refused. And they kept pressing and pushing and prodding until I couldn't hold in the pressure anymore.

I'd just belted out that repetitive song, "Now You're a Man", telling them the truth in a way I knew they wouldn't take it seriously. And Nicky had laughed along with the rest of

them before telling our other friends to just knock it off about the trip already. He insisted I didn't have to go if I didn't want to.

I *wanted* to go. I just wanted to room with Nick and Leo. Or any of the other boys, really. I wanted to go as myself, and there was no way that would have been possible. In the end, my friends wore down my resolve and the band director all but begged to get enough butts in seats to make the trip happen.

I signed up to stay with Lacy and Clara and then sneaked into my brother and Nick's room with my sleeping bag. Which would have gotten us into epic levels of trouble if we'd gotten caught, but it was still the most fun I'd ever had on a school trip.

Lacy and Clara totally hooked up on that trip, so they weren't about to rat me out. It was worth the risk. And so is taking a chance on dating Nicky.

"You lot didn't let it go either. It should have made me mad that you all mocked me by calling me a man for the rest of the year. Or like, started humming the song when I entered the room, but it just made me so fucking happy. Like my own personal inside joke. Or an affirmation that, yeah, I really could be myself." I swallow hard. "A man."

Nicky takes my hand, turning it palm up to twine our fingers. He gazes into my eyes, like he's about to say something serious. And I watch him with bated breath, hanging on his every word as he quietly, softly... sings that stupid DVDA song to me. I punch him in the shoulder.

"Yeah, yeah. You're so funny."

"Thanks." He gives me a goofy grin, and he's close to me, our foreheads practically touching. He brushes his fingers along my cheek. "I want to kiss you, Ethan."

So I tilt my head to the side and lean toward him. Nick meets me halfway. Our lips pressing together in a culmination of years of fruitless desire.

I'm glad it's only happening now. That the rough scrape of his stubble meets stubble of my own instead of smooth cheeks.

The low groan that escapes me is as masculine as the rest of me. His lips on mine are firm and experienced instead of tentative and sloppy, like my first few kisses were when I finally got to university and could explore my sexuality.

Kissing Nick is a little slice of heaven and I savor every second as his tongue pushes into my mouth, dancing with mine. Nicky's fingers cup the back of my head, holding me gently. He's giving me the hint of restraint he knows I've always craved without making me feel trapped in this outflowing of public affection.

The barista from earlier wolf whistles and it pulls me out of the moment. Nicky breaks the kiss, laughing as he rests his forehead against mine and smiles with our mouths inches apart. He brushes a kiss against my forehead and straightens back up in his chair.

"Woo." He mimes fanning himself. "Next time we should definitely do that some place more private." He winks.

"There should definitely be a next time." I shoot back.

"Come to mine?" Nicky tugs on my hand. And I consider going home. I shouldn't leave Gandalf in her cage all day. But I certainly don't want to bring Nicky back to the childhood home where we used to play bondage games in the basement. Not yet. Too many memories to contend with. But I want everything Nick is offering, so I nod.

"Yeah. That sounds good."

Chapter 4

Nick

I glance over at Ethan and grin. It's so good to see him again. I'd love to just drink in his once familiar profile in the passenger seat of Daddy's car all day long.

"Eyes on the road." Ethan nods toward the dash, but he's grinning too.

Inviting Ethan home for a spur-of-the-moment fuck is probably not my best moment. I don't want to give the impression that I'm using him as a distraction from missing Daddy. But is that what I'm doing? With most of my friends, yeah, that would be exactly it.

Before I ran into Ethan at the munch, I even considered calling a friend for some companionship today. But Ethan is... well, he's different. He's always been different.

From the day my family moved in next to his, we just clicked. He and Leo saw me sitting on the back steps trying to keep out of the movers' way and basically commandeered me into their game of laser space aliens.

There was never any awkwardness with us. The two of them just folded me into their games. Welcomed me into their little world. Like the universe intended for us to meet.

Ethan always felt like a part of me on some level I didn't have words for. He and Leo were my best friends and when we were teenagers, I thought we'd stay that way until the day we died. For Leo, that was true. And now I've got another chance with Ethan.

Another chance that I hope I'm not blowing by bringing him straight home to the house I share with Daddy. Ethan drums his fingers on his thighs, playing out a beat to music I can't hear. It's an old habit.

I used to tease him about it. We joked about how he and Leo might have rhythm, but my skills with the brass made my

tongue extra dextrous. I'm still good with my mouth, though I haven't picked up a horn in years.

"So, what are you playing?" I tease, nodding toward his lap.

"Huh?" Ethan's fingers freeze and he gives a nervous chuckle. "Oh. Sorry. Just the Imperial March."

"Hey!" I feign a wounded expression, but I want to laugh at his audacity. "Is sex with me that ominous?"

"No. Not at all. It's just surreal to be going somewhere to have sex with my high school wet dream, is all." Ethan goes back to drumming.

"Did you dream about me?" I glance at him out of the corner of my eye. Then I squeeze the steering wheel and focus on the road.

"I already told you I was crushing, dude. No digging for compliments." Ethan scolds me.

"Sorry." I flash him a sidelong grin, so he can see that I'm totally not.

"Pshaw." He scoffs. "Don't worry about it. So, are you still horny?"

It takes me a minute to realize he's asking if I still play the trumpet, and I snort at the ancient joke. His appearance might have changed, but—on some level—he's still the same person I knew. The one who could always make me smile, even at my most depressed. "Nope. I tried to convince a couple of my university buddies that we should have a ska band, but they weren't into it."

Ethan chuckles. "Leo and I would have had your back."

"Right," I drawl, and yeah, there's still an ache of loss at the mention of Ethan's brother. But it's also good to remember him, and all the good times and inside jokes the three of us shared. "Because every band needs two drummers."

"You know Leo would have been all over that. Battling drum solos."

We both chuckle. And it is so good to laugh about Leo. To acknowledge that he was important to me, once. I can only imagine how it feels for Ethan to smile at his brother's memory. Cathartic, I hope.

“Double the trouble. That could have been our band name, with you two running the show.”

“Yep. Twice the weird.” Ethan sticks his tongue out at me. “But no, I picked up the bass. Got me all the hot guys on campus. So we just would have needed a guitarist and a singer and we'd have been rock stars.”

“Of course. We'd have been living out the rockstar dream. Sex, drugs, and ska?”

“Sure. That could be our band name.”

“Leo would have loved it.”

“Nah, he'd have called us something NSFW like the Horny Bastards.” We both laugh at that.

“Yeah. He would have loved that too. Classy, he was not.” We ride in silence to the next red light, and then Ethan angles himself toward me. “We should discuss parameters before we get to your place. You said your Daddy is fine with you fucking and dating other people. Do you need to let him know first? Or is there anything that's off limits?”

“I told him I ran into you again. And I'll tell him we had a date. How much detail he gets is down to what you're comfortable with me sharing. As to limits, I only bottom for Daddy. And I use condoms for anal and oral with casual partners. I guess the same applies to other forms of penetration, if you, uh—” I gesture vaguely at his crotch. “—use the front hole? One of my friends does and I'm into it. So just, FYI. I am down for that if you are.”

“Good to know.” Ethan chuckles at my fumbling efforts to not say the wrong thing. “Ah, so that sounds like it's my turn to share. No front hole anymore for me; I had it closed off when I got my meta. Do you know much about lower surgery options for trans guys?”

I shake my head. “No, sorry.”

“It’s fine.” He waves off my apology. “Basically, there’s two major options. Metoidioplasty takes what you’re born with and makes it as similar to a cis dick as possible—just fun-sized. Phalloplasty creates a new dick out of tissue from another part of the body. I wanted to be able to get an erection on my own, so I went with meta. And I had the front hole removed. So I’ve got a small dick and balls with implants. Mine’s not really long enough for penetration, but I’m a big old bottom slut anyway, so that didn’t matter as much to me when I looked at my options.”

“Oh. Cool. Um. Thanks for sharing?”

Ethan laughs. “Dork. I’m just telling you because I am so DTF when we get to your place and I don’t want my junk to derail things if it’s not what you’re expecting.”

“I wasn’t honestly sure what to expect. But I like the sound of playing with your fun-sized junk. And in case it wasn’t clear, I’m into pretty much anyone who has strong masc vibes. And a few femme leaning nonbinary folks. The configuration of their junk doesn’t really matter to me as much as making each other feel good.”

“So,” Ethan licks his lips. “Do you and your Daddy have rainbow duct tape, for old times’ sake?”

“Ha! We aren’t fucking up Daddy’s desk chair. He’d tan my ass for that. But we’ve got restraints if you trust me to tie you up and fuck your brains out.”

“Heck yeah. Traffic lights okay? I enjoy begging to be let go.”

“Fuck, Eth, you’re going to have me all ready to play the trumpet.” I reach between my legs to adjust my hardening dick. It’s a good thing we’re almost home because his teasing is making it hard to focus on the road.

“Good. I want you horny. You can show me if your mouth is really as good as you always claimed.”

I smirk at him. “I gave you a taste of that at the cafe, remember?”

“Yeah, the details are hazy. I’m going to need another sample when we get there. Just to be sure.” Ethan teases, tracing a finger along my thigh, toward my bulge.

Daddy would swat my hand away if I did that to him when he’s driving. He’d tell me to behave and not be a danger to others on the road. I’m not a Daddy. I stare straight ahead and try to ignore my burgeoning arousal.

Dragging in a deep, calming breath, I squeeze the steering wheel some more. Almost there. I take the turn to our road and then I’m pulling into the driveway.

As soon as I put the car into park, Ethan’s mouth is on mine. He pulls me half across the console as we kiss and touch. I consider climbing into his lap to straddle him, but sex will be more comfortable without a gearshift in the way. Or the constraints of the car restricting our movements.

“Come inside.” I pant.

“Shouldn’t I be the one saying that?” Ethan taunts. “Seeing as we’ve established that you’re going to fuck me.”

“Perv.”

I kiss him again. And then I tear myself away from him and we both make a beeline for the door. I fumble with the keys while trying to unlock it. Doesn’t help that Ethan plasters himself against my back, mouthing at my neck. Once we get inside, I tug off my shoes and he follows my lead.

I reach for his shirt, and he tears mine off over my head. We kiss again, stumbling down the hall as we try to remove each other’s clothing while maintaining as much physical contact as possible. My hip bumps against the side table by the door, but it barely registers. We cross the living room, vaguely headed toward the nearest horizontal surface.

I cringe a little at the mess. My fuzzy neon rainbow smiley face blanket drapes over the beige couch and my pup toys litter the carpet. One squeaks when he nearly trips over it, making us both burst out laughing. Good thing Ethan already knows I’m messy; he doesn’t seem to mind the clutter, too intent on touching every part of me.

We fetch up against the couch and I press my naked body over his, down onto the soft blanket covering the cushions. He squirms to align our groins, and I rut against his erection. I kiss him with a passion I usually reserve only for Daddy.

I can't get enough of Ethan's mouth on mine. His tongue caressing mine. His body goes pliant under me. He wraps his legs around me, keeping me pinned against him. His hands massage the planes of my chest, squeezing my pecs, moving around to my shoulders, feeling me up like he wants to memorize every detail of my body. And I do the same to him.

He's so familiar and so different at the same time. The kind eyes, adorable dimples, and unique birthmark I remember, that connection we always shared, paired with a body that turns me the fuck on, more than I can say. I want him, and I have him.

I take my time frothing with him as we make out with a strange combination of frantic need for each other's bodies and leisurely exploration. It's glorious and I could lose myself in him for hours. Spend the entire day edging us both. Teasing, touching, fucking. Except, who am I kidding? I don't have the willpower to deny myself for long.

"God, Nicky, want you to fuck me already." Ethan echoes my thoughts.

"Impatient much?" I laugh.

He smiles up at me with that gorgeous, up for anything smile that used to dare me into, well, pretty much anything we could contrive. I was there for it, by his side. I'm still here for it now.

"Please? I've been waiting to feel your cock inside me for half my life, Nicky." He faux whines.

I almost laugh at that. But it occurs to me that he probably means it, so I hold that back. And I reach for the condoms and lube Daddy keeps in the side table drawer for me. Ethan makes it difficult, pulling me back in for another kiss.

Our lips lock as I fumble, trying to find the supplies we need by touch. I pull away from his fierce kisses, dragging his

lower lip between my teeth, just enough to get his attention. “Stop, I need to grab the condoms.” I grumble.

He relents, gazing up at me as he traces his fingers over my nipples. I find the supplies. Ethan pinches me, and I buck against him. He gives me a smug smile. “Still sensitive there, huh Nicky?”

“God, you’re just the same brat you always were, huh? It’s a good thing I’m not a Daddy, or I’d have you over my knee...”

“Mm, we could pretend you are a Daddy, if you want to spank me, Nicky.” Ethan’s eyes dilate with lust.

I have to suppress another laugh. “Oh, you’d love that, huh? Bet if I shared you with my Daddy, you’d get us both into trouble, just to see what happens, wouldn’t you?”

“Only the good kind of trouble. Would you guys enjoy that?”

“Devious games where we can earn each other punishments? Yeah, if we wanted that, Daddy would be on board. I think.”

“Mhm. You’ll have to introduce us.” Ethan lifts his hips up into me, grinding our erections together again. “But for now, I was promised bondage and sexy as it is to have a big hunk of a man pressing me into the pillows...”

“Too tame for you, Eth?” I grind our dicks together with intent and he arches up into me with a moan. And while he’s distracted by that, I dismount.

Ethan’s moan cuts off with an irritated grunt. I ignore his wordless protest to grab one of my leashes, a cheap nylon one from a pet store. I loop it around his wrists to secure him. Next time I’ll find something better to use, but this will do for now. I tug the slack tight, make sure it’s lying flat against his skin.

Ethan yanks to get loose, so I tighten up the loop and lift his arms up away from his body, taking care not to actually hurt him. Then I resume my position, straddling his hips with his naked torso at my mercy while I hold his restrained arms out of the way.

“Hey! No fair, I wasn’t ready.” Ethan tugs on the leash, but I keep my grip as I cinch the loop tight.

Before I tie off the knot, I make sure he has enough slack not to hurt himself. Then I wind the slack around and between his wrists to keep it in place. I’ve picked up a few tricks over the years, even if I’ve mostly been on the receiving end of the ropes. Still, if Ethan has retained even a fraction of his former skills, I know he’ll have my efforts unraveled in no time. Unless I keep him distracted.

I make quick work of rolling the condom onto my cock and drizzling lube along his dick, and down his taint to his pretty little pucker. His hole winks at me as he clenches from the cool touch of the lube. I lick my lips, eager to be inside that tight ring of muscle. Inside Ethan.

“Uck, that’s cold.” Ethan whines, already working to undo the leash binding him. I grab it and fix my rudimentary knot.

“None of that; you aren’t getting away from me, boy.” I swat his plump ass.

“Mm, yeah, that’s one way to warm up my ass. Friction is better. I’d rather have your dick in me.” Ethan moans low at the impact.

Seems like he’s into that, so I smack his other cheek, enjoying the way his flesh jiggles. Each strike has his hole tensing.

“Fuck. Yes. Rough me up, Nicky. Make me your fucktoy,” he says.

He’s trying to distract me. That much is clear as he works his hands through my half-assed knot. I seize him again, fix the leash so it will hold him. I check that it’s not too tight or pressing where it shouldn’t, and secure it in place. Then I loop his bound wrists over my head, so his forearms press into my shoulders as I lower myself on top of him to bring our lips together.

His struggles turn me on like nothing else as he wriggles under me. I kiss him again, making him go soft and pliant

under me. Well, except his dick, that part of him is anything but soft as it rubs along my answering hardness.

I wasn't sure what fucking him would be like when I invited him home, just that I wanted to learn his body. Every inch of him turns me on. Not the easy familiarity of casual sex between friends. Or the meaningless thrill of a one off with someone new.

Sex is pretty much an all you can eat smorgasbord and I've yet to find much I don't enjoy. But sex with Ethan stands out already.

I won't say that foreplay with a guy I haven't seen in years feels like making love. It's not a bit like what I have with Daddy. But that doesn't make it any less momentous.

My heart is full to bursting with some emotion I'm not ready to name here. And the naked longing in my former best friend's aching familiar eyes is anything but casual. I reach between us to finger him open while we frot with his bound hands looped around my neck, his trust clear in how easily he gives himself to me.

This rekindled connection with him is uncharted territory, and I want to map every inch of it. I work two fingers inside of him and he grunts, shifting up to give me better access, his dick rubbing along the base of mine with the movement.

"Fuck, you're tight." I groan as I fumble for more lube.

"Ung. Yeah, been a minute. Haven't gotten laid since I moved back here." His face becomes guarded with that vaguely apologetic admission.

"Doesn't matter, so long as you're sure you're good with this?" I ask, pausing my probing fingers.

Ethan bucks onto them and nods. "Swear to god, if you aren't fucking me in the next five minutes I'll..."

"You'll what?" I taunt, pulling my fingers out of his ass.

Ethan throws his head back on the cushions and digs his bound hands into my neck, pulling me down on top of him. He laughs despite himself, though.

“Ugh. I’ll probably explode. Or come humping your dick if you keep teasing me. But, for the record, I’m flipping you off right now.”

I chuckle. “Your complaint is noted. Such a bossy greedy bottom boy, huh?”

“Guilty. Hope you don’t mind?”

“Nope, I get it. Should I make you plead for it?” I roll my hips, teasing him with the glide of my cock over his groin. “Make you hump my dick while you beg me to put it where you want it?”

“You should let me the fuck go so I can show you where to stick that thing,” he grumbles, tugging on the leash again and grinding against me.

The move brings our faces closer together, so I kiss him, deep and slow. That has him moving more frantically under me, his arms press hard into my shoulders. I can’t hold out any longer. Daddy is much better at drawing pleasure out than I’ll ever be, but he isn’t here to make us pace ourselves, so I give in to what we both want.

I guide my dick against Ethan’s hole, push in as he bears down and his body swallows my cock like he was made for me. He’s tight enough that I don’t push all the way in right away. I hold still while he adjusts, rocking his hips to take me deeper at his own pace.

“Nngh. That’s good. You’re—fuck! Nicky, you’re inside me.” Ethan gazes at me, and yeah, that’s more of that big emotion I’m not naming shining up at me from his face.

It’s like his heart is as open to me right now as his body. His arms clench tight on the sides of my face, squeezing me even as he lifts and opens his legs to me more. Ethan urges me all the way inside his ass. Inviting me to take everything.

I can’t do this soft, slow lovemaking with our hearts bare. I just can’t. It’s barely been a day since he came back into my life and it’s too soon to feel so intensely about him. So I slam into him. Grab his hips to keep myself from caressing his face with the same tender care he’s looking up at me.

I pound into him like he's nothing but a sexy fling. I jerk his dick and jackhammer into him so that I can get off fast. This is all too much, too soon and the entire whirlwind of it overwhelms me.

Ethan's expression goes from adoring to pleasure drenched. His head tips back, his eyes flutter shut and his lips part. I want to memorize every detail of that orgasmic combination of slack-jawed and tensed, something to savor when he leaves.

I adjust my hand on his junk based on the way he responds to it. Giving the head firm strokes and tugging at the base roughly until his breath catches and he bucks frantically onto my dick, humping into my palm. All the while I keep railing his ass hard until his body shudders and clenches with his orgasm.

"Nicky! God, yes, Nicky," Ethan moans my name, and it reaches into my heart and squeezes.

He's the only one who still calls me by that nickname, and hearing it broken in pleasure is an unexpected rush. It's like the years between us can just melt away and we can pick up our places in each other's lives.

Not just where we left off, but where we might have been if we'd been in contact over the intervening time. If he'd told me his truth and I'd been ready to accept it and take the next steps in his journey by his side. But he didn't tell me. And I wasn't there. I don't want to dwell on what ifs and regrets while I'm getting the best ass of my life, but... fuck.

I tear my focus back to the sex. To the glorious friction as his ass milks my dick. His cock in my hand, perfect and hard and swollen with his arousal.

"Love your pretty little dick. Milk my cock, make me come, Eth," I pant.

Ethan's dick jerks in my grip at the dirty talk, whether in a valiant effort to stay hard or from involuntary muscles making it dance with his pleasure. That's what I focus on. The way his perfect fun-sized cock makes me want to feel him coming

against my tongue. Taste his skin, the way I only ever really taste Daddy.

I'm still buried inside Ethan, seconds away from an orgasm of my own, and I already know I want him again. And again, for as long as this lasts.

"Yes!" Ethan hisses the word.

He rocks to meet my continuing thrusts, keeping the tempo of our bodies moving as one while I fall apart in the face of how big this all feels.

"Fuck, yes, Nicky." Ethan tugs me closer, like he wants to burrow as deep inside my heart as I am currently lodged inside his body.

His voice breaks as he says, "Fuck me. Use me, Nicky."

"Gonna come inside my tight little fucktoy, Eth. Make you milk me dry. You gonna empty my balls for me?"

"Yeah. Do it. Come inside me," Ethan pleads, arching up to meet me, even though he has to be sensitive after coming. "Make me take it."

I can't help myself. I'm already teetering on the edge of my release. When Ethan pulls me down for another scorching kiss, opening to my tongue even as I pound into his ass, it's too much. He moves with me, and I can't hold back a moment longer. I pump into him, filling the condom with a muffled cry of his name that he swallows along with my moans.

I rock against him, chasing the dregs of pleasure until my dick softens, and it's not really pleasure I'm seeking in his body. It's just him as we cling to each other. I press a soft kiss to his neck, just over the birthmark I used to tease him about.

I don't realize he's freed himself until the dull thump of the leash hitting the carpet startles me into noticing his hands running over my back.

"Still have those aspirations of being the next Houdini?" I favor him with a lazy smile.

"Mhm." Ethan smiles back.

“You’ll have to improve your time, if you want to dethrone the legend.” I kiss him, just a gentle peck on the mouth.

“Well, you made a compelling argument for delaying my escape.” Ethan kisses me, still lingering, but our shared orgasms bank the heat of our earlier kisses.

“Guess we’ll need to practice.” I shrug with faux-indifference.

“Oh, yes. A lot of practice. All the time. You up for that?” His eyes sparkle with mirth. I missed the way I smile when he’s around.

“Yes. I’m up for anything you want, Ethan.”

“Anything?” He arches a brow and gives my soft cock a challenging look. “You don’t look very up.” He reaches toward my dick. I’m not sure if he’s planning on prodding it or stroking me back to hardness, but either way I’m too spent for another round.

“Hey!” I shove at his teasing face, and he redirects his hand to capture my wrist.

We both break into laughter as we wrestle naked on top of each other. It’s like and unlike the way we used to be in so many ways. I love being playful and silly with him.

He makes a move that nearly flips me off of him and onto the ground. To keep from falling, I cling tight to him and twist away, rolling us onto our sides with my back pressed firmly into the couch’s backrest.

“Oomph. Stop struggling before we roll onto the floor,” I warn him.

Ethan stills in the circle of my arms and hugs me tight. “Fuck, Nicky, I’ve missed you.”

“Same. I’m glad you’re back in my life,” I tell him, and I mean it with every fiber of my being. “We should do this again.”

“The sex?” Ethan rocks his groin into mine playfully.

“That too. All of it. The date, talking, fucking, the kinky play. Joking around. Everything. I want to date you, Ethan. I know we’ve been reunited for a hot second, but...”

He cuts me off with a kiss. “Yeah. I’ll date you. Do you and your Daddy do boyfriends?”

“Yeah. Or at least, I do. Daddy hasn’t in the past. He’s on board with me having boyfriends. Would you be okay with being with me, regardless of his involvement?”

“I want you however I can have you, Nicky.” Ethan cups my cheek, his bright smile dimming at the reminder that Clark exists. Not a great sign if he struggles with knowing I have other partners, but I don’t really want to see it. I’m already invested in this.

And Ethan tries to hide it, so I don’t call attention to the change in his mood. I can’t control how he feels about sharing me with Daddy. Just give him the choice to accept that I have enough room in my heart and my life for them both if he agrees to see me again.

Besides, Ethan said he is open to polyam, so I’ll take him at his word and hope he can work through his feelings about Clark. If he’s still got reservations after they actually meet, we’ll have to discuss it, but for now I let it lie. I suspect they’ll like each other once they’re properly introduced. Fuck, I hope they like each other.

Ethan gives me one last chaste kiss, then he rolls off the couch and gathers his clothing.

“There’re wipes in the side table.” I gesture. He takes me up on the offer to clean himself up and plucks out a clean wipe for me, which he drapes over my junk.

I take the cue to deal with the used condom, tossing it into a bin that we keep in here for the purpose. That was a compromise because I like to invite friends over and Daddy likes to keep the place tidy. Glancing around the room now, it is far from neat.

I try to see my mess through an outsider’s lens and I wince internally at all my puppy toys scattered on the floor. I left my

humpable fleshlight out so the insides could dry after I washed it last night. At least it's clean?

Basically, I've got some major cleaning to do before Daddy gets home tomorrow. And I should have done it before I invited Ethan home. If only I had the energy to actually follow through on the mile-long mental to-do list that's been accruing since Clark left with his suitcase.

Ugh. I need Daddy back ASAP. And I don't want Ethan to leave me here alone.

While I'm woolgathering and sinking into a depression pit about the mess, Ethan seems to have found all his clothing and is getting dressed.

"I should get home, but text me to schedule another date soon?" Ethan talks into the awkward silence of me staring at him while he gets dressed.

"I will." I tug on my boxer briefs as he buttons his pants and straightens his shirt. "Do you want a ride home?"

"Nah, I'll grab the bus. Bit of a walk will clear my head. Thanks for a great time, Nicky." Ethan rakes his gaze over me, runs a hand through his hair and leans in to claim another kiss.

It seems like neither of us can get enough of kissing each other. I caress his cheek. He pulls back far too soon, long before I've had my fill of him.

"Call me," he says, and his smile is back, but his eyes aren't sparkling like they did before I brought the mood down. And then he leaves.

I stare after him long after he's disappeared from sight.

Chapter 5

Ethan

I think about a lot of things on the way home from hooking up with Nicky. Like, do they still call it a walk of shame if it's in the middle of the day and you're riding the bus? Answer, it feels kind of the same, considering that my briefs are sticky with lube.

I think about how little I care, and how I don't actually feel any shame. Just self-consciousness that I got laid and bolted before I could get properly cleaned up.

Do I smell like sex? Are there rope burns on my wrists where he restrained me? Can everyone around me tell what I did? Do I even care if they could? If it was written above my head in neon lights, I'd still have done it again, given the choice. So no, I don't have any regrets or shame.

Listening to how Nicky talks about his husband, I can't even really regret that he's married to someone else. How can I, when it's obvious that Clark makes him happy?

That's all I ever wanted for him. To be happy and settled. And he is. I just hope I can be a permanent part of his happiness going forward. And I worry we won't fit the way we always used to.

Nicky's living room was cluttered with kinky stuff I can't even name. I might not be vanilla, but I'm nowhere near his levels of kink. The man is a collared submissive to his husband. I'm a dabbler compared to that.

One Dom I experimented with accused me of being a horny tourist to the scene. I don't think that's what I am. But he was right that I'm not into the hard-core vision he had of a twenty-four seven submissive.

I was never going to be someone who bowed to his every whim or let him flog me in front of an audience of strangers. Or whatever. I'm not really into pain play and giving up all my control. Or at least, I wasn't with him.

Bondage seriously turns me on more than any vanilla sex, ever, though. And the idea of Nicky dominating me is hot. The way he talks about his Daddy gives me a funny feeling in the pit of my stomach. Something like lust, but with an edge of discomfort. Like it pushes at the limits of what I'd be willing to do, but it still arouses me in theory.

It's unsettling that I like the idea of watching Nicky with someone else. And maybe doing more than watching. I'm not ready for that. Not yet.

I mostly went to the munch where we met because I hit it off with QutiePie online. They convinced me that even though I'm unsure whether I'm into age play or puppy play, I can still make kinky friends. I agreed with their reasoning that then I'd be more comfortable checking out their local inclusive club.

They were right. And the fact it was so clearly a trans inclusive event made it all the more appealing. I'll be forever grateful that I chose that event. That my life intersected with Nicky's again.

And the sex was... phenomenal. Best ever. If we actually had a band, I'd compose entire albums to the wonder of having Nicky hot and hard inside me. The way our bodies danced to the beat of our hearts. The pure agonizing bliss of letting him carry me over the edge. Of giving myself into his capable hands.

I've loved Nicholas like he's a part of my soul since we were eight years old and swore we'd always be friends over a backyard camp out. And now I know what it's like to have him as a lover. It's as though I found a missing piece of myself I never dreamed I'd get back.

I'm pretty sure I haven't truly been whole these last years without him and Leo—without a family. The part of me that belonged to my brother is gone and buried, only alive in memories, but it's a precious gift to have Nicky back in my life. One I won't squander.

I'm on cloud nine that he's willing to date me. That he noticed me, the real me, and he wanted me the way I've always wanted him. I still can't believe that some part of him

saw me through the roles I had to play. The ‘sister’, ‘daughter’, and ‘girl’ I knew on an instinctive level that I had to perform as to be safe under my parents’ roof.

I don’t have to pretend anymore. And yet somehow I’m still living back under that same roof. Albeit with everything else gone topsy-turvy. The bus drops me off a few blocks from home and I walk the familiar route that’s changed so much since I last lived here. So many of the old homes have been replaced with new builds.

Sometime in the past decade, Dad had the exterior redecorated. Mom’s cheery red front door is now painted a muted forest green to match the trim. It still sticks in the frame, so I have to coax the door open. It still opens onto the same entryway. But the cubby with the four slots for each of us to store our shoes and winter gear is long gone.

I wonder what made Dad junk it. Was it the one empty slot Leo left behind? Mom would have wanted to keep it the way Leo left it, but Dad couldn’t stand to look at anything that reminded him of my brother. Was it when there were two slots empty? After he kicked me out? Did he get tired of Mom sighing over the symbol of everything they lost?

Or did he break when all three gaping sockets of the family he used to have stared emptily out at him? Was Mom’s funeral the final straw that made him rip it off the wall and replace it with a single coat hook? If he hadn’t done it, I would have when I moved in.

I wonder why he stopped there, instead of purging all the other memories along with the cubbies. I wish he had erased every trace of us. Then I wouldn’t have to face them every time I walk through the door to this mausoleum of a house.

I hang my keyring from the hook, then my jacket. Gandalf greets me with a boisterous cacophony of noise, pulling me out of my brooding.

She finishes with a loud whistle. “Gandalf is good birds. Gotta love me.”

“I do love you, you ridiculous bird.” I toe off my shoes and step into the living room to click open the latches on her cage. She puffs up her feathers and struts out onto the edge of the door, then hops onto my shoulder to preen my hair. I reach up to scritch her pin feathers around her beak. Gandalf rubs along my fingers, preens my ear, then dismisses me with a kissy sound.

“Good birds,” she clucks.

“Good birds,” I agree. With her riding on my shoulder, I go to the bathroom to run a cool shower. I need to wash away the evidence of sex with Nicky.

Gandalf flutters to her shower perch and spreads her wings to revel in the spray. She’s such a clown. Her antics make me laugh. I wait until she loses interest in the shower and flaps off to preen on the towel rack before soaping up my body. And I hum to myself as I shower.

Gandalf chimes in with the occasional trill of notes or snatch of song lyrics. She never fails to coax a smile from me. If it weren’t for her, I don’t think I could stand living here with all the memories thick in the air.

When I’m done, Gandalf rides my shoulder back to the living room, then flaps over to one of her perches for a snack. There’s a new message on my phone.

Nicky: Sorry for the mess.

I shake my head at him. Here I was worrying I wouldn’t measure up to his Daddy, and Nicky is worried his mess scared me off.

Ethan: Um, you should be? I just finished scrubbing it all off :P

Nicky: LOL. I’m not at all sorry about *that* mess. I meant the house.

Ethan: Hate to break it to you, Nicky, but I already know all your secrets.

Ethan: I’m under no illusion that you keep a tidy house.

The little dots bounce for a long time. Like he's typing and discarding responses. Is he telling me that his Daddy will punish him for the mess?

Clark is a huge part of his life. I'm going to have to get used to hearing about him. Accept that he's the most important person in Nicky's life now. But this thing I'm doing with him—the flirting and dating and possibly being his boyfriend—is so new, I don't want to think about sharing it.

I'll need to accept Clark as a part of my life in some capacity if I want anything lasting with Nicky. But I don't want to hear about his Daddy or his rules right now. And he must understand that, since the message he finally sends doesn't mention Clark.

Nicky: Busted, huh? Does that mean we can skip past the awkward best behavior phase of dating where I can't fart in front of you?

Ethan: It's a deal. So. Do you still play *WoW*?

Nicky: Oh, *WoW*. No. I haven't played that in years. Too much of a time sink once I get pulled in. If you've got Steam, I can send you a copy of *Day Dreamer* though. Want to play?

Ethan: I've got it already. Eye-On Games had me at playable LGBT+ characters. Can we do co-op remotely?

Nicky: Yeah. Let me just start up a new character? My current account is Leya and I'm playing through with Q.

Ethan: Q, as in QutiePie from the munch?

Nicky: Yeah. We're friends. With occasional benefits.

Ethan: And one of those benefits is gaming together?

Nicky: Nah, that's just a friends thing.

Nicky: The benefits come in when we cyber in the voice chat while we play. :P

I snort. Nicky having cybersex with someone else should make me jealous, right? Except it really doesn't. If anything, it makes me want to see what it's like to do that with him too.

Nicky has no reason to lie to me about how serious he is about Q.

He told me upfront about Clark, so I have to believe that if there was more to his relationship with Q, he'd be honest about that too.

Ethan: Right, I can make a new character. Want to be in-game boyfriends?

Nicky: Duh. Hope you've got a mic so we can voice chat?

Ethan: I do. You'll have to excuse the random bird sounds.

Nicky: Bird sounds?

Nicky: Do you have a pet bird?

Ethan: Yep. She's an African Gray.

Nicky: I demand pics. What's her name? Can she talk?

I smile at his enthusiasm and send him a snapshot of Gandalf sitting on my shoulder.

Ethan: I got her from a roomie who didn't realize that birds are pretty destructive when they're bored and that they can live longer than humans.

Ethan: Her name is Gandalf. And I'll let her show you her vocabulary when we chat ;)

Nicky: ROFLMAO. You named your parrot Gandalf the Gray? You are such an epic nerd. I am literally laughing my ass off.

Ethan: That sounds unpleasant. I'd prefer your ass still attached to you.

Ethan: Bet your Daddy would too.

I add that last part in hopes that facing the reality of our situation will inure me to sharing him. Framing Clark as my partner in appreciating Nicky helps. Like we could be a team, united by the person we love, even if there's never anything more than that between us. When we were best friends, I shared Nicky with Leo. It was always the three of us. This won't be much different from that. Except much more R-rated.

Nicky: Okay, not literally, then. But I **am** laughing. I'm going to go boot up the game. Want to play now?

Ethan: Sure, it's a date.

Nicky: In that case, be ready for me to dirty talk your ear off, babe.

Ethan: You know, I'm getting the impression you learned biology from Mr. Potato Head. My ear, much like your ass, is not detachable.

Ethan: My dick, on the other hand, does come with customizable attachments. ;)

I second-guess the message as soon as I hit send. Is it too soon for brazen talk about my junk? I mean, he had it in his hands not that long ago, but still. And it's not like I'm big on using the extender sheath and other accoutrements I got shortly after surgery.

I wasn't lying when I told him I prefer to bottom. Definitely time for a distraction. I wander into the kitchen for snacks. If we're gaming for a while, I want a drink at least.

I grab an apple from the fridge and slice up half of it for Gandalf before biting into the other half. That and a large tumbler full of homemade iced tea have me ready for a long gaming session.

Gandalf whistles happily at her treat, head bobbing as she makes her way to her treat bowl. I power up my gaming rig in the living room so I can play on the big screen and log into the game before checking my message thread with Nicky. There's an update, so I hit accept for it to download.

Nicky: LMAO. For the record, I enjoyed playing with what you've got in your pants, but attachments are fun.

Nicky: I've got some fun detachable dicks in my toy box.

Nicky: Not that I'm calling your attachments toys. Am I putting my foot in my mouth?

I smile at his message, a warm bubble of happiness filling me at the fact that he cares enough to want to say the right

things. And knows at least enough to realize my junk might be a sensitive topic.

Ethan: Nah, you're good. My dick is what you were jerking earlier.

Ethan: I've got a strap-on and an extender sheath deal to use for topping.

Ethan: And, I mean, some guys prefer different terminology, but I'm cool with calling the non-bio bits toys. Tell me more about your collection?

Nicky: I could show you, next time you visit.

I can just picture his flirty smile as he says that. The way his voice gets soft and raspy when he's playing coy. Like velvet, if it was a sound.

Dang, we got off together not two hours ago, and I'm already thirsty for another taste. I take a sip of my iced tea. The game finishes updating, and the console pops up a restart dialog. I hit accept.

Nicky: Unless you're asking why we have them? Daddy's kind of hung, so sometimes he uses toys with me.

Nicky: Adds variety, and it lets him take it easy on me if I'm sore.

Nicky: And some of them just have fun added features.

I didn't need a mental image of Clark with a coke can monster cock pounding Nicky into oblivion. Or strapping said appendage out of the way to fuck him with something with added bells and whistles. What sort of features is he talking about?

My toy drawer is none too shabby, but the idea of a big burly Daddy Dom strapping on something new to give his boy variety has me drawing a blank. It doesn't seem like something a Dom like the ones I've tried to date would do. They'd have seen a sub asking for that as some kind of slight against their virility or something. Guess I've been dating the wrong people.

I must take too long to reply, because another message from Nicky pings my phone.

Nicky: Sorry. TMI? I don't know how much you want me to mention him?

Ethan: You can talk about your husband to me. We're friends first, right? Friends dish about their bedmates.

The game finally loads and lets me start a new save file. I rush through the character selection screens while I wait for him to respond. It takes a while, so I'm not surprised that he's typed out a long reply.

Nicky: Sure. But I want you to be my boyfriend, too. So, if you aren't comfortable with details about Daddy and my sex life, that's okay.

Nicky: I'm used to most of my friends being part of the scene and seeing me get intimate with him in person.

Nicky: But that doesn't have to be how we operate if it makes you uncomfortable.

Ethan: I don't want you to be walking on eggshells with me, Nicky. You can tell me anything.

I wince, thinking of all the times we said that to each other in the past. Every time the words were on the tip of my tongue to come out to him. I'm a dude. I'm not a girl. Don't call me that.

The words I love you, but in a totally gay way. Words that all turned to ash in my mouth when my dad turned his back and my mom let him. I missed out on having Nicky in my life for years. All because I was too scared to take him at his word when he promised me I could tell him anything.

Now I've got my second chance with the best friend I've ever known. I'm not going to screw it up. I mean it when I say he can tell me anything and I pray he'll be on the same page. Even though he'd be within his rights to throw those words back in my face after the way I left things.

Nicky: I know. This time around, I hope you believe I'll listen to whatever you have to say, too, yeah?

Nicky: And that includes telling me if I'm being a twat who makes you worry that I'm not safe to share huge parts of yourself with, okay?

I breathe out a sigh of relief. He isn't holding a grudge or throwing the past in my face. If anything, he's saying he gets where I was coming from and shouldering a portion of the blame for what went wrong in our friendship. That's not something I've had before.

Ethan: Yeah. I'll tell you. Ready to play? I've got Discord up for audio.

Nicky: Yep. Send me your handles so I can invite you?

I text him my usernames, and soon we're playing through the first intro level with the familiar sounds of Nicky trash-talking the computer over my headset. It's been ages since we've done this.

The last time, I sat huddled under the blankets in my lonely little dorm room. We were both grieving the empty spot in our raid party where Leo should have been. It hurt too much to know I'd never have another hug from my brother, and I'd never have Nicky the way I wanted him. That was when I started to pull away from him, if I'm honest with myself. It wasn't entirely my dad's reaction that ruined things.

Gaming together is like a healing balm over those old wounds. Nicky's ridiculous monster voices as he narrates our enemies' deaths have a goofy grin plastered onto my face. I smile so much it makes my cheeks ache.

Nicky can always make me laugh. He has the baddies beg for our mercy with sob stories he fabricates on the spot, just like old times. I love that about him.

He's grown up into an adult with a career and a husband and kinky friends with benefits. He's changed in a million tiny ways that add up to who he's become in the decade since we last played video games together. But in some ways, he's still the same best friend I fell in love with.

The boy I still love and can't wait to get to know all over again. I just hope his husband is as wonderful as he is, and that

there can be room in their family for me as more than a friend
Nicky fucks sometimes.

Chapter 6

Clark

Niko gloms onto me in the doorway as soon as I get home late Sunday afternoon. I leave my bag tucked against the wall to deal with later and hold him steady. Niko yips as he jumps up on me, aggressively showing his affection. I'll have to talk to him about greeting me at the door wearing nothing but a jock and his play collar, but that can wait.

"Hello to you, too, puppy!" I don't even try to sound stern with him when on the inside, I'm just as excited to see him as he is acting, tail plug wagging behind him. Instead of correcting the overeager greeting, I hug him close to my body and savor his unbridled joy.

I have to shuffle awkwardly around to toe the door shut since my hands are full of excited, wriggly human puppy. His tongue lathes over my cheek and across my lips as he unconsciously humps into my hip. My pup wriggles with joy at my earlier than expected arrival.

He must have been playing in his pupspace when I tried to call him from the airport about getting a slightly earlier flight. That's not unusual, especially when he's in a funk or stressed, both of which are true with everything he's been dealing with at work and my ill-timed absence.

Niko seems happy about the surprise at any rate.

"Yes, I missed you too. Were you a good boy for Daddy while I was gone?"

I grab his face between my hands to still his frantic licking. Which basically just concentrates his efforts over my mouth as he makes these little excited puppy yips at me. He gives me an agreeable arrooo in answer to my question. He hasn't stopped humping me and his erection is nudging insistently against my belly now, his forearms draped over my shoulders.

I get where he's coming from; I've missed him this week. More than usual, since I could tell from our calls that he was

more upset about the drama in his classroom than he was trying to let on. Trying not to worry me while I was too far away to do much more than let him vent to me.

It's times like that when I wish he had more close friends to confide in. There are a few other pups, but most of them are people he has casual sex with. Not the sort of closeness where he can vent about his day while they hold him and help him face his emotions instead of shutting down. He doesn't let them see the way he gets when something triggers his depression and it gets out of control.

"I've missed you too, Niko." I pin him in place to give him a proper kiss. He stills enough to let me. "Can you settle or do you need your fucktoy?" I ask him when he still doesn't stop humping me.

I used to think the uptick in his libido meant he was better. But I've since figured out that, as paradoxical as it seems, he gets more horny when he's depressed. And then more irritable and depressed since he lacks the motivation to do anything about it.

Niko whines. I swat his ass and he drops to all fours and nudges me down the hall. Niko pushes his forehead against my ass and paws at the back of my knee.

"Hey, now! Behave, pup!" I reprimand him.

Niko slinks toward the living room with his tail tucked and head low. Damn it, I hate when he lays on the guilt like that. He looks like a scolded puppy as he goes to the humpable silicone toy I got him for when he's frisky in his pupspace. Which is often.

"You want to mount your toy, Niko?" I ask. Niko laps at the opening. "Need Daddy to slick that wet little hole up for you, boy?"

Niko whines and hits me with the pleading eyes. I grab the lube out of the side table drawer and drizzle it over the opening while he noses at my fingers. He licks the hole again as I push lube inside with two fingers, then whines and paws at his mouth at the taste of the lube.

I chuckle at the silly boy. Niko gives me a reproachful look and tries to lick into my mouth, sharing the unpleasant flavor. I nudge his face away.

“Hey! You know it doesn’t taste good, boy. Let me make it better.” I reach around my pup to jerk his hard cock until he is humping into my fist. He whines for a release I have no intention of giving him anytime soon.

“No coming until Daddy is buried balls deep inside your tight little ass, boy. You prepped for me, didn’t you? You knew Daddy was coming home today, so I better find my hole nice and ready for me. Is it?”

Niko barks. A wishy-washy in between sound that tells me he was probably putting it off for later. Which makes sense if he was as down as he seemed when we last spoke. Still, he’s wearing his plug, so he must’ve done at least a perfunctory prep job. Good enough for now. I’m not about to wait to get inside him when we’re both eager for it.

I grab a condom for ease of cleanup afterward. He’s mine, and he needs to feel it as much as I need to claim him after our time apart.

“Mount your toy, boy. Daddy wants to see you fuck your cock into it.” I take my hand away, leaving his jock tucked behind his balls. He turns to nose at my palm. “Fuck your toy hole, stud puppy,” I insist.

Niko does as he’s told. The wet squelch of the lube melds with his shuddery moan of pleasure and he sinks into the toy. It’s low to the ground, so he has to lower himself, basically fucking into the floor, knees spread wide. I enjoy watching him debase himself like that. His skin flushed with pleasure. His voice coming out in grunts and needy whines.

I open my pants and stroke myself from base to tip as I watch him.

“Oh yeah, puppy. Daddy likes that. Show me how good it is,” I demand.

Niko fucks into the toy harder with my encouragement. It’s hot having him respond to my voice. When I moan as I

squeeze the head of my cock, he rocks against the toy with more force, responding beautifully to my sounds of pleasure.

His frantic, hard thrusts are going to tip him over the edge before I'm ready for that to happen if he keeps it up.

“Slowly, boy. Take your time fucking it real good.”

Niko obeys, slowing down and readjusting his upper body to get a better angle. I pace around him, observing my pup from every angle, drinking in the sight of him as he lays there obediently pleasuring himself.

He's mine, all mine, no matter how he's fucking or getting fucked or who he does it with. I love watching him like this, face screwed up as he fights back his orgasm for me. He slows a little too much for my taste.

“Move your hips, boy, stroke every inch of yourself inside that tight hole. So good, huh? You want to come for me, don't you? No holding back.” I instruct him and Niko snaps his hips forward and then rocks back, finding a new rhythm.

His knees slip on the rug in a way that I know will chafe before long. Pup should have worn his knee pads; he'll feel that reminder for a while by the time I'm done with him.

Once I've taken in my fill of watching my puppy's ass flex while he fucks his hump toy, I kneel behind him and pluck out his plug tail. I press the head of my dick between his cheeks and Niko bucks back toward me. I give his ass a sharp crack with my palm and he yelps as he thrusts forward, away from the sting of pain.

“Keep fucking your toy. Daddy decides when you're ready for my dick, not you.”

Niko gives me a huff of a bark and goes back to fucking his toy while I tease him with my cock pressed against his hole. I trace along his crack and around his rim. When he stops trying to get me where he wants me with every thrust, I line up and press inside of him.

Niko groans at being filled up, and then he bucks back hard, impaling himself on my dick. I grip the nape of his neck to pin him in place. I pound into him, driving his dick into his toy

and fucking him with all the pent up longing of our days apart. All the frustration of not being able to hold him, or help him get out of his head, pours into a hard, merciless fuck.

I want him to feel me for days. We both need this physical reminder that we belong like this, bodies merging. I want him. So I take him. And Niko lets me. He gasps out little sounds of pleasure and lifts into my thrusts, as much as he can with my weight pinning him against the ground and his toy.

“Ungh, Daddy. Yes! Fuck me.” He gasps.

My sweet Nicholas. Not the horny stud puppy, my husband, rocking back to take me as deep as I can get. It’s as though he’s trying to get me so deep inside of him we’ll never truly be parted again. Sometimes it seems like that’s how close we are when we make love. As if we’re entangled on some quantum level and he’s a part of my soul. Oh, how I needed this. His body is so responsive to mine, his need raw in his voice.

“You’ve got until I count to five to come for me, boy,” I growl the command, and then I count. “One.”

Nicholas rocks between me and the toy.

“Can’t. Need you, Daddy. Need you to make me yours.” He bucks back, taking me balls deep.

Then he reaches back toward me, and I grip his hand. Nicholas tugs my hand toward his neck, pulling me forward to drape over his back. He shivers as I cover his body with mine. Me, still fully clothed in contrast to his nakedness, my weight pressing him into the carpet, and I know what he’s asking for.

“Please, Daddy. Need to feel you.” He curls his fingers over mine, pressing.

“Two.” I thrust in harder, shift my grip to gently constrict blood flow at the sides of his throat. It’s something we do sparingly, but I know how much my boy loves this. Loves letting me control him in this most primal of ways.

Nicholas moans and I savor the vibrations against my hand. His breathing hitches against my palm as the effects of my carefully constricting hold build. I fuck in hard. “Three.”

“More, Daddy,” he chokes out in a strained voice.

I tighten my grip a fraction more. Niko gasps, bucks more violently between me and the toy.

“Four.”

Nicholas grunts, the sounds of our flesh slapping together with every drive into his body is music to my ears. He feels so good around me. My entire world is spread out under me, speared on my cock.

The beat of his heart pulses against my fingers as he gives me everything. His trust, his body, the very oxygen his brain needs to function. All of it surrendered to my hands.

Nothing compares to the high of taking him soaring to these heights. There isn't a thing I'd deny him in that moment as he offers his everything to me. I love him more than I thought I could ever love anyone.

“Five. Now or not tonight,” I growl near his ear, giving him another hard thrust in emphasis.

I'm so close I can barely hold back my orgasm until he clenches convulsively around my dick. He milks me for all he's worth. Releasing my careful hold on his neck, I leave my hand resting against his throat so he can feel me as I pound out my release. I press my lips to his nape, kissing and claiming and loving him even as I fill the condom buried deep inside of him.

Rocking into him a few more times, I chase the last dregs of pleasure before it becomes too much and I have to pull out. I kiss his bare, sweaty shoulder and deal with the condom, reaching into the drawer where we keep our supplies for a wipe to clean up.

First, I take care of my dick, zipping up before turning to my well-fucked boy. The straps of his jock frame his gorgeous ass, still presented for me to use as I see fit. Niko waits where he is for me to ease his dick out of his toy and swab his spent cock clean. I'm tempted to force another orgasm out of him while he's too sensitive to enjoy it, but I know he's been

having a rough week. So I refrain from needlessly tormenting the boy.

“Daddy missed your pretty little cock, boy.” I tuck his limp dick away inside his jock with a chaste kiss to its crown.

Nicholas squirms upright and reaches for me, both arms upraised in a plaintive gesture. I gather him into my arms and maneuver us onto the couch with him splayed across my lap, straddling me, face nuzzled into my shoulder. His scruffy stubble chafes my skin when he rubs against me. “You saw it on video, Daddy.”

“I did. It’s not the same as having you at my mercy.” I stroke his back, reveling in having my boy back in my arms where he belongs.

“Mm. Shoulda been my sugar daddy and took me with you.” Nicholas mouths at my throat.

“You love your job,” I remind him, nudging his mouth away before he marks me. Cheeky boy revels in leaving hickies if I let him.

Nicholas shrugs. “Love you more.”

“Are things really that bad with this cheating situation?” I check, because I suspect he might have downplayed just how much the ordeal is screwing with his head, judging from the depression nest in our living room.

Nicholas buries his face in my neck again, his scruff prickling over my clean-shaven skin. “They stole from me and plagiarized the entire essay section of the test.”

“I know, baby, you told me.” I rub his back. “Can you tell me where you’re at right now?”

“Not good. Principal Bragley didn’t have my back.” He sits up and chews on his lip, hard enough to worry me that he might draw blood. “It’s like the kids betrayed me and my administrators hung me out to dry. Like they all turned on me and the admin just abandoned me when I needed them?”

“I’m sorry, Nicholas.” I squeeze him tight. “You know Daddy is here for you and I’ll always be in your corner,

right?”

“I know.” Nicholas snuggles into my arms, nuzzling his nose close to my armpit and inhaling me. God, I love that my scent comforts him. And I love it even more when he... not the time to get turned on when he needs comfort. I reach between us to adjust my dick.

“Daddy?” His sweet plaintive voice helps rein in my libido at the mental image of my boy licking my pits while he rides my dick right here on the couch.

“Yeah?” I clear my throat and adjust how he’s sitting on me. He smirks and shifts, as though he’s trying to help, but really, he’s rubbing his ass over my bulge in a blatant tease.

“Thanks for that. I needed a good hard fuck.”

“My pleasure, darling boy. What do you need from Daddy now?”

“Snuggles and a movie? And pizza with soda?”

“Make it veggie lover’s pizza and clear soda, and you’ve got yourself a deal, puppy. Daddy missed you.” I lift my hips to fish my phone out of my pocket.

“Mhm. Missed you so much, Daddy,” Nicholas murmurs, then he rests his ear against my chest as I put in our usual pizza order. It’s good to be home.

I set the phone on the side table and return my focus to my boy. “Were you lonely all weekend? Or did you have friends to occupy you?”

“Told you, I went to the munch and saw people. And I had a coffee date yesterday. With Ethan.” He sounds nervous, like he’s invested in my response.

“Decaf?” I ask, because he knows he needs to keep his caffeine intake consistent.

“Yes, Daddy.”

“Good boy,” I praise him absently as I try to place the unfamiliar name. That’s not one of his usual friends from Adventures or our puppy play group.

I'd expected him to call up his pup friend, Q, since the pair of them often share no strings stress relief through orgasms. He was antsy and all over the place during our video chat after the munch, so I knew he'd need to find something to distract him. The name clicks into place.

"Ethan, the old friend you reconnected with? How did that go?" I ask, rubbing his back because we both need to touch and ground ourselves in the other's presence tonight.

"Yeah." Nicholas takes a deep breath and rubs at his thighs. "It was good. Really good. I really like him, Daddy."

I narrow my eyes at Nicholas. "Did he explain why he ghosted you?"

That matters. Ethan hurt him deeply when he left, and I don't want to watch a repeat unfold if I can help it. I never expected Nicholas to renew his friendship with the long-lost best friend whose inside jokes he still laughs at sometimes when something reminds him of the past. Those secret smiles that melt into melancholy always make me protective of my boy.

"His folks paid his phone bill, so it's possible he really lost my number when his dad cut him off." Nicholas shrugs.

"Hm." I narrow my eyes skeptically. He's young enough that the internet was a thing. They could have stayed in touch unless Ethan deliberately cut ties.

Maybe I'm being too harsh. As many times as I've watched indulgently while my boy falls in and out of lust with someone else, I've never faced watching him head-over-heels in love with another person. And he always loved Ethan. As a friend, sure, but it was the sort of love that didn't go away with time and distance. I imagine that rekindling their friendship will only make those emotions grow.

Nicholas nudges me. "Don't 'hm' me, Daddy. He was in a tough spot."

"Okay," I agree; he knows the situation better than I do.

The way he's always talked about Ethan—though he obviously used the man's deadname before he knew it had

changed—I sometimes tease him that Ethan was the one that got away. He always brushed it off with flustered hand-waving. And now... he wants to date the only other person I've really had to share his heart of hearts with.

It wasn't hard to share that piece of him when Ethan was an abstract part of his past. A memory Nicholas was never romantically involved with. A memory who came with almost as much grief as joy.

It's hard for me to face the fact that, for the first time, I'm uncomfortable with him dating someone. I thought I'd accepted that he might fall for someone else. Not instead of me. As well as me.

I just never thought it would be someone who has more history with him than me. Someone with a longer standing claim on his heart. Someone who hurt him deeply and left scars, however unintentionally.

“Either way, he had a lot going on.” Nicholas continues the conversation.

He's right. And intellectually, I want to love Ethan as much as he does. For no other reason than that Nicholas has loved Ethan for longer than I've known him, but I'm not sure I can forgive a man I've never met for the pain his leaving put my boy through. He was so wary of trusting me to stick around at first.

I've long since concluded that a huge factor in his reticence had to be losing Ethan right after Leo died. Two of the most important people in his young life were gone in the blink of an eye. Heck, that fear of abandonment is probably a big part of why he hates my work trips so much.

“When I asked, he told me the reason he never came out to me.” Nicholas ducks his head against my chest.

I hold him tighter, sensing that the reason probably isn't something he's proud of. His anxiety makes me resent Ethan that much more. It's not fair, but emotions rarely are.

“What?” I ask.

“I was an asshole.” Nicholas takes a deep breath and stares at his cuticles like they contain the key to unlocking the secrets of the universe. I suppress the urge to correct him for the negative self-talk. We’ll get to that once he’s unburdened himself. Still, I’m bristling as I bite back my retort that he’s nothing of the sort.

“No, I know your rules, but I was an asshole. Not in a vindictive way. I just never questioned the sort of jokes that made him uncomfortable. He wasn’t sure if he could trust me and when he tested the waters, I didn’t get it. I laughed off his hints that he wasn’t a girl. Along with all our other friends. Leo didn’t; I think he was the only one who got that it wasn’t really a joke? Hard to say for sure, a decade after the fact, but he was always more observant than me. I haven’t asked if Ethan ever told his brother. But in retrospect, I suspect Leo might’ve guessed, anyway. And I was a shit best friend not to show him he could tell me anything. To give him any reason to doubt that I had his back, no matter what. And part of me thinks he was right not to tell me. That I might not have responded the right way.”

“I don’t think you’re giving yourself enough credit, Nicholas.” I comfort him, because I know who he was when I met him and there’s never been a mean bone in his body. He always strives to be a better ally to other parts of the queer community in the years we’ve been together. “If Ethan had come out to you back then, I don’t doubt for a second that you’d have been his fiercest ally. I know you didn’t always get why certain jokes can be harmful, but you changed when you learned better. You still change when you learn better.”

“Yeah. I changed, because I didn’t want to *keep on* being an asshole. Duh.” Nicholas rolls his eyes. I kiss his temple.

“Not everyone does that, pup. I’m sure this Ethan must have seen that he can trust you, if he agreed to a date?”

“Yeah. He agreed to, um, be my boyfriend.”

Well. That’s fast, even for the sort of whirlwind fling Nicholas has been known for when he’s desperate for all the

new relationship buzz to drown out his depression. Or riding the high of his mania. “Boyfriend?”

“Well. We didn’t *officially* agree to be boyfriends yet. But I want him to be. I think. I don’t know. You know how sometimes you meet someone and you hit it off, and it seems like you’ve known them forever?” He fiddles with his day collar, sliding the wedding band along the chain.

“Yeah.” I smile softly at him and he returns it with a smile that’s overshadowed by the worry in his eyes. That’s how it felt when I finally convinced him to give me a chance at a vanilla date. After we enjoyed dozens of evenings together in casual play at puppy moshes, and other kink events.

Nicholas sucked me off before I even properly knew his name. And I shared the best first kiss of my life with him the better part of a year later. It was after we lost track of time talking after our meal until the restaurant staff gently reminded us they were closing soon. I left a big tip for their trouble, and that’s still the best date of my life. The day I knew I was going to collar this boy I love.

“Well, that’s what it was always like with Ethan and Leo. We just fit from day one. And when he walked into the munch last week, it was like that same feeling all over again. Like he’d clicked back into place and a part of me I didn’t realize had been missing was just, back.”

“Did you always love him?” I ask, because it’s clear that his emotions run deep.

“Yeah.” He nods, and Nicholas admitting it so freely surprises me. “I just thought it was sibling love. Platonic. I mean, sometimes when we roughoused or when Ethan let me tie him up, I got hard... but I figured it was just about the physicality or the power trip.”

That’s promising, at least. I love seeing how Nicholas takes charge with some of the guys he dates, letting out his dominant stripe. The taunting, teasing side of him, the boy proud to show off and share his Daddy when I join him with his dates, or for casual sex. I love to see all the different sides of him that being with other people brings out in him.

When it's just us, he's my submissive, my sweet boy and my horny pup. My loving husband. And I love watching him rambunctious and silly with his friend, Q. Together, the two of them are uninhibited. Two peas in a pod, they're both liable to leap before they look, confident that Q's Mommy and I are always going to be there to catch them. That unbridled mischief is a delight. Every aspect of him is precious and wonderful and I'd never want to stifle any part of him.

Even when I suspect some of the romantic choices he makes are more about chasing endorphins than the person he's dating. And even when most of his boyfriends are short-lived affairs and he's happier bringing in friends who he fucks. Those are the people who stick around once the initial thrill of seeing someone new wears off. I'm not sure where a friend he loves is going to fit into the equation.

"Ah, so he's the friend you experimented with topping before you got into the scene?" I ask, giving him a chance to tell me more. I can't decide for him if trusting Ethan again is worth the risk, and questioning it further is only going to upset us both.

"Yeah."

"You neglected to mention it was platonic fooling around when you told me you'd played with ropes before."

"Didn't seem relevant." He shrugs, flashing me his cheekiest grin.

"Okay. Well, I'm glad you reconnected. If you're as serious about him as you seem, I'd like to meet him soon." That's absolutely true. I enjoy meeting Nicholas's dates. I like to be able to picture them when he spins out fantasies for the three of us. But this time I have reservations. This time, he's already more than infatuated with new love.

"Yes, please. I'll invite him over for a dinner date one night this week. Um. Is it still cool to have him come over if he's not ready to meet you yet?"

"If he says no to meeting me, I can be busy for a few hours to give you guys some time alone." Part of me hopes Ethan

won't be ready. I'm not entirely sure I'm ready to welcome him into our lives. "It might be for the best to ease into this. I want to meet him; I can tell you are completely smitten. But I don't know if I'm ready for a date night with the boy who broke your heart."

A delay would give me more time to get used to the idea. Time to forgive him for the hurt he caused Nicholas when he left. I just hope time is enough for me to warm to the other man.

Then again, if he's amazing enough to have my Nicholas lovestruck even after a decade apart, I might be hard-pressed to hold a grudge. I doubt I can help but admire anyone who lights my boy up the way Nicholas's stories about their childhood exploits animate him.

"That's fair. For the record, I don't blame him for what happened when we were teenagers, and I hope you won't either. If I have him over, maybe I can introduce you two before you head out? Take it slow, but at least give you both a face to put to my stories?"

"That sounds good. Let me know what you two decide." I step closer to him. Not holding the past against Ethan is easier said than done when that's all I really know about him, but for Nicholas, I'll try.

"Thank you, Daddy." He tips up his chin for a kiss and I claim his lips.

That's enough serious talk for tonight. Later, I'll give him his lines to write for calling my boy names and remind him he has to tidy the living room before we can have more puppy time. For now, we just need to be together. We kiss and cuddle until the food arrives.

Chapter 7

Ethan

“So, will you?” Nicky asks, voice so light and full of hope as we plow through bad guys in-game that I take a minute to recall the question. Will I go to his place for dinner with his Daddy? Will I go on a date with him and his husband?

“I...” I swallow hard. I want to tell him yes. There’s not much I’d rather do than spend time with him. But the idea of sitting across from him while he’s twined around his husband and I’m the awkward third wheel is too much for me to get my head around.

I can’t watch him flirt with the love of his life while they size me up as a fun diversion for the night. I can’t. And I can’t seem to find the words to tell him that properly. The right words to say I’m scared meeting Clark will prove our arrangement is too good to be true.

“It’s okay,” Nicky says, voice soft with understanding. He saves me from having to articulate my racing worries. “You never have to agree to anything you aren’t comfortable with, Eth. Would you want to come over for dinner with just me? Daddy can make plans with friends and I can introduce you two in passing, if you’re more comfortable with that? Or not at all, if you aren’t ready.”

I can tell this is important to him, and really, it might be easier to get used to the idea of Clark if he’s more than a vague concept. I can handle meeting the man for a few minutes.

“Uh, an introduction before he goes out is okay. I’m not sure about more for now. Sorry. I just don’t want to be some sort of, I dunno, game you guys play?”

“You aren’t!”

“Yeah. Okay.”

“No, I mean, I really like you, Ethan. You aren’t a bedroom game for me.”

“Yeah. I believe you. And your Daddy sounds really great for you. He takes good care of you, right?”

“The best. Even if he replaced all my soda with caffeine-free and the Cheezies with kale puffs as soon as he got home last week.”

“Kale puffs?” I repeat, unsure if I heard him properly.

“Or some sort of low-sodium puffed pea alternative veggie snack stuff,” Nicky whines. “They’re not anything like Cheezies.”

“I’m sorry? Is that, uh, out of line for you guys or...?” I ask, genuinely unsure if his husband is being a controlling ass or if the food restrictions are something they agreed to. A part of their dynamic that extends outside the bedroom.

“Tch, don’t be sorry. I’m just being whiny. It’s for my health. For real. I asked him to help with my dietary stuff because if I don’t keep my salt and caffeine intake consistent, it screws with my medication. His rules are all tailored for me, like one hundred percent.”

“Oh.” I’m tempted to ask which medication, but I know better than to pry into his personal information. We aren’t there yet. I gave up the right to demand things like that from him when I walked out of his life, no matter how much I’ve regretted that choice. “I’m glad you have him.”

Even if I am jealous of his Daddy’s place at his side. I know Clark is the one holding him when we stay up late gaming together. The one he pauses the game to go eat with and logs off to get into bed with.

I shouldn’t be jealous. We’ve been dating for all of a week now, and we’ve only fucked in person the one time so far. Despite that, I’ve gotten off with his voice in my ears, cajoling me on almost every night this week. We even did a video chat last night. I got to watch him jizz to a fantasy of pinning me down and fucking me, which was heady as fuck.

For all my doubts about the in person date he is inviting me on, I’m eager to see him again. Eager for him to act out the fantasies we’ve described to each other over our voice chats.

I'm falling for him all over again, hopelessly head-over-heels for my first crush.

"Um, I suppose on that note, if we're going to be a thing, you should know that I have bipolar disorder."

"Oh?" I ask, heart in my throat. Not at the disclosure, but at the fact that he's trusting me with something so deeply personal. I know this can't be easy for him to discuss, and his trust warms me to my toes.

"Yeah, I got diagnosed the summer after we lost touch. I might have slightly gone off the deep end after my first year university finals. I was staying up late to cram for exams and then I went out drinking with some friends to celebrate the end of term and... yeah, things spiraled from there. Turns out I didn't have a firm grip on reality until a few weeks later. When I ended up in a psych ward after spouting a bunch of just bonkers stuff, really."

"I'm sorry I wasn't around to help you," I say.

"Eh, I doubt I'd have listened. I don't when I'm having a manic episode. I think I promised to get a group of perfect strangers an audience with the queen or something. Really believed I could too. Overdrew my credit card so hard buying plane tickets—among other things—that my folks had to help me out of the financial hole I'd dug. In exchange, they made me move home for the fall semester and they had to sign off on any purchases over twenty bucks for a while there. It was messy, but it could have been worse. I found an awesome psychiatrist who got me on meds that helped, and I got through school and everything. Like, I still have the occasional episode, mostly depressive stints, but overall, I'm stable and everything. Daddy's rules and my meds, and my psychiatrist all help."

"I'm glad you have the supports you need, Nicky. If you need anything from me to help, just let me know, ok?"

"Yeah. I guess the biggest thing is to mention if you notice stuff that's off with me. Like, any major changes. Sometimes I don't always notice I'm manic until it's out of control. But,

like I said, I'm stable on my meds and Daddy is great about helping me to stay that way. I just wanted you to know."

"Thanks for telling me."

"Yeah. Of course. So, you'll be here tomorrow at seven? You said you just want to meet him in passing before our date, right?"

"Yeah, Nicky, tomorrow at seven." I'm grinning despite my trepidation about meeting Clark. It will be okay. The kind of person who buys Nicky kale puffs to take care of him can't be a bad guy.

"Cool. I'm going to fuck your brains out, so come prepped." Nicky's voice is a velvety purr as he drops that promise.

I shiver deliciously in anticipation of tomorrow night. The mental image of his mischievous grin lingers in my mind's eye. Oh, how I want him. What I wouldn't give to have him here right now. To hold him and reassure him that what he told me doesn't change how I see him. I still adore him. I might not be able to show him with a hug over voice chat, but I can show him that nothing has changed in other ways.

"Sure thing, Nicky. Can't wait. Now, let's go see if we can find that mutant antelope drop we need for your weapon upgrade, yeah?"

"Sounds like a plan."

We play on, as though he didn't just open up to me in a huge way after I was too chickenshit to be open to an entire evening with Clark. The other man. I can't believe I agreed to meet Nicky's husband tomorrow. Even just an introduction as I arrive and he leaves. I hope it goes well. At least I don't have long to angst about it.

It's daunting to walk back up to Nicky's place, knowing his husband is there with him this time. In a few seconds, that door is going to open and I'll meet the man my Nicky loves. I swallow hard at the thought.

Clark isn't some random stranger, though. He's the soothing voice in the background of our video chats. He's the man Nicky calls Daddy so sweetly. The one I've heard Nicky cajoling into ordering takeout on his nights to cook. Or asking for five more minutes to finish a mission with me in our game.

In some ways, meeting Clark reminds me of meeting the parents. He's Nicky's family. Someone who loves Nicky as much as I do, if in a different way. And it is different. I have no desire to give Nicky rules and boundaries.

That would exhaust me. It isn't who we've ever been to each other. Sure, I'll remind him to get a drink, or tell him to lay off the snacks if he needs it, but I'm not the sort to make him obey rules. I'm more the guy to curl up beside him in his blanket burrito when he's had a bad day and game with him until he feels better.

I just hope Clark likes me, because I can't imagine continuing to date Nicky if his Daddy hates me. And I want to be with Nicky long-term. That's a given. Even if the sex fizzles, I still want to be part of his life. I never want to go back to being someone he used to know.

Nerves getting the better of me, I wipe sweaty palms on my jeans and take the last few steps up to their door. I waffle between texting Nicky that I'm here or ringing the bell. Then I just hit the ringer. I'm overthinking this. They're expecting me, so it's not like they'll be upset I'm on time.

Sure enough, heavy footsteps approach and a built silver fox of a guy opens the door. I stare into his ice-blue eyes for a long moment, my mouth gone dry with anxiety. Nicky's Daddy is hot in his work suit. He's got the first few buttons on his shirt undone, a bit of salt and pepper hair poking out at the neck. I resist the urge to cruise him right there on the front step. Barely.

"You must be Ethan?" Clark offers me a handshake and tilts his head to watch me as though he's not quite sure what to make of me.

"Yeah. I'm Nicky's, uh, friend? It's a pleasure to meet you, Sir." I shake his hand. Clark's lips quirk more at the 'sir,'

tipping into a quizzical grin. I don't regret the honorific for a second. He looks like a sir.

"You can call me Clark, Ethan. And I'm always happy to meet my boy's special friends." He winks as he claps me on the back. "Come on inside. Nicholas is just putting a lasagna in the oven for you two."

"Thanks."

I let him take the lead. First, I toe off my shoes and line them up next to the others near the door, and then I follow Clark down the hallway. His ass looks incredible in his suit pants. I try not to ogle my boyfriend's hot as fuck Daddy too much, but that's a tall order. Clark is fine.

I wasn't sure what to make of their age gap at first. Especially since they've been together for a while, and I think Nicky must have met Clark just before he finished his teaching degree. But I can see the appeal on Nicky's end and clearly they care deeply about each other. Not my place to question how things work between the two men.

We walk through the tidy living room where Nicky fucked me a week ago. I try not to look too hard at the couch where we wrestled around buck naked. Or search for any of the toys that no longer mar the pristine cleanliness as we pass through to the kitchen.

I stop scoping out the house at the sight of Nicky bent over as he slides food inside the oven. His butt wiggles along to some pop song about shaking off haters that's playing over a speaker in the corner. He's adorable, lost in the beat of his song as he lip-syncs along to the lyrics.

I try not to ogle my boyfriend's ass in front of his husband. Clark doesn't seem to have any such compunctions. He walks right up to the man and hooks a finger through Nicky's belt loops to tug him into an embrace.

"Hi, Daddy." Nicky closes the oven as he straightens up, arching back into Clark's chest and craning to offer his mouth for a kiss.

“You have a guest, pup,” Clark announces, then he tugs Nick into a quick kiss. Nicky moans into his Daddy’s mouth before pulling away to glance at me.

“Oh! You’re here!” Nicky flounces around the island to glom onto me in a hug. “Daddy, this is Ethan. Did you two meet? I didn’t hear the bell.”

“That’s because you had your music going.” Clark gestures at the speakers.

“Oh, is it too loud?” He doesn’t wait for either of us to reply before telling the speaker to stop the music, which it does mid song. “Did you want a drink or anything before Daddy has to go, Ethan?”

“Is that you subtly telling me to get out of you boys’ hair, pup?” Clark arches a brow.

“Of course not, Daddy.” Nicky bats his lashes coyly. “I’d never tell you to get out of any part of me.”

“Watch it, cheeky puppy. Don’t forget to set a timer for the food. Ethan, can I get you anything?”

“Right, almost forgot.” Nicky lunges for the oven timer to set the clock for forty minutes.

“Um, water is fine,” I say.

“Sure, I think we’ve got club soda or filtered. Got a preference?” Clark offers.

“Filtered is fine.” I lean against the counter.

“Ice?”

“Sure, if it’s no bother.”

“None at all.” Clark grabs a clean glass and fills it with ice and water from the fridge’s built in dispenser. He slides the glass across to me, then fills a second one with an added squeeze of lime concentrate for Nicky.

“Thank you,” I say. Nicky echoes me as Clark hands him his glass.

“You’re welcome. I won’t keep you two from your evening any longer.” Clark rubs his hands together briskly. “I should be going if I want to meet Ky and Martin on time. Please, make yourself at home with Nicholas, Ethan. It is a pleasure to meet you. I hope you boys have a good time without me tonight.”

“Not *too* good,” Nicky winks as he nudges elbows with me.

Clark smirks at us. “I don’t believe that for a second.”

“Uh huh, that’s because you know I’m the life of the party. Have fun with your friends.”

“I will, and on that note, I should go.” Clark squeezes Nicky’s shoulders.

“Bye, Daddy. See you later.” Nicky beams at him.

“Bye, Nicholas. Follow your rules; no exceptions just because Daddy isn’t here to watch what you eat, right?”

“Yes, Daddy, I’ll be your good boy. Now go have fun.” Nicky shoos him away.

Clark laughs, swatting Nick’s ass in passing, a playful swipe that has more to do with teasing than any actual spanking. Nicky trails after his husband to the door to say a proper goodbye.

I watch them covertly from the hallway. Unsure whether to be envious or just turned on by their interactions. When Clark meets my eyes while he’s giving Nick a lingering goodbye kiss, I can’t help getting drawn into their flirtations. Like I’m a part of them for tonight, not some interloper here to take up space while Clark is away, someone they’re both making room for. A part of the cozy family they’ve built here.

Brief as it was, my introduction to Clark is good. Like a mutual acknowledgement of our roles in Nicky’s life. Clark is his family, and he just welcomed me into their home.

The warm glow of being invited into something special makes me think I could belong with them both. Not just as Nicky’s piece on the side or a distraction that Clark has to tolerate to appease Nick. And I like that feeling. Of fitting

neatly into their dynamic. As though they both have space for me to be here.

Clark eases the door shut behind him, locking it with a key before he goes. And then it's just me and Nicky with long lazy hours of lovemaking ahead of us.

Chapter 8

Clark

When I called a few friends to go out for drinks the night Nicholas invited Ethan over for supper, I figured it would be business as usual. This isn't the first time I've made plans to give him privacy so he can avail himself of our playroom and all his favorite toys with someone else. I doubt it will be the last time. It's never bothered me before. And truthfully, after my brief meeting with Ethan, I like him well enough.

The grin he puts on Nicholas's face whenever the two of them are talking online makes me smile. Seeing Nicholas carefree on the couch with his games and connecting with people after his week of moping about his work troubles filled me with compersion. Happiness at seeing him happy. Gaming bores me to tears, so it was nice to see him finding a partner who he can share that side with. Other than Q and their friends.

Still, I'm on edge about Ethan. Not upset, precisely; it's just that there is something different about the way he moons over Ethan. It's in his chipper mood when he woke up this morning, all smiley and excited as he got himself ready for work. Even though he's been dreading facing his class ever since the drama last week. It's in the way he tore through his half of the closet, trying to pick just the right casual outfit to wear for his evening with Ethan. How he cleaned like a dervish, even though we already tidied everything he left in disarray while I was gone.

Ethan isn't like the other relationships Nicholas has pursued. This might only be their second official date, but Nicholas already cares deeply for Ethan. It's painfully obvious that he's more emotionally invested than I've seen him get with anyone else in ages.

Nicholas gives me a hug before I leave to meet Kylee and Martin. I squeeze him a little too tight, hold on a little too

long. Breathe in the spicy clean scent of our bodywash on his skin. Memorize the man I love.

“Have fun tonight, puppy,” I tell him with a forced smile. We’ll have to discuss why this is bothering me at some point, but right before his date isn’t the time for it. My jealousy over him is my problem to work through.

It’s a new feeling. I’m not jealous of his evening with someone else. How can I be when he shares most of his evenings with me? I have no problem with Nicholas fucking other people since bottoming isn’t really my thing, and I’d never deny him something he enjoys.

I can even see the appeal of the adorkable nerd vibes Ethan puts out. He’s a cutie. Definitely the sort of boy Nicholas and I have shared in the past. Someone with just enough sass to stand up to us but enough of a submissive streak to be happy kneeling to two men at once. And the way that ‘Sir’ slipped off his tongue, the hooded gaze he gave me as he drank in his first look at me. I draw in a deep breath to banish filthy thoughts of watching the boy play with my pup.

If only I was just attracted to Ethan, that would make this simpler. I would just suggest we all fuck sometime once he’s comfortable with me. But it’s more than that.

I’m attracted to Ethan. And I want Nicholas to have him. But I’m also wary of how their friendship ended and jealous of the past he and Nicholas share.

All the little inside jokes that still make the pair smile years later. All the ways Nick’s heart already belongs to someone I don’t know outside the stories he tells. And for as long as I’ve known Nicholas, the ache of missing his best friends tinged all those old stories.

The grief of Leo’s passing and Ethan disappearing without a word of explanation in the midst of that grief. I’m horribly biased about this date of his. I don’t want to be, but that’s where I’m at as I hop on a bus to downtown to meet up with my closest friends.

Once I arrive, I spot Martin first. He's tall and broad enough to stand out in the crowded street outside the club that's across from our usual drinking spot. Kylee is standing next to him and she waves me over with a broad smile.

"There you are! We were about to go in and grab a table," Kylee says.

She pulls me into a hug and kisses my cheek. I return the gesture, then turn to greet Martin with a shoulder slapping bro hug before we go into the tavern. We get a table and make small talk over the menus before placing our orders.

I ask after Kylee's partner, Quent, and Martin's teenage daughter, Tabby. They ask how Nicholas is doing. And I give them a bland nonanswer.

As soon as our server leaves us with a round of drinks to put in our meal orders, Kylee fixes me with a no-nonsense look.

"We missed you at last week's munch," Kylee comments. "How was the trip?" Her piercing gaze leaves me with no doubt that she is going somewhere with that line of inquiry.

Martin sips his drink, but there is amusement in his eyes at getting to watch me getting interrogated.

"Exhausting, but productive." I give them a wan smile, then decide there's no sense in hiding my troubles from these two. "The timing could have been better. Did Nicholas talk to either of you about what's been going on with him at work?"

"He mentioned something to Hope. I was going to check in on him, but then he spent most of the night making a new friend. We had a few new folks and Quent was keen on introducing their friends to the new Daddy in town, so they centered most of their focus on him." Kylee swirls her wine with a feigned disinterest, perfectly calculated to draw me into further conversation.

I sigh. "Yeah. Nick's friend was not so new, it turns out."

"Oh?" Kylee lifts an elegant brow.

"Ethan was his childhood best friend."

“I thought his best friend died?” she asks between dainty sips of her drink.

“No, that was Ethan’s brother. He moved across the country and lost touch after his brother died and his family didn’t take him coming out well.”

“Ah.” Kylee fits a world of empathy into that one syllable. She covers my hand with hers and squeezes. “That must have been hard. And now he’s back in your boy’s life and you’re afraid of him getting hurt again?”

“Yeah. Pretty much.” I take a swig of my drink, but I don’t pull away from Kylee’s comforting touch.

Martin reaches over to squeeze my shoulder. “You know Nicholas isn’t going anywhere, right? No matter how much history he has with this Ethan, you two have strong roots. You’ve been together for years, Clark.”

I take a deep breath and nod. “When he talks about Ethan, it’s different. It makes me realize that for all the dates he’s been on, all the boyfriends and joyfriends he’s had over the years, I’ve never watched him truly fall in love with someone else before. With everyone else, he’s always broken things off before they get serious. I don’t think he ever truly wanted anything serious with anyone else. And I think he’s been up front about that with his dates, but this time, I think it means something. More than the rush of a new fling or a new infatuation. More than sex or getting to let his dominant side out to play.”

Kylee nods. “He likes casual, like my Q. That’s part of why those two get along so well.”

“That’s what I always thought. But I guess, deep down, he does actually want a romantic connection with another person and it’s throwing me for a loop. Not the least because it’s the one person he’s loved for longer than me. I’m feeling insecure. Especially since Ethan asked for more time before meeting me when Nicholas invited him over for dinner tonight.”

Kylee snorts. “They’ve reconnected for a hot second, Clark. Ethan gave Q the impression he’s having a hard time getting

his feet under him after moving back to deal with his inheritance. Give him time before you ask him to have dinner with his new lover's husband."

"Yeah, I guess. I'm just... threatened by their history together, I suppose." I shrug with a nonchalance I don't feel at all and toy with my glass.

"Were they involved?" Martin asks.

I hesitate, then wobble my hand. "No? He says they were just friends. But he also tells me stories about the three of them kissing, for practice. And getting turned on when they played some game that I'm pretty sure was an excuse to tie each other up."

Kylee laughs. "Well, I can't say I haven't been there."

And she has a point. I got all my scouting badges for knots and lashings as a teen. And Nicholas certainly doesn't complain when I apply those skills to him. It's not that I think he's trying to mislead me about his affection for Ethan.

I know they loved each other; it doesn't really matter if that was romantic or not back then. It is romantic now. I take another sip of my drink and try to shake off the churning in my gut at the thought.

"I always assumed I'd be glad to watch him open up and share his heart with someone else, beyond that initial superficial rush, you know? Watching him play with Q, or the two of you is always a joy. I'm happy to see him happy. With anyone else, it turns me on to know that he's turned on. The joy he gets from meeting someone new and exploring that connection, making new friends he enjoys playing with, it makes me happy for him."

"Hm." Martin rubs at his jaw. "From what you've told us, I wonder if maybe you'd be more comfortable with this budding relationship if you could see Ethan making Nicholas happy?"

Kylee nods and points at Martin. "That's it. You keep coming back to the past. How Ethan hurt Nicholas when he left. And I'd normally agree that exes—even ex-friends—earned the prefix for a reason. It shouldn't go away lightly, but

in this case, I think you need to trust Nick's judgment. If he thinks that Ethan's reasons for leaving the way he did are justified, then it's up to him to decide if the hurt was forgivable. And if the risk of getting hurt again is worth renewing their friendship."

"That... makes sense. So, basically, I'm not unreasonable to be worried, but I still need to accept this and work through my jealousy, huh? And not push Ethan to get to know me before he's ready."

"Pretty much," Kylee agrees, tipping her wineglass toward me.

"That about sums it up." Martin nods.

I sigh and down more of my drink. "Fair enough. I'll work on it. So, you mentioned hashing out a scene for our pups, Ky?" I change the subject.

A scene with our friends will be a fun gift I can give to Nicholas. Niko loves our playdates with Q and Kylee. I want to recapture the joy I get from sharing his affections. It's something I need after all the unpleasant ways his new relationship with Ethan has been tying me in emotional knots all week.

I need to remind myself that what we have works for us. It brings us both joy. And I want the visceral reminder of how much I enjoy watching him share pleasure with someone else.

That might help me recapture those feelings when I see him with Ethan. When he talks about Ethan. Dreams about him. I shake off an errant thought about what the two of them are doing as I sit here. It's not my business unless they both choose to make it my business.

"It's the breeding scene they've been begging for," Kylee says.

"So, they're still sold on being a surrogate?" I ask, knowing that Kylee had reservations about what that will mean for her relationship with Quent.

"They are. And as much as I'm worried about their mental health and how I'm going to handle giving up the baby in the

end, it's ultimately their choice. Thinking of them carrying a kid has me questioning if I might want to become a mother with them someday after all. But the more they talk about it, the more I'm warming to the idea of being an involved aunty even if that never happens."

"Well, then I'm sure Niko would love to help set the scene." I smile.

Kids aren't in the cards for Nicholas and I. And that's something we're both happy with, but I get where Kylee is coming from. If it was my boy, well, I'd have a hard time letting go of a piece of him. As I'm coming to see here with this situation with Ethan. Much as he's mine in a lot of ways, much as he wears my collar, he's still his own person.

"Perfect. Q has wanted a breeding scene for ages, but it made me uncomfortable until recently. I think Niko would be a perfect stud for the night. I've got the hardware to inject the semen with a syringe, so Niko would wear a strap on with a toy that has internal tubing. He won't have to touch the sperm or anything," Kylee explains. We lay out the details, pausing when our food arrives. And from there we talk about other things.

Martin's daughter is gearing up to graduate from high school. He's got a summer full of travel planned to help her get to auditions since she wants to pursue a career in dance. He might need to hire extra help at the club to handle event planning while he's out of town.

From there we talk about the club's upcoming events. Martin points out that the public play area might be a lower pressure venue for meeting Ethan than my house for a 'meet the family' style interrogation. He's got a point, but I'm done thinking about the other man and I tell my friends as much.

The rest of the night, we talk about lighter topics. Kylee and Martin tell me about the other newcomer from last week's munch, Rory, and how he seems interested in a membership at Adventures.

The two of them gush about the latest indie movie they're into. We discuss new restaurant openings. I mention some

recipes I've been itching to try if I can find the time. They commiserate with me over the details of my packed work travel schedule. Ky and I contribute to Martin's dream list of upgrades he would make to the club if it wouldn't mean lost revenue to close for remodeling.

We lose track of time and spend an entirely pleasant evening together. I can put my ambivalence toward Ethan on the back-burner. Hopefully, letting go of his past with Nicholas will get easier once I can see that he's a viable part of my boy having every happiness in the future.

Chapter 9

Ethan

I fall into a pattern after that first meeting with Clark. Nicky and I spend hours texting and chatting online while we game. Sometimes Clark is around in the background, commenting on our in-game antics or just sharing about his day with Nick. It lulls me into feeling like I'm getting to know the man without being put on the spot or thrust into awkward social situations.

Most of the time, it's me and Nicky hanging out online and Clark will jump into the conversation, or he's just present with Nicky. I learn the tone he uses when he means business and Nicky really has to log off to go to bed. I recognize his playful voice, where Nicky can push him if he wants to earn a funishment. And I know what both men sound like when their words are pure foreplay.

Much as I've fantasized about the things the three of us could do together, I'm not quite ready for that to become a reality yet. I want more of Nicky to myself, greedy boy that I am. We've only been together in person for two official dates. Three if our initial reunion at the munch counts. There will be plenty of time for me to get frisky with my boyfriend's husband. For now, I just want to savor reconnecting with the man I'm falling for all over again.

When I get to Nicky's place for our third official date, he greets me at the door with a kiss on the cheek. Then he leads me down the hall to the living room. Tonight I'm hoping to play with puppy Niko. That's my plan, anyway. I'm excited to see that side of him, if he's willing to share it.

Much like last time, their place is a lot less messy when his husband isn't out of town. I absently wonder if that means Clark is a tidy person or if it's down to him being strict with Nicky. I can see how he'd thrive on having a Daddy to guide him and give him boundaries. Even if he didn't need a firm hand to help him regulate his bipolar. He's always been eager

to please but scattered when it comes to keeping on top of chores and stuff.

Whatever the reason, the living room no longer looks like an adult version of a pet store exploded in it. I wrinkle my nose at the bestiality implications there. Not what I meant.

Puppy play is nothing like that. I know it's not. It's also not something I've done. I mean. Not unless playing fetch with Nicky when we were kids, counts. Does it count? I'm not sure.

We used to play like that a lot. I still remember how his entire demeanor changed. He'd paw at me until I'd pet him or give him belly rubs, or throw a ball for him. And then it tapered off as we got older and gave up kiddy games.

He stopped doing it at all when some other kids at school called him weird for going into puppy mode whenever he got stressed or excited. But when we first met he liked to be the dog when we played pretend. It wasn't sexual back then. Although, looking back, I certainly enjoyed the warm rasp of his tongue on my fingers. The tingles it sent right to my core when his mouth was on me.

I'm glad he's recaptured the joy he used to find in that kind of play. And a part of me is curious what it's like to play those games with him again. So, I'm a little disappointed that all the pet play gear that was out the first time is absent. We talked about breaking out the kink tonight. I just hope he's on the same page as me.

Nicky clears his throat when I spend too long staring around the room. "Yeah, uh, sorry about the mess the other day. I usually keep my toys tidy." He rubs at his neck, looking chagrined. "Daddy keeps me accountable about that stuff."

"I can see that. You did a good job."

"Thanks!" He brightens at the praise and smiles at me. I like the warm flush that sends through me. I'll definitely praise him more, if that's how he responds. "So, uh, I wasn't sure what you'd want to do tonight?" he says. "I know we said we'd get kinky, and you wanted to see my Niko side. Did you have anything specific in mind?"

I shrug. "I'm up for anything that ends in mutual orgasms. And probably dinner after sex."

"Good call. So. Want me to tie you up better this time? Or we have some other fun toys in the playroom. And if you stay the night, we can crash in there. It's got a comfy bed. It also doubles as our totally non-kinky guest room approximately twice a year, when Daddy's family is in town to visit. Mostly that's where I take my dates if they come over and don't want to be with Daddy."

"Ah. Yeah. Um. Can I ask a silly question?"

"No such thing as a silly question."

"How many people are you dating?"

"Right now? Just you." He pauses, considering. "And Daddy."

"Does it count as dating if you're married?" I tease him.

Nicky nods solemnly. "Oh, yeah. Absolutely! To me, dating just means doing the work of building and maintaining a relationship, and that never stops, no matter how long we're together."

"Huh, valid point. I hadn't thought of it like that."

"Yeah. I guess I think about that stuff a lot, kind of have to, what with maintaining several romantic relationships at any given time. But for now, I'm only seeing you and Daddy. In a romantic sense. Sex-wise, there's a bunch of people I see pretty regularly. Does that bother you?"

I give it a moment's thought and then shake my head. "I don't think so? Not as long as you prioritize making time for our dates. I think? If it bothers me later on, is that something we can negotiate in the future?"

"Yes. For sure. This can't work if we aren't open and honest with each other. And that includes Daddy. Like, you two don't have to be lovers or even friends. But you're both important to me, so I need you to get along on some level."

"That's fair. I do want to get to know him better. I'm just a bit intimidated. Are you upset that I said no to dinner with him

the other night?”

“No. I get that it’s soon.” Nicky shrugs.

“I just want a little more time with you to myself before things get complicated with balancing multiple people and multiple relationships. Even if I don’t date him, he’s still your husband. I can’t imagine being a part of your life again without having some sort of relationship with the man you love.”

“You don’t have to justify yourself. Anyway. I agree that we should focus on our relationship for now. You can spend more time with Daddy whenever you’re both ready. Is it okay if I share what we do with him?”

“Like details of our sex life?” I ask, distinctly uncomfortable with the idea. It feels too much like the games my exes played with me at their center.

“Not so much details as the broad strokes of what we do and fantasies of what I want us to do, with and without him.”

I bite my lip and consider the request. Remind myself he isn’t using me as a game to make Clark jealous. If he’s not describing exactly what we do, like some sort of secondhand amateur porn, just sharing what turns him on, then I can see it being okay. I give him a cautious nod. “Will you tell me about what you do with him, too?”

“Oh, yeah. Sure. Um, he has rules for me. Like, all the time rules.” Nicky gestures around the living room. “I’m supposed to keep my toys picked up, for one. And I’m not allowed to say mean things about myself.”

“I wondered about the mess.”

“Yeah. I’m still a slob when left to my own devices.” he shrugs self-deprecatingly.

“Do I need to tell your Daddy you said that about his boy?” I tease. Nicky playfully pouts at me and crosses his arms over his chest like a sullen child.

“I knew you’d be a total snitch! Ugh, maybe I should keep you two from conspiring for as long as possible; so I’m not

writing lines until my hands fall off.” He pretends to stroke a villain mustache, like he’s some evil mastermind plotting against my perceived alliance with his Daddy to get him to be nicer to himself.

“I like that rule.” And if that’s how Clark uses his Daddy powers, I think I’m going to like him. But I keep that to myself for now. “So, you’re his boy and you follow his rules. But I know you like being the one in control, too. Is that part of why you date other people?”

“Yep. Daddy isn’t much of a switch. He’ll sometimes play around with role reversal, but it’s not as much fun when his heart isn’t in it. Much more fun to fuck a willing partner into submission.” He winks at me, and I give him a coy smile.

“I am very willing.” Our eyes lock and I lean into his space.

“I know.” He licks his lips.

“Is the puppy thing something you only do with your Daddy, or can I play with puppy Nicky, too?”

“It’s Niko when I’m a puppy.” Nicky corrects me, rubbing at his ear. The way he does it sort of reminds me of a dog scratching himself.

“That suits you. And can I play with Niko?”

“Yeah. If you’d like. Is that what you want to do tonight? Fair warning, I usually get pretty horny and hump stuff when I’m in my pupspace.”

“That’s fine. I like you musical. So long as I don’t have to like, scoop your poop, I’d like to see that side of you.”

“Yeah, uh, no scat play.” He chuckles. “That is not my thing. Anyway, have you done puppy play at all?”

“Only with you.”

“Huh?” He gives me a puzzled look, head cocked to the side, another dog-like mannerism creeping into his movements. And then understanding dawns and he laughs. “Oh, my god. Yeah, I guess we did some G-rated puppy play before. Seems we both knew what we liked, huh? Remember when Leo was on his quest to get them to agree to getting a

dog? I still think he had a point that showing your folks how well you two took care of me should have merited more consideration.” He chuckles.

I remember the horrified fascination our folks watched us with that day. We paraded our friend around on a leash in a very homemade dog costume to prove that we would feed and walk our pet. Leo had a stubborn streak a mile wide. He never got his pet dog though.

I try to focus on the happy memory of my brother. The way his schemes made for wonderful memories instead of the pang of loss. Funny how parts of the grief can still hit almost like it was yesterday. I don’t want to dwell on Leo tonight.

“Yeah, that was probably not as persuasive as he’d hoped it would be. Especially when you ran off to bark at the squirrel.” I laugh at the memory, and Nicky joins me.

“Nope, your parents gave me the stink eye for weeks after that little stunt.” He guffaws.

“So, are you still an adorable disaster as a puppy, then?”

“Pretty much.”

“Good to know.” I reach over to ruffle his hair. I remember him liking pats when he was a puppy before. When it was all innocent play.

He melts into the touch. It’s the first time I really understand that the look in his eyes when his entire mindset shifts isn’t just a goofy thing he does. That he’s really shifting into a completely different headspace. I never had words for that transformation before, other than to joke that Nicky was in puppy mode.

“And that’s more lines for me to tell your Daddy about.” I stick my tongue out at him. Nicky—or, no, it’s Niko sitting next to me on the couch now—moves to straddle me and licks my face. I splutter and he pushes his tongue into my mouth, licking more insistently and humping my lap. I laugh and shove him off. “Down, Niko, no puppies allowed on the furniture.”

I don't know if that's a rule he has, but he seems to like rules with his Daddy. That's a pretty common dog rule. I think. I let Gandalf on the furniture, but birds aren't the same, and she mostly prefers her perches.

Niko whines, but I push firmly on his shoulders and he slips off my lap and onto the carpeted floor. I follow him onto the carpet, petting his head. Niko snuffles at my hands and whines for more pats.

"Want belly rubs?" I offer, in a sing-song meant to rile him up more. Niko wriggles onto his back, displaying his belly to me, legs splayed out, tongue lolling in a doggy sort of panting grin. I rub all over his belly. Niko makes happy little growly sounds and rubs his back against the carpet, getting into the role. "Who's a good boy?"

Niko barks.

"Yes, you are, aren't you? A very good boy. Does my good boy want to play?" The possessive pronoun slips out and I freeze with my hands still on his belly, unsure if I should pretend it didn't happen or take it back, or what. He isn't *my* puppy.

Niko woofs at me, nosing at my fingers and wriggling, trying to get me to pat him more. I scritch up to his neck and Niko makes a sound that's closer to a human moan than anything I've heard from a dog.

"Oh, puppy likes that, huh?" I lay the heels of my palms against his throat and wiggle my fingers behind his ears. Niko gazes up at me. His ass wriggles like he's wagging a nonexistent tail.

"Do you have a collar for when you're a puppy, Niko? Do you need me to put it on you so we can go for walkies?" I suggest. Niko makes a bark that sounds like a sneeze. Is that a yes?

"Go get it, puppy. I want to walk you."

Niko rolls up onto all fours, licks at my face and turns toward the hallway. He stops and glances back at me when I don't follow and gives a hopeful little butt wag. "You need

your tail too, huh? Shoulda got your things first. Is it okay to show me where your puppy stuff is?”

Niko barks another of those affirmative sounding little sneezy barks. I laugh and crawl after him, because it looks like fun. His tongue lolls and his eyes sparkle like when he’s laughing as I crawl up to him.

When I reach him, Niko snuffles his nose along my jaw and licks me again. His breath tickles my ears when I turn away to get him to stop licking my mouth. I giggle and shove his face away.

“No more puppy kisses, walk time,” I demand.

Niko huffs, but he heads down the hallway to the first door. He nudges it and whines.

“This one?”

I reach for the handle. His butt wags. I push it open. Niko goes right to the nondescript dresser and noses at the top right-hand drawer. He whines and paws at it until I pull it open.

Inside, I find a jumble of leather. Niko barks and wags his ass, looking expectantly between me and his stuff. I’m not sure what we need or if I’m really supposed to be digging through his belongings. I see a couple of tails in among all the straps. Niko gives an impatient bark.

“Are you sure this is okay? I don’t want to get us in trouble with your Daddy.” I glance over my shoulder, as though Clark might materialize to punish us for snooping or something. Even though Niko said we could play in here, assuming this is the playroom. It looks like a regular guest room, other than the contents of the dresser. I wonder what other toys they have stashed in here?

Niko shoves his face between me and the drawer, balancing his front paws on the edge of the drawer. He gingerly grabs a studded leather play collar out of the tangle and turns to offer it to me. Head cocked plaintively toward me.

“You want me to put this on you?” I ask, holding out my hand, palm up for him to drop it onto so I don’t bang his teeth on the spikey decorative studs by accident.

Niko drops it with a pleased little woof. He offers me his neck, butt still wagging excitedly. No one has ever asked me to put a collar on them before. I've played around at clubs and with friends. But this doesn't seem like mere play.

It might only be a play collar, but it feels like so much more than that. I hesitate, unsure about why. I want to play with him, and he clearly wants that too. Niko noses at the collar and barks insistently.

He glances at me, a question in his eyes that almost subsumes that doggy happiness he was watching me with before I hesitated. I don't want to ruin the moment for him. More than anything, I want to play with Niko. I close my finger around the collar to hold it up to him.

Niko shuffles forward to press his neck against the offered length of leather. I loop the wide band around his throat and fasten the collar at his nape. The spikes look pointy, but they're not sharp when I rub a finger over one.

Niko seems to like it as I gently tug his day collar out from under the play one so it won't pinch. Then I check that it's not cutting off his wind, but it's snug enough not to irritate him. Niko whines, like he's wondering what's taking the human so long to do something that I'm sure his Daddy could do in a fraction of the time. My fingers tremble on the buckle. I'm really putting a collar on him, promising to take care of him for the duration of our play.

It seems like a tremendous responsibility. I can almost understand why my parents said no to the puppy Leo and I begged them for. It's a lot to have another living creature depending on me.

Niko is relying on me to take care of him while he's in his pupspace. I guess that's true regardless of the play collar. But that's what this feels like. A promise to watch over him and put his needs above my own for as long as he's wearing it. I want to make that promise. I finish adjusting the buckle and give the D-ring, where a leash can clip, a gentle tug.

"There, all ready to be my good boy, huh?" I smile at him, admiring the way the collar looks on him.

Niko barks and turns to dive back into the drawer. I expect him to present me with a leash. Or maybe a harness. Instead, he pulls out a long tail with a butt plug dangling from the end. I take it from him, holding the narrow plug between my fingers by its wide base.

He turns to present his ass to me. I pat his firm round globes experimentally. How many times have I fantasized about touching him like this over the years? I've long since lost track, but I want to grab a double handful and squeeze. Part his cheeks and tease his hole and drive him wild with lust.

I want to bury my face in Nicky's crack and lick him until he begs to be filled. I don't necessarily want to be the one to fill him up, though. What appeals to me is winding him up until he takes out his sexual frustration by fucking me into the nearest available surface.

I wonder what it would be like to prep him with my mouth and tongue and fingers while his Daddy watches us. To let him sink into me even as his Daddy fucks him. Clark's every movement would force Nicky all the way inside me to the hilt. Threesomes aren't on my usual fantasy playlist, too many moving parts to keep track of. But the thought of Nicky dominating me while his Daddy dominates both of us turns me on.

Niko arches into my touch, drawing me out of my fantasies. Much as I love having sex with him as Nicky, I'm playing with Niko for now. Niko hitches his hips up toward me, as if to say 'get on with it already.' I snort at his impatience. He lifts into my hand and whines for it.

"You want me to just shove it in?" I ask dubiously. "You told me your ass belongs to your Daddy."

Niko whines more insistently and wriggles enticingly.

"Is the plug an exception?" I ask, hooking my fingers around his waistband.

I tug the loose sweats and his boxer-briefs down to expose his ass. And swallow back my wave of lust at stripping him bare. Niko barks, the sound I've come to associate with a yes.

So I trace the plug between his cheeks, to his pucker, and tap the blunt point against his body.

“Hm, I think we need to get this wet first.” I part his cheeks. Then I work up enough saliva to spit a good glob onto his hole. I lean in close to get him nice and wet for the plug, without actually touching my mouth to his ass.

Niko whimpers as I shove the plug inside with nothing but my spit to ease the way. “That’s it. Such a good boy, taking your tail for me. I want to see how happy you are to play with me, puppy.”

Niko woofs his agreement. I consider teasing him with the plug, but I really want to play with the puppy more than I want to play with his ass. So I just settle it into place and help him finish removing his pants and underwear.

Niko turns to face me, bows down into a playful pose, chest low, ass high, and wags his tail. He barks an invitation to play, and I remember this game was always a favorite of his when we were younger. I make a grab for one of his hands, and he snaps at it. I reach for his other hand, tagging him.

“Got your paw!” I crow.

Niko bites playfully at my hand and I pull back, feinting and tapping him as he tries to catch me.

We both get into the game. His teeth graze me a few times, but he’s gentle even when he catches me. And I grab his paws and tug gently when I catch him.

He makes the cutest little doggy sounds, challenging me to get him, complaining when I trick him into getting caught. In the end, he must tire of the game, because he bowls me onto my back and stands over me on all fours, licking every inch of my face.

His hard dick traces sticky trails of pre-cum onto my belly as he enthusiastically gives my face a tongue bath. I laugh until my belly aches from it and he makes happy puppy sounds low in his throat.

I reach under him to stroke his dick. Niko whines more urgently, lapping at my mouth like he wants to lick my tonsils

as I jerk him. He humps into my hand at first, then he pins my hips and lowers himself so that he can hump against my groin.

His movements trap me under him, and I love the indisputable proof that I turn him on as he ruts against me. I can imagine his hole clenching on the slender plug that I filled him with every time he thrusts. As if he's got a small part of me inside him as he tries to get himself off.

"You're a horny little puppy, aren't you?" I tease, grabbing his face between my hands to stop his licking. He laps at the air in front of my face, tongue grazing the tip of my nose, and barks his agreement.

I lift my hips to meet his next thrust, wishing I'd worn something easier to wriggle out of than the tight jeans that make my ass look amazing. I want his rock hard cock pressed against my erection.

The rough fabric can't feel that good for him either, especially if he ends up rubbing himself on my fly. I tug on the collar and his eyes roll up like he's in seventh heaven. He ruts into me harder, with a low howl that sounds more like a moan.

Wet heat rushes over my groin and I can't help laughing as I realize he came all over me.

"Naughty puppy! I didn't tell you to come." I scold, releasing the collar and lying back against his carpet. Niko noses at my face, his expression contrite. "You want to make it up to me?"

He yips a yes.

"Clean up your mess, then. Every drop." I nudge his head toward the wet patch on my lap. Niko snuffles all along my torso and starts licking up his cum. I prop myself up on my elbows to watch him lick my pants as though they're covered in his favorite treat.

He makes eye contact when he notices me watching, wags his tail, and goes back to his task, diligent as though nothing else matters. And I revel in the single-minded devotion of his mouth moving over me. His tongue is hot and firm through the

fabric. The growing moisture as he keeps on licking me makes it easier to feel what he's doing through the thick material.

"Mm, that's a good boy. Such a very good boy." I grab his head and push him more firmly against me. Niko makes more of his low pleased sounds, mouth becoming more insistent.

"Mhm, wish you could suck me." I moan.

Niko wags his tail and a moment later, there's a tug at my waist as he uses his teeth to ease open the button of my fly. He tries to nose my pants out of the way. I laugh and shove him off of me. "Wait, let me, uh, suit up first." Niko pauses at the word wait, so that must be a command he's used to.

I lever myself up to standing so I can shimmy out of my damp pants. Niko watches me rise with a quizzical tilt to his head. He whines and paws at my ankles when I take too long finding the improvised condom I fashioned using a cut up nitrile glove. I fish it from my discarded pants pocket so I can cover my junk for him. The trials of having non-standard parts.

"I know buddy, but you said to wrap it for oral, so this is what I've got to work with."

I shrug. Niko licks his chops, eyeing the glove with interest. I awkwardly fit the thumb opening over my junk and arrange the part that would normally go on the hands over my balls to secure it in place.

"There, um, I don't know your release command. Want to lick me some more? I love having your mouth on me." I gesture toward my covered cock. "Be a good boy and, uh, help me come?"

Niko yips happily and noses at me. He gives me an experimental lick, and when the glove stays in place, thanks to my fingers bracketing it, he gets into it again. I jerk the base of my dick as Niko sucks and licks my sensitive length until my knees are weak with the effort of staying upright. I have to hold his shoulders with my free hand to steady myself.

Niko makes encouraging sounds as he laps at me. Like he's telling me to come for him and I can't hold back when he

slurps my entire dick into his mouth and sucks me like a lollipop. Niko's tail wags as I curl around him and my orgasm pulses against his tongue. Niko keeps lavishing me with attention as my entire body clenches with the shuddering pleasure of my orgasm.

I cling to him, lost in pleasure that I never want to end as it goes on and on. He keeps suckling on my cock until I push myself upright, and the heat and friction become too much. I give him a command to stop.

"Enough. Such a good boy." I praise him. Niko licks me again, a perfunctory swipe over the sensitive head. I push him away from my oversensitive bits and deal with the makeshift condom.

"Hm. Too much, puppy. Now that we've played, what else do puppies need?" Niko perks up and gently takes my hand into his mouth to tug me toward the bed.

"Snuggles?" I ask. Niko yips and dances in place, looking between me and the furniture. "Are you allowed on the bed?"

He barks an affirmative and even if he's not allowed, a nap with him sounds heavenly. I want nothing more than to snuggle with my puppy in bed, so I pat the comforter. "Okay, you've been a very good boy, up."

Niko launches himself onto the mattress. He snuffles at the pillows, then turns in a circle and settles in with his front paws hanging over the edge. He yips for me to join him. So I crawl onto the bed beside him and curl around his warmth.

Niko rests his chin on my chest with a contented sigh. I bury my fingers in his hair and scratch him like I would if I were snuggling a real dog.

I wake up from our little nap to Niko licking my face again and whining urgently.

"What's wrong, Niko? Do you need something?" I look around for a clock and realize we must have slept for longer than I thought. "Hm, what do you need, puppy?" I ask him.

Niko yips, hops down from the bed, and goes to scratch at the door. I get up and let him out into the hall. He pads down

the hall, back to the living room and through the large archway that opens into the kitchen. There he leads me to a pair of ceramic bowls and noses mournfully at their lack of contents.

“Are you a hungry puppy?” I ask.

He barks and dances in place, nails clicking against the laminate flooring.

“Okay, I’ll get you something. Calm down.” I wash my hands real quick, remembering what we were up to before our nap, and reach for the bowls. He licks my face again when bending over puts me at his level. By now I know to expect his tongue on me whenever I get in range, so I just laugh and shove his face away.

“Not now, puppy. I need to get your supper.” I fill one bowl with filtered water from the spigot on the fridge and set it back on the cute little paw print mat.

Niko buries his face in the bowl and laps the water up eagerly. I feel bad that I let him get so thirsty.

“Poor thirsty puppy. Next time, I’ll offer you more water sooner. You’re such a sweet good boy.”

Niko wags his tail and I wince, thinking of the discomfort of sleeping with a plug in his ass. Should I pull it out? He doesn’t seem bothered by it though. And I like the way he wags it for me, so I leave it for now. Or maybe I should ask him?

I tug gently on the tip of his tail, and Niko shoots a startled glare over his shoulder.

“Want to keep this in for now?” I ask.

Niko growls low. I swat his ass. “Behave, puppy. Do you want me to leave the tail in your ass?”

Niko licks the water off his lips and barks a yes. So I let go of his tail. He wags it and goes back to drinking.

“I don’t know what puppies eat,” I say as I peruse the countertop.

There’s a bowl of fruit with a jar of peanut butter next to it. Not exactly the dinner of champions, but I can make little

banana and peanut butter sandwiches for him. So I find a knife and slice the banana into bite-sized medallions, smear each one with peanut butter, and place them in Niko's bowl. When I offer the treat to him, he sniffs at it, barks questioningly, and wags his tail.

"Go on, it's for you." I nudge the food toward him.

Niko gingerly eats one. And then gives a joyful bark and devours the rest of them. And I have to admit, it feels fantastic to take care of him like that. He wags his tail as he chows down on the food I made for him. My heart swells at the sense of accomplishment I can get from something so simple.

I wish everything could be as simple as this moment where I'm the one who meets his physical needs. No wonder people enjoy this. Taking care of my puppy is more fulfilling than I could have imagined, almost as good as getting to fool around with him.

I wonder if Clark loves this feeling as much as I do? Probably. It might be nice to talk to him about it someday. The ways he takes care of Niko, and how I can be a part of this with them.

I'm still nervous about spending more time with Nicky's Daddy, but part of me is also excited about what that might look like. Sharing a pup. Or having his Daddy boss him around while he mounts me again. Both sound good, and I'm sure there are plenty of other ways we could play that I'm not even thinking of.

Despite my trepidations, I'm starting to think I might want to try them all. Once Nick and I are more established as a couple, and I'm more comfortable around Clark. All the deliciously debauched things I want to do with Nicky are worth stepping outside my comfort zone with him and his husband.

Chapter 10

Clark

It's a few weeks between when Kylee broaches the idea of a breeding scene with us, and when she texts me to say tonight is the night. I'm excited for the playdate. It's been too long since we all got together.

In the time since we last met up in person, I've lost track of the number of dates my pup has gone on with his new boyfriend. When they aren't meeting up for a night out, or dinner, or coffee, they seem to be gaming together online.

They're texting as Nicholas eats a cold breakfast and I stew over not having time or inclination to actually cook something for us. I've got coffee and I'll grab something to eat at my desk on my way into the office.

I'm glad Nicholas has Ethan right now, because I've been working overtime ever since Pam went on parental leave. Her temporary replacement is a nice kid, but it's taking him forever to get up to speed on everything she normally does, which means a huge chunk of her workload is landing on me.

The extra hours, travel, and the work I've been bringing home are taking their toll on me. In March, there was an emergency with a client that meant I had to bail early on a visit to Whistler with my sister and her kids. They flew out to spend their school vacation with us. I considered resigning over that one. It's not like I get to see my sister and nephews as often as I'd prefer without the interruption to what little quality time we get.

Worst of all, the strain is cutting into my time with Nicholas. He's the most important part of my life, not the job that's taking so much of my energy. I'm so exhausted by the end of the day that I haven't been cooking much more than basic staples, which is extra annoying because trying new recipes to share with him is one of my happy places. I love being home with my boy, sharing our meals and our lives.

I've been looking forward to this playdate with Kylee and Q. Time with them is a part of our normal that I miss with my busier schedule. They're part of the fabric of our family. I really hope Nicholas doesn't have anything else planned for tonight, and I want his attention so we can discuss it.

"Did you take your meds?" I ask perfunctorily. That's routine enough that I'm sure he has and it should draw his focus to me.

Except Nicholas only grunts at me. Unease prickles through me. It's never a good thing when Nicholas goes off his meds. I text Kylee back that I have to check if he has plans, though really, I'm more concerned about the meds than his schedule.

"Hey, Nicholas?" I lean across the counter to get his attention. My husband is smiling at his phone like a giant sap, so I assume he's texting Ethan to avoid thinking about work. He probably just wasn't paying attention to my question. Still. "Did you take your meds this morning?"

"Yeah, Daddy?" he asks distractedly.

I pat his hand to make sure he's actually listening. He glances at me. A there and gone flicker of irritation in his gaze as he turns his phone over to focus on me. He gives me a pointed look so chock full of attitude my palms itch to spank the sass out of him. "Meds?"

"I ran out yesterday. Going to the pharmacy before work to pick up a refill."

I make him meet my gaze, searching for some hint this is more than an oversight. It could happen to anyone. He's had a lot on his mind lately. The situation with his job hasn't changed much. He had to meet with parents and offer the students involved a make-up exam.

The parents seem satisfied with that resolution. The administration considers the matter settled. Everyone but Nicholas seems content that the entire cheating incident is in the past. I try to reassure myself that it's just work stress and he really will get his prescription and take his dose before work this morning.

The tension between us hurts like a physical ache. I want to trust him that this is just an honest mistake, but he asked me to be strict with him when it comes to his health. Our gazes hold, and as I stare into his soft dark eyes, I'm hard-pressed to be upset with him.

"Promise, I'll get it before work." Nicholas gives me a reassuring grin. "Trust me, I don't want to miss a dose any more than you want me to. I took them last night. It will be fine."

"Okay." I let it drop for now, making a mental note to ask again later. "Do you have plans after work?"

"Nope. Just the pharmacy before work. Well. Sort of? Ethan and I are gaming tonight, after I grade papers. Might just give them all a pass and call it done." He taps the back of his phone, obviously wanting to check his messages as it buzzes with new texts.

Nicholas isn't content with how everything got resolved with the tests. He hates going to work now. He's checked out in a way I've never seen him act about his job. Teaching is a passion for him. He loves guiding his students.

I miss the way he practically bursts with pride when their hard work pays off and they get a concept that's been eluding them. These past weeks, he's just been counting down to summer vacation with the stolid stoicism he usually reserves for having to get a needle stick for our quarterly STI testing.

"Work still isn't good?" I offer him a sympathetic smile.

Despite his problems with his job, if it weren't for the fact I know how Nicholas gets when he's depressed, I could convince myself his depression nest while I was out of town was just an aberrant blip. A temporary thing brought on by the stress of that week. Our sex life is better than ever.

He's affectionate and sweet with me when we play. And accommodating of my work schedule as I prepare for another trip to handle a problem with an install in New Brunswick at the end of the month. The timing stinks since it's a few weeks before school gets out for the summer in late June. He's smiley

and happy around Ethan. Dripping with the buzz of a new relationship. He cracks non-stop jokes and laughter into his headset while they game.

But I know him, and by now I'm acutely aware of the signs to look for with him. And he still barely leaves his blanket nest of perpetual gaming on the couch if he doesn't have to for work or a date.

I practically have to spoon feed him anything other than the junk food he grazes on as he plays. Even throwing out all the chips, twinkies, and jerky doesn't stop him. He keeps a stash in his work bag and comes home with more.

If I didn't drag him to bed, sleep would be that thing he only does for a few restless hours when he crashes after Ethan logs off their game. I know to stay on top of his sleep schedule to prevent manic episodes though. So that's one rule we stick to, no matter how much depression naturally fuels his insomnia.

He shrugs. "It's work." Then he perks up a little in his seat, a hint of my eager boy breaking through the fog of his bleak mood. "Did you want to do something with me tonight? You don't have to bring home more reports?"

My heart aches at his question. I've really been dropping the ball. That has to change. I want to see more of his excitement. The contrast between his recent default and the happy boy eager for a scene almost guts me.

I wish I could just pull him out of the mire of his depression for good. That there was some miracle cure to make everything better, but antidepressants on top of his lithium haven't worked out well in the past. Long experience has shown me the best I can manage is to support him through this rough patch and it too shall pass.

"I mentioned having a time-sensitive plan for a scene with Kylee and Q a while back, right?"

"And it's time?" Nicholas's eyes light up and he flashes his wheedling smile at me. He grabs my hand, his phone forgotten. "Are you going to tell me what we're doing?"

“You’ll be my good stud puppy and breed a very willing bitch in heat. And I think Q has a new toy for you to play with,” I divulge, smiling at his interest.

Nicholas grins, lust in his eyes. “Hot. They’ve wanted a scene like that.”

“You’re good with it?” I check.

If I wasn’t already confident that he’ll be into the proposed scene, I’d never have agreed to it. But this falls under the broad parameters of what he is alright with me arranging for us. It should be a perfect distraction from what’s been bothering him. A way for us to connect and to remind him I’m always there for him, ready and willing to care for him when he needs it.

Even if I have to travel for my job more than either of us would prefer. At heart, I’m a homebody despite moving across the country from my family when I started my career. Vancouver is home now and Nicholas is my family. I love the structure of our lives, and all we’ve built together. Part of me hopes a fun scene might go a long way to pulling us both out of our funk.

I’m getting more and more leery of the travel my role requires. Leaving when Nicholas needs me rubs all my instincts wrong. Nicholas needs his routines and rules to keep him stable. He needs me. And I need to be there for him when he’s having a hard time. Not just for him, but for myself, for the fulfillment I only find in being his Daddy and taking care of him.

“Yeah.” He nods. Nicholas leans toward me and licks his lips, eager to hear more.

“Even if there’s real impregnation going on?” I ask.

Nicholas chokes on his spit. “What?”

I laugh at his bewildered expression, eyes wide, lips pursed. “Relax, boy. Not with your sperm.”

“Oh. Good. I mean, it might be hot to go bare, but uh, I don’t think I want to have a kid with Q.”

“Pretty sure the feeling is mutual.” I ruffle his hair and explain Q’s surrogacy plans for their brother. Q has probably mentioned their plans to him in passing, but I have the specifics from Kylee.

“Sounds fun. I’ll tell Ethan we can’t game tonight. Think he’d want to reenact the scene with us? You could tell me to breed him? Or would that be dysphoric?”

“You’d have to ask him that, babe. Kylee says Quent is very into the idea. But she warned me to let her take the lead and that we might have to stop if the reality isn’t as good as the fantasy, since it does border on Q’s dysphoria triggers.”

Nicholas nods his understanding. “Yeah. They told me that’s part of why it’s so hot. Because it pushes them past where they want to go without their Mommy to support them. I’ll have to discuss it with Eth.” He grins at me. “I’m excited for Q. Thanks for setting this up, Daddy.”

“You’re welcome, pup,” I say.

It’s nice to see my boy smiling and happy as he takes another bite of his sugary cereal. That’s usually reserved for meals when he’s in his pupspace, but I let it slide. He goes back to texting Ethan. At least he’s eating it with some berries today. That makes it healthy-ish.

Part of me wants to force him into healthier habits, even though I know better than to think I can fix him. I itch to take care of him. Ultimately, I’m his Daddy, but I’m not his dad.

When I offer him healthy dinners lately, he picks at his food, shoving it around his plate and sulking until I excuse him from the table. When I try to entice him into bed so he can get enough rest, he makes it sexual. Then he tosses and turns for hours, unable to fall asleep once the orgasms are over.

In short, he’s struggling. I hope he’s not just burying himself in his big emotions with Ethan in a desperate bid to overcome the depression that we’ve worked hard to manage over the years. This is an unhealthy pattern I’ve seen him repeat before. He notices the symptoms creeping in, and he dives into a fling

to chase the fleeting endorphin high of NRE that inevitably leaves him worse off when it falls apart.

And when he's like this, it always falls apart fast. He comes on too strong, too eager. Too much for any one person to contain all his energy and his desperate need to feel something.

Most of the time, it's harmless fun. Flirting, a few casual dates, and plenty of sex. We've talked about making sure he sets expectations with those relationships. Not leading anyone on. Usually, his Grindr fling du jour walks away with no animosity. They part with fond memories of a fun-loving guy who was just over the top happy all the time.

"You need to get to work, babe," I warn him as I finish my coffee. I text Kylee back to confirm that we are on for tonight.

"There's time." He waves off my concerns, still smiling at his phone with that soft, lovey smile that's almost always just for me. It's strange to see that smile directed at someone else. Not bad, but I am worried that he's not in a good place for it right now.

From the first, this relationship with Ethan has seemed different from his usual depression flings. It's like watching him unravel at warp speed. And this time, he's falling into those old bad habits with someone he'll regret hurting. Someone he loved. Still loves, if the way he talks about Ethan is to be believed.

"He says I can try to breed him all I want, but he doesn't have a few of the necessary parts anymore, and the actual verbiage squicks him out." Nicholas grins at me. "And also that I need to stop getting my biology lessons from Mr. Potato Head if I think he can just swap in whatever parts he wants willy-nilly." He laughs and looks at me like he expects me to be as charmed at their inside jokes as he is.

I chuckle, more at seeing him happy and engaged than the actual joke. This isn't like his usual sharing about a new beau.

Granted, he always has plenty to say about new dates. Endless cheerful chatter about the new person. It's normal

bonding. This goes deeper than that. I can tell he wants me to connect with Ethan.

It's not superficial food preferences, favorite songs, or even shared sexual fantasies. This is not that puppy love 'you like stars, and I like stars, we must be soulmates' energy. His emotions already run so much deeper.

With Ethan, he tells me about the other man's breakfast preferences with a story about Leo sneaking him into their house in the wee hours of a school morning. The two of them presented that breakfast to Ethan in bed, as a birthday surprise.

It's not a favorite song they happened to hear on the radio, it's the song they danced to together, as friends, at their senior prom. Before they knew the heartbreak that was just around the corner for them both. It's not sex with Ethan he spins fantasies about, it's having Ethan and I both there, making love to him. He doesn't word it like that, but I can see it's what he wants.

"Maybe the three of us could do a scene like that?" He hits me with the puppy eyes I can never resist, no matter how stern I try to be when he needs that from me.

"One step at a time. I think we need to wait until he's ready to spend more than a few minutes with me before we go planning scenes with him, boy." But there's a part of me that likes the idea.

I consider having Nicholas pass along my number to Ethan so the two of us can get to know each other better since Ethan is clearly a texter. Another time, when we aren't running late.

"Yeah. Okay. You're going to love him though, Daddy." Nicholas catches sight of the clock and chugs the rest of his milk and soggy cereal. "Gotta go, I love you."

He drops his bowl into the sink and pecks my cheek before rushing out to catch the last bus that will get him to the pharmacy before work. He's usually not one for cutting things so close. Usually, he's there well before class. He likes to give his students a chance to catch him if they have questions, need

extra help with their assignments, or just want a supportive adult to listen.

Yeah, he's not okay and something is going to have to change with his job. I can't fix any of that for him. Unless he asks me for advice, it's not my place to tell him what to do about his career. Not beyond the gentle suggestions I've already made that if he doesn't feel supported by the administration at his current job, there are plenty of other schools in the area.

All I can do is support him when he needs me. And make sure he has a good time tonight instead of dwelling on his problems.

I just wish my job made it easier for me to ensure I'll always be there for him. Then again, if this thing with Ethan works out, that would mean another person he can lean on when I'm out of town.

I've never been able to rely on his other partners to be there for him when his depression gets out of hand. Usually, I'm the one picking up the pieces of his broken heart in the aftermath.

So far, I've fixated on how much worse losing Ethan will hurt than when his short-lived flings go up in flames. But maybe I've got it all wrong and this time around, it will work out. This time, he might have found another love that can last. I hope it works out that way; it would be nice for him to find another partner who can also be my partner in loving him through thick and thin.

I get home from work just in time to head to Kylee's place for our scene. Nicholas is grading papers with a desultory expression on his face when I arrive and he gladly shoves them back into his bag in favor of getting prepped and ready. There isn't much time to exchange more than the barest pleasantries about our days before we head out the door.

Our scene goes off without a hitch. Q clearly adores every moment of my stud breeding them and Kylee seems invested in the scene too. It's hot to watch. Niko gets really into the

game, enough that I will definitely agree to a repeat. Still, I'm horny as fuck when we leave our friends to their afterglow.

After a quick hand job to take the edge off for him, I hustle Niko out the door and into the car. He keeps giving me fuck-me eyes for most of the drive home. It's not usually a terrible drive, but with my dick aching to be inside him, it seems interminable.

"Daddy, that was so hot. I kinda wish I'd felt them writhing on my actual dick though. Instead of the toy."

"You want to put your puppies in someone, Nicholas?" I tease, to get my mind off the image of my boy thrusting into a tight hole.

He blanches. "No. Fuck, no! No kids for me, please. I just meant how tight and hot they always are when we fuck."

"Mm. Well, I can't say I blame you. I can't wait to be buried balls deep inside my sexy fuckhole when we get home."

"Daddy!" Nicholas moans and palms his cock. I press a hand over his, grinding against his thick shaft.

"What?"

"I like when you call me yours."

"Good. Because that tight little hole is all mine. Unless you object, I have every intention of burying myself inside you as soon as we're home," I tease him with a sidelong glance. His long lashes flutter against his cheeks as he groans and arches into our hands.

"Right in the entryway?" Nicholas asks.

"Is that where you want it, boy? Or would you prefer for me to bend you over our bed and fuck you until you see stars?"

"On my back, on the mattress, with my Daddy's hands on my throat."

"Just touching you there?" I know he wants more than my gentle touch tonight.

"No. I want you to choke me, Daddy. Take control. Control everything. Take me apart with your cock and your voice and

your hands. Don't leave any room for anything but belonging to you. I need you to make me feel."

His wording doesn't escape me. Make him feel. Not good, not euphoria. Just feel anything. Depression is an asshole and I hate what it does to my puppy.

"Anything for you, pup. Daddy will make it so good for you."

"You always do." Nicholas turns his hand and twines our fingers. I should pull away to focus on driving, but I don't until the traffic picks up. We cut across town from Kylee's place in the burbs to our cozy little rental in the city proper. I let him rest his fingers on my thigh, giving him more leeway than usual. His touch ghosts over my cock through my pants in an infuriating tease that keeps me on edge until I've parked the car.

I'm tempted to haul my tease of a pup across the console for a kiss. Or maybe arrange him over my lap for a spanking to take the edge off. There really isn't room for that in the car. So instead I take out the keys, give him a sidelong glance that has his full attention hanging on my every word.

"If you get my pretty hole ready for me in our bed by the time I get the mail, I'll shove my cock so far up your ass that you'll be tasting me while I make you come, pup."

He whimpers, pawing at the door handle ineffectually until I reach across his body to push open his door. He bolts for the bedroom. I indulge in watching his perky ass jiggle as he walks away. Then I grab the mail from our box and toss it onto the side table in our entryway without a second glance. I follow a moment behind him, at a more measured pace.

Sometimes, the illusion of control is all it takes to dominate my puppy. I'm just as eager for sex as he is. But holding back a little gives me the control we both need.

By the time I reach our door, Nicholas is naked in the center of our bed. His hand rests on his burgeoning erection, shoulders propped up on the pillows so he can watch me approach with hooded eyes.

His free hand goes to his day collar, tugging on the chain like he needs the reminder of my ownership in his bones. It breaks me open to see that longing in him. I love him so much, love that he craves me on such a deep level.

“That’s my boy. Let go of your little cock and finger yourself. I want to see my hole stretched open for me.”

Nicholas does as he’s told, releasing his dick and brushing his fingers over the crown to gather up a bead of pre-cum to slick his hole. He starts with one finger tracing around his rim, legs splayed open to give me a view. Then moans and arches as he penetrates himself.

“That’s right, boy. Spread it open for me.” I encourage, palming my erection through my pants.

“Daddy!” Nicholas whines. “Need you inside me.”

“The sooner that tight little hole is ready, the sooner Daddy can use it, boy.”

Nicholas hastily crams another finger inside of himself, spreading them wide, twisting them. He fucks himself, his tight pucker making obscene sounds with every thrust. The sheen of slick and the way he takes his fingers, his desperate, needy little grunts, and moans form a symphony. I stand rooted in the doorway because it’s hard to resist his allure for any length of time.

As soon as I take a step toward him, I’m going to want to bury myself in his welcoming heat. Much easier to portray the illusion of an unaffected and aloof observer from a distance. Still, I only have so much restraint.

When Nicholas fucks a fourth finger into his ass, lifting his hips up toward me in a blatant offering, I can’t hold back any longer. His eyes have long since fluttered shut, full lips parted on a moan as he wordlessly begs for me.

I stride across the room to him, grab his ankles to pull him to the edge of the mattress.

“Yes, Daddy!” Nicholas writhes under me as I jam his knees up into his chest and pull out my dick to tease his tight pucker.

I had the foresight to slip a packet of lube into my pocket earlier in the evening and I slick myself with it before shoving inside my boy. Every time I enter him is like coming home and tonight is no different. Slipping inside my lover is intense. Nicholas shudders and arches and sobs out a pained moan as I thrust inexorably into him.

Neither of us is satisfied until I'm balls deep inside Nicholas. He clings to any part of me he can reach as he pants and adjusts to the fullness.

“You good, boy?” I press on his belly, imagining I could see my length bulging inside him. I can't, but it's a hot fantasy. “Daddy's good little fuck sleeve?”

“Ungh, yes, Daddy. So good. Fuck me, Daddy.”

“I will, pup, soon.” I lean down to stroke his precious face as he gazes up at me in adoration.

“Use me.”

“When I'm ready, baby. Daddy just wants your perfect hole squeezing me nice and tight for now.” I pinch one of his nipples and his dick jerks, nudging against my abs. His responsiveness makes me grin. “I want my tight little cum hole to work every inch of Daddy's dick. Can you be a good little stroker and squeeze?”

I flick his other nipple, then lean down to kiss along his throat. I graze my teeth along his jaw, then claim his mouth in a brutal kiss. It's more teeth than tongue as I thrust a little deeper into him.

Nicholas groans, his body tightening around me reflexively as he shudders at my words and my touch. I thrust again. Firm strokes that my boy moves to meet. I bend his legs more firmly toward his chest, pinning him with my body. I want to make him come undone.

“Daddy!” Nicholas bucks against me, taking me deeper. He scrabbles at my hands. “Take my breath away, Daddy. Please. Need—”

I know what he needs and I don't want to hear him beg for it. The tacit acknowledgement that he's hurting and sex is his

way of reaching out of the haze toward me.

I need him, need this connection as much as he does. I wrap my hand around the delicate column of his throat. This used to scare me when he asked for it. Part of me feared he might use me to hurt himself, but that isn't what this is about for us.

He needs to know he can put the whole of himself into my hands and know I'll take care of him. And I will. There are always risks involved, but watching him float when I give him this is something we've both agreed is worth the risk. And I do everything in my power to keep it as safe as possible.

"Two taps if you need me to stop," I remind him in an undertone. Nicholas nods.

I gently squeeze the sides of his neck, just barely giving him compression. Nicholas writhes on my cock. I slam into him, fucking him harder, desperate to drive him over the edge as quick as possible while I've got his life in my hands.

"That's it, pup. Daddy's fuck toy is so good wrapped around me. I'm going to fill you up with my jizz, boy. Make you mine."

Nicholas gurgles, but he's not showing any signs of distress and it's only been a few seconds. I'll relax my grip in a few more seconds, regardless of him asking me to. I squeeze a fraction tighter, plow into him a little harder. Pinch his nipple in my free hand, then glide it toward his cock.

I rest my hand over his lower belly. "Mm, you feel me, boy? Daddy's cock is so deep inside you, filling you up. Are you going to be my good little cock sleeve and come for Daddy?"

Nicholas grunts.

"That's it, boy, come on my cock." I wrap my fist around him and jerk him hard. His entire body tenses under me as cum spurts from his tip to coat my hand. I jerk him through the orgasm, gently releasing the pressure on his throat.

Nicholas gasps in air. I rest my palm on his neck, no longer applying pressure, just letting him know I'm still there and still in control. That he's sucking in greedy breaths because I allow

him to, that he came because I allowed it. That he's mine to command and control. My precious boy.

Our eyes lock as I come buried deep inside him with a low grunt. I smear his cum over his lips.

"Lick up your mess," I demand, smothering him with my palm as he laps at me, eyes blown wide with lust. I push my sticky fingers into his mouth and he slurps each one clean, sending more pleasure jolting to my balls as I release inside of him. I take his face between my hands and kiss him gently as the last tension drains from my body and post-orgasmic lassitude claims me.

"Love you, Daddy." Nicholas reaches up to pat my face, hand fluttery and expression floaty. The boy looks lust-drunk and dazed, his body open to me, his heart in his eyes as he gazes up at me.

"I love you too, Nicholas. More than everything." I ease my cock from him, wincing at the discomfort that flits across his face at the motion. It can't be helped, nor can the wet spot we leave at the edge of the blankets when I pull free.

I kiss him again as a distraction tactic. The two of us remain tangled together in an embrace until I gather the resolve to pull away. I get us both cleaned up for bed; my boy needs his sleep and I need to have him nestled safe in my arms.

By the time I remember to ask about his meds again, I'm more than half-asleep and Nicholas is snoring beside me. He looks too peaceful with his lips gently parted, mouth slack, for me to shake him awake to check.

Besides, Nicholas must have gotten his refill. When he misses doses, he has a hard time falling asleep and here he is snoring. Everything will be fine; I can ask him in the morning.

Chapter 11

Nick

It's disorienting to wake up alone when I distinctly recall falling asleep in a warm embrace. Daddy and I had sex last night. More than once. I got to fuck Q with their new toy as Niko. Then Daddy jerked me off as a reward, and later, he pinned me down and fucked me in our bed, calling me filthy things and using me for his pleasure. I love when he claims me down to the very air I breathe.

It was glorious. The only thing that could have possibly made it better would be if Ethan had joined us. Just the memory of my boyfriend's voice breaking in pleasure as he moans his old nickname for me has my dick taking interest. He's the only one who still calls me Nicky, and I love it.

I give my morning wood an idle stroke and play over memories again, merging them into a fantasy. Being balls deep inside Ethan. My mouth on his neck, his hips moving sinuously in time with my thrusts. Boy might not play the drums anymore, but he sure can still keep a beat.

I overlay that with the memory of Daddy being buried inside me. In my fantasy, his thrusts would dictate how I fuck Ethan. Pure bliss, caught up in pleasure as I'm sandwiched between my two favorite men.

I glance over at the clock, hoping I have time to rub one out before work. Fuck. Nope. Not even close. I must have slept through our alarm and Daddy leaving for work.

That sounds right; he had an early morning for a client meeting today. I have a vague memory of mumbling a plea for five more minutes in bed while he stood over me, adjusting his cuffs. Mm, Daddy always looks delicious in his work suits. Palming myself hard through my boxers, I regret the lack of time to do more with my morning wood as I roll out of bed.

I've been slacking at work since the incident, but showing up late won't look good if I'm really planning on leaving. As I

sashay into the washroom to freshen up for the day, I've got this electric buzz of energy under my skin that tells me I can totally do that. I should do it. Quit.

The thought brings me up short. Is it really that simple? Yeah. It is. And since I'm definitely done with my current school after everything that's gone down, there's no sense drawing things out. I should put in my resignation. Now. Today. I've got this.

A detached part of me realizes that's a terrible plan, recognizes the buzzing thoughts and drive to do all the things right this second for what it is. My misfiring neurons are going to get me in trouble. That part is drowned out by how glorious it is to take action after weeks of helplessness and dejection.

I idly check my pill organizer as I brush my teeth. Empty, just like the compartment for last night and yesterday morning. Must've taken this morning's dose when I got up to piss earlier. I feel better than I have in ages. Since the cheating situation started.

I must have taken my meds. Right? It would be there if I didn't. Unless, no, that's right, I forgot to stop at the pharmacy yesterday.

Not ideal, but it's only a few missed doses. I'll take it after breakfast. I'll just have to add getting my refill to my to-do list. After I quit my job, I'll have plenty of time to run errands. The thought has me bubbling with giddy laughter. No more dealing with broken trust from my students and admin for me.

Daddy would tell me to wait until I've got something else lined up for sure. Be prudent. But I know my worth and I can do better than a principal who caves under the slightest pressure and students who will stab me in the back for trusting them.

I'm out of there. And I'm calling in sick today. Ironically, since this is the most alert I've been in weeks. Since the cheating incident sent me into a depression spiral that had me breaking all my rules.

It would disappoint Daddy if he knew just how far I've pushed his boundaries. I want to blame him for not noticing. For not being around with his work travel and long hours at the office. But he has no clue how bad it's gotten because I've been acting out of character.

I don't normally hide how I'm doing from him. Or pour my cola into caffeine-free root beer bottles, so he won't realize how much I've increased my intake. Or get out of bed after he's asleep to game the night away online.

My usual MO isn't to break the rules, but I'm caught in a depression spiral where I convince myself nothing matters. Where it seems reasonable to conclude that I may as well guzzle an entire six-pack of cola since it won't do anything, or it might actually give me the energy to drag myself off the couch. I ignore the pesky knowledge that my rules exist because breaking them means my meds don't work as well, plunging me off the deep end into mania.

Part of me recognizes that it's self-destructive. The part that seems to be in control doesn't care. I've been acting out like a rebellious teen, and Daddy, empathetic to how upset I am about work, tries to be sensitive instead of strict. I know he's struggling with his workload right now too, and guilty about how much he's had to travel already this year.

He tries to make up for it with coddling, when what I need is his firm hand. I don't know how to ask him for the discipline he's always offered so freely. My meds ran out a couple nights ago and I just let them. Like, I'm playing chicken with the bipolar.

I called in the refill, like a responsible adult. But when the pharmacy left a message that they needed to wait on their order to arrive before they could fill it, I just didn't pick it up last night. I could say I forgot. And I did, but I also didn't care that I forgot.

I hate being depressed, hate the low mood and anhedonia and the worried way Daddy watches me and tries to cajole me into eating healthy food and getting enough sleep.

I'd say it's almost a relief to wake up this morning with the buzzing energy that comes with my manic episodes, but it's not *almost* anything. It's euphoric. For the first time in weeks, I feel connected and alive. And I crave more.

I don't want it to stop. I want to glut myself on emotion, and to double down on every sensation. Everything is so bright and shiny and wonderful from this perspective.

Instead of worrying about what the sudden shift means, I focus on the decision to find a new job. That seems logical, decisive. No more wallowing in misery. I'll need an updated suit for interviews. I lick my lips and consider reaching for my cock again at the reminder of how lickable Daddy looked in the hazy half-asleep of dawn. The way he loomed over me in his suit.

Mm, I definitely need a new one. So that calls for shopping. I can try a new hairstyle while I'm at it. Make a day of it.

The plan taking shape in my head reminds me of playing hooky as a kid with Leo and Ethan. And the memory of those times isn't quite so bittersweet as usual.

I'll always miss Leo and who he was to me. A brother in all but blood, but now I've got a chance to make more awesome memories with the one other person who loved him as much as I did. I want to call Ethan and get him to call in sick as well. The two of us can make a spa day of it. A day of pampering is phase one in my new job hunt. Or phase two, if I whip up that resignation letter for the principal first.

This calls for a celebratory breakfast. Something fancy, like French toast. Not the normal boring kind, either. Extra fancy. Like what they made at the new brunch place where Daddy took me to eat with Q and Kylee a few weeks ago.

They had stuffed French toast with Nutella and bananas inside. So tasty. Decadent chocolate and hazelnut and sweet gooey bananas. Yes, please.

I'm not entirely sure how to go about stuffing a piece of toast, but I pull out all the stuff that sounds like it should go into the recipe. How hard can it be?

Eggs, a splash of milk, cinnamon, and sugar. I think that's how you make French toast. Except the batter looks too runny, so I add enough flour to make it thicker. More like a batter. Then I dip the bread. And hmm. Filling, right, a dollop of Nutella, a few slices of banana, drop that in the pan, dip another slice of bread and top the filling. I snicker like a twelve-year-old at the phrasing.

“Yeah, bread, I'll top the fuck out of you. Fill you right up.” I stab at my gooey—slightly smoking—confection in the pan.

Hmm. The heat must be too high. That's okay, I'm sure it's like pancakes where the first one always comes out bad and this will get better as I go.

I've got plenty of ingredients to work with. I flip my monstrosity, getting thick globs of batter all over the stove. Looks like I'll have to remember to give myself time to clean up before Daddy gets home. After shopping. I've got big plans.

I lower the heat a bit more and open up a new email on my phone app. Unsure how to write a resignation letter, I search for a template. I change around the wording to fit my situation. When it's done, I skim the message for any blatant errors and trim down the number of exclamation points. I also delete a few of the more accusatory lines until the tone is blandly neutral, talking about parting ways. I hit send.

Phase one complete. Phase two, new clothes! Actually finding a new job, phase three, will come after, and it's going to be a good one. Foolproof plan, what could possibly go wrong?

Oh, right! I need to call in sick. Hmm. In hindsight, I should have done that before I sent my resignation email. If I call the secretary now, there's a solid chance she won't know about the email yet, right? Right.

I dial, holding my breath for the answer, but it goes to voicemail. Instead of punching in the extension I know by heart to get an actual person, I cop out and leave a message that I'll need a sub for today. I heavily imply that I can't make it in because of digestive issues. It's not even all that far-

fetches since my stomach ties itself into knots every time I enter the school lately.

I plate up my first—slightly charred—breakfast attempt. Hmm. Not quite what I was going for; better make some cocoa to go with it. I'll need a beverage to wash it down. I assemble my second attempt before dipping it into the batter, and while a few banana slices slip out into the egg glop, mostly it seems less messy. Attempt number two sizzles in the pan as I heat up milk for hot chocolate.

I go through a few more iterations before I get something that isn't burned or raw or both burnt and raw. It's still not as good as the restaurant version. I dust it liberally with powdered sugar and eat it, flaws and all.

Next time I'll find a recipe. And make some hash browns to go with it. Cooking isn't that hard; I could totally make a better version of this to impress Daddy and Ethan.

I smile to myself as I picture feeding them both a fancy breakfast in bed. Mm. Yeah. I want to lick the powdered sugar off Daddy's fingers and get him all slobbery so he can finger my ass open while I slurp leftover syrup off Ethan's chest. Hot.

They could fuck the daylights out of me and then we could share the tasty food after. Who cares if the food is a little cold by the time we get to it, right?

I am so going to ace this cooking thing. And I'll make it up to Daddy that I've been so down in the dumps lately.

Speaking of making things up to Daddy, the kitchen is a mess. I suck the last bits of syrup and sugar off my fork as I survey the aftermath of my cooking. That's going to take a while to set to rights. And I need to get my new interview suit, so I'll just have to clean up after I get back.

I'll have plenty of time. And while I'm at it, I'll work on that master chef thing. I can pick up some nice steaks or something to impress Daddy with tonight. Why wait for weekend brunch to feed my husband the fruits of my hobby when I can get a start on it already tonight?

I add the butcher shop Daddy likes to my mental list of errands and get myself cleaned up and dressed for shopping. Oh, and the toyshop, I bet he'd love coming home to me in an apron and a sparkly new plug. Or a new jock. Or both. Yeah; both would be good. There's some pup stuff I've had my eye on online too. I've got a very busy day ahead of me.

I text Daddy to let him know I'll be making dinner tonight and I text Ethan to invite him over as well. Daddy says he wants to get to know Ethan better. And Ethan has hinted about being open to a three way with us at some point, no time like the present.

I might as well cook to impress them both if I'm going to the trouble. I'll just have to get dressed after I let Daddy fuck me in my new sexy apron.

Do they make sexy aprons? They must. I search for it, and put a few in my shopping cart. I am going to be a super sexy master chef. Oh, that would make an awesome amateur pornsona. I should totally be the sexy chef.

I'll put a pin in that idea, because I've looked into making sex tapes before and Daddy talked me out of it while I'm teaching. Still, I resigned, so maybe we could do that now? No. No, I'm going to find a new job. A better one. With higher pay, and an administration that has my back. After I go shopping for what I need.

Our joint card has a daily spending limit and by the time I finish my little shopping spree, I've hit it. On every card in my wallet. I wince at the text notifications because I know Daddy will also get the messages.

Luckily, the department store where I'm getting the suit lets me open a store line of credit. And I've got enough cash on me to cover three big juicy steaks from the butcher.

I'm sure Daddy won't be upset once he sees what a good boy I am and tastes my delicious meat. On that note, Daddy's meat belongs in my mouth.

I miss Daddy and Ethan. I text them both as much, pleased when Ethan agrees to dinner with me and Daddy finally. Time

to head home to cook so he won't regret accepting my invitation.

Chapter 12

Clark

The text alert I receive from our bank late in the day makes all my internal Daddy alarm bells go off at once. The only times Nicholas does this are when he's manic. He hasn't had a bad manic episode in years though. Nothing where he maxed out—holy shit.

My notifications tell me that my husband has maxed out both our joint cards and the one that's in his name only. Fuck. I rub my temples, getting them to text me the alerts for that one took some hoop jumping, but I'm glad we did it now.

I call the bank to make sure they are freezing our accounts. Then I log into his email to see how much of his online shopping I can return before it ships. I cringe as I do it. No matter how many times he's granted me permission to do this for him when he needs help, it still feels like an invasion of privacy to open his emails.

My first order of business is finding everything with a receipt and going to the websites to cancel the orders. Most of them make that easy since they haven't shipped yet. I hate telling my boy no, or denying him anything, but most of what he's bought this time is weird kitchen gadgets. Stuff that I know neither of us will actually use more than once.

A high-end kitchen torch? Fuck, Nicholas, my boy can burn cereal. There is no way he needs a mini blowtorch. I hesitate over the order for new pup gear. But no, he isn't getting a reward for all his reckless spending.

I forward the puppy gear confirmation to myself for future gifting ideas before I process the cancelation. I know that makes me a soft touch, but I can't really care. It's not like he's actively trying to be a little shit. He needs help when he gets like this, not punishments.

I cancel almost everything without a problem, thankful for the system we put in place after the last manic spending spree.

Our fail-safes seem to have caught this one before it hit our bottom line too hard.

As I'm skimming his messages to be sure I caught everything, my gut lurches. He emailed his principal this morning with the subject line 'I resign.' Fuck. My heart breaks for the things his brain does to him when he's like this. My sweet boy is going to regret not thinking this through.

I'm contemplating what to do about the letter of resignation when my phone buzzes with another text. I'm dreading more bad news as I open the message app, and then I ache at how sweet he can be.

Nicholas: I miss you Daddy. Can't wait to see you tonight.

Clark: I love you, boy.

Clark: We need to have a chat.

Nicholas: Don't be mad at me. I got you some surprises!

How is he so painfully sweet? My darling boy is in for a very different night than he has planned. I don't want to crush his buoyant mood, but it's no more the full picture of him than the depressed version of Nicholas who's been moping around the house lately.

I want him to be okay. Not this amped up over the top grandiose version of himself that's all racing thoughts and brilliant plans that never quite work out the way he envisions them. Brilliant plans capable of torching our savings and his job in one fell swoop.

I dry wash my face, shoot a message to my boss that I'm going to finish up the report I was working on this afternoon from home, and clock out. I need to get home before he executes whatever kitchen related carnage he had in mind when he bought out the Gourmet Warehouse. Hopefully, he doesn't trash the kitchen too badly before I get there.

Clark: I wanted to order in, so don't cook tonight, baby.

I text him, but I know that even his favorites won't be enough to forestall him for long if he's got a bug up his ass

about cooking for me. It would be a sweet gesture if he wasn't such a disaster in the kitchen.

In part because instead of going for something simple or following a recipe, he gets these grandiose notions that he can somehow intuit the recipe for a perfect soufflé. Or whatever other dish pops into his head.

I'm tense all the way home, unsure of what to expect when I walk in the door. The living room is clean, at least. No sign of his most recent depression nest on the couch with half our blankets piled high on top of his prone form as he zones out to video games. Half-full soda cans and snack food wrappers—some still with the food partially eaten—littering every surface. He cleaned that up. Why am I not breathing a sigh of relief?

Oh right, because I know that he's not doing better, so much as worse in the opposite direction. Loud music and the sounds of someone aggressively chopping food and the sink running clue me into where I'll find Nicholas. I enter our kitchen with a sense of foreboding.

If the living room had lulled me into a false complacency that Nicholas is fine, the kitchen makes up for it in spades. I doubt there's a single clean utensil left in the cabinets, most of which are hanging open. Their contents are stacked precariously in and around the sink and all over our counters.

Nicholas looks up at me with an overbright grin, hands covered in—well, something that looks suspiciously like raw meat juice.

“Daddy! You're home!” He abandons the poor, mangled food to make a beeline toward me.

He's wearing a new apron that flaps as he moves and the slogan catches my eye ‘once you have my meat in your mouth, you're gonna want to swallow.’ It makes me snort. Nicholas watches me read it and poses for me with a cheesy grin.

“Funny right?” He gestures at his chest. That smile, his excitement at seeing me, it gets me every single time. I love

this boy, no matter how much of a chaos demon he can be when he gets like this.

“It’s certainly a statement. I missed you today, pup.”

I brace for an overenthusiastic hug. A voice I don’t immediately recognize pulls my husband up short before he can fling himself into my arms, meat covered hands and all. Ethan stands from where he was crouched by our dishwasher. Presumably loading it with all the filthy dishes Nicholas somehow generated over the course of a single day.

Fuck, this is shaping up to be a bad one. And I can’t help blaming myself for not paying attention to the signs. I’m all but certain he forgot to get his meds yesterday. I should have followed up on that.

On top of ignoring his sleep schedule and eating poorly recently, this was all but inevitable. All those things are risk factors for him and instead of being the firm Daddy he needs, I gave him enough slack to hurt himself. That ends here. This is so not the impression I want to make on the other man in my boy’s life.

“Nicky, hands,” Ethan chides, catching Nicholas around the waist to stop him before he can round the kitchen island to come to me. “You don’t want to make your Daddy sick, right?”

“Right. I knew that.” Nicholas rolls his eyes and pivots toward the sink to wash up.

“Soap.” Ethan and I both chorus as Nicholas runs his hands under the water briefly. I catch his boyfriend’s eye and give him a rueful grin.

“Hello, Ethan. I didn’t know you were coming over tonight. Did Nicholas tell you I’m joining you both for dinner?” I tip my chin toward Nicholas as I approach Ethan, hand outstretched in greeting.

“I told him, Daddy,” Nicholas chimes in as he lathers up with soap.

“He did. I didn’t realize it was a surprise.” Ethan gives my hand a firm shake. “Unless Nicky just forgot to tell you about

inviting me?”

“It does appear to have slipped his mind, yes. But I’m glad you agreed to join us. You’re welcome anytime. Nicholas has been eager for us to get better acquainted.” I don’t mention that the circumstances could be better; I’m sure Ethan is aware of that already. “He’s told me so much about you over the years. I know we met in passing the other day, but it’s lovely to put a face to the name properly.”

Ethan pales slightly, then nods. It takes me a moment to realize the potential implication that I’m putting his face to his deadname. And Nicholas gave me that information, before he knew it was a deadname. It’s not something that’s ever going to pass my lips. “Relax, Ethan, whatever story you think he’s told me, I can assure you, I’ve heard worse.” I wink at him, hoping to put him at ease without explicitly telling him I know the thing he doesn’t want me to know.

Ethan’s tense shoulders ease down from his ears at the teasing, and there’s a twinkle in his eye as he asks. “Oh, did he tell you we used to play Houdini?”

“He mentioned it a time or two.” I nod.

“Will you tie him up, Daddy? I want to see him naked and trussed up like a holiday feast for us to share,” Nicholas pipes in as he dries his clean hands.

“Us, is it?” I smirk at both boys. “Did you ask Ethan if he wants that?”

“Ethan, do you want Daddy to help me tie you up so we can spit roast you in my bed?” Nicholas asks, the portrait of faux innocence.

“Um, considering the unspeakable things I caught you doing to that poor steak when I arrived, I’m not sure I care to mix kitchen talk with sex right now, Nicky,” Ethan quips. His gaze darts to the cutting board. There’s a meat tenderizer beside it and I wince at the mashed remains of what appears to have started out as a very nice ribeye. Damn.

Nicholas’s eyes flash with anger. “I know how to cook!” His hands go to his hips and he looks like a petulant child as he

stomps his foot.

“I never said you couldn’t, just that you aren’t as experienced with making steak.” Ethan holds up his hands placatingly.

“I wanted it to be tender. The hammer thingy is supposed to be a tenderizer. Why call it that if that’s not what it does?”

Ethan blows out an exasperated breath. “Nicky...”

“Nicholas,” I say at the same time, in my sternest warning tone. “That isn’t how we speak to our guests.”

“He’s not a guest. He’s my Ethan. And I can talk to him how I want.”

“Right, you need to go to your crate for a minute to cool down, pup.” I point toward our bedroom.

He needs a chance to back down without losing face. Time to cool off before this escalates and I need a minute to get the kitchen disaster under control before I snap at him and say something we’ll both regret. Especially if he cares as much about Ethan as I suspect he does.

It doesn’t take much of a nudge to have Nicholas in puppy mode at the best of times. It’s harder for him now, but I can see the change in his demeanor when I address him as my pup. And I know it helps him to calm down when he can’t cope with the racing thoughts. Still, Niko glowers at me.

For the barest instant, I know a refusal is on the tip of his tongue. And if he defies me openly, then I’ll have to take him to task. I don’t want to go there.

He doesn’t need a punishment or a huge confrontation in front of Ethan, just a correction. Help with restoring his equilibrium. That starts with getting him calm and receptive instead of keyed up, irritable, and hyped on the high of riding his mania. The worst is that sense of invincibility that will always get him into trouble if he gets in over his head.

“Crate. Now.” I snap in my most no-nonsense Daddy voice.

When he glares, I meet him in intensity and just point toward our room. Niko drops to all fours with a loud huff and

slinks past me toward the hall.

If he had one, his tail would be tucked between his legs. He gives me a reproachful look over his shoulder and a whiny little bark from the doorway. I stand firm, pointing toward our room and snapping to convey I mean now. Niko goes.

“Um, should I leave you two to figure this out?” Ethan asks, his hands full of our dirty dishes.

Airing our dirty laundry in front of a stranger should embarrass me. But he’s not a stranger, and if he shares Nicholas’s feelings, he is going to see my boy at his worst.

“No. He invited you for dinner, and this is a side of him you’ll see sooner or later. Might as well stay. Unless you want to leave?” I ask.

Ethan meets my eyes and shakes his head decisively. That loosens some of the tension in my chest. Nicholas didn’t scare Ethan off yet. He isn’t about to get hurt by Ethan walking away like so many casual flings Nicholas has let close over the years.

“No, I want to be here for him,” Ethan insists, going back to stacking up dirty dishes. “As long as I’m not intruding. Um, is he going to be okay alone for a while?”

I hesitate to disclose his medical information. That’s not mine to share. “He’ll be fine in his crate. Pup time usually calms him down.”

“Okay. Because this isn’t really new. He told me he’s got bipolar. And he used to go through phases where all he wanted to do was lie around playing video games and binging snack-cakes. And then he’d snap out of it and have all these grand adventures planned. Made him the life of the party among our friend group when he was—I guess it was manic, right?”

“Probably hypomanic, considering it never derailed his life until he got his diagnosis. But yeah, Nicholas still gets those big ideas.”

“He’s on meds, right? He said they help?” Ethan asks.

“Yes,” I confirm, though I haven’t seen him take them in a few days.

Damn, I really hope he wasn’t misremembering when he said he took them the night before last. Still, one day off of his meds can be enough to cause trouble. I go to look for his pills, and find the empty bottle shoved to the back of the cupboard behind some OTC painkillers.

“Right, well, step one is going to be calling his therapist and the pharmacy about this.” I shake the empty bottle and rub my temples. “Fuck.”

I lean hard against the counter and try to wrangle my guilt into something more useful.

“Don’t be mad at him.” Ethan approaches me hesitantly. “He was trying to make you a nice dinner. Said he wanted to impress us so we’d like each other.”

I smile despite the self-recriminations rampaging through me. “I’m not mad at him, just pissed at myself for letting the situation spiral out of control. It’s my job to take care of him.”

Ethan shrugs. “I don’t know all that much about your kinks, but he’s still a grown ass adult capable of taking his own meds.”

“Normally, I’d agree with you. But when I agreed to being his Daddy, I took on the responsibility to take care of him and I failed. When everything went down with his job, I was out of town when he needed me. I knew he was struggling, and I didn’t follow up after he told me he forgot to get his refill.” I jiggle the bottle.

We have our rules for a reason and it’s not because I’m some sort of twenty-four seven dom looking to control my pup’s every action. That might work for some people, but it’s not us. I give Nicholas rules because he needs the structure I provide for him.

“I should call in the refill. Excuse me for a moment.”

“Sure, I’ll just finish loading the dishwasher.” Ethan suits his actions to his words.

“You don’t have to clean up after us,” I say, but I’m thankful for the extra hands.

Ethan shakes his head. “It’s fine; I want to help. Go make your call.”

I pull out my phone and dial the number on the label. The automated system tells me the refill is ready for pickup. I heave a sigh of relief at the confirmation that Nicholas was already taking care of this; he just got sidetracked. I can pick up the meds before the pharmacy closes, no problem.

Still, guilt roils in my belly. There are ways that Nicholas needs me to be his caregiver all the time, not just during our scenes, and I dropped the ball.

This is fixable, but that doesn’t assuage my guilt. Not when I saw it happening, and I didn’t step in to fix it until it got so out of control that Nicholas has been off his meds for who knows how long. And racked up enough credit card debt to have me worried about more hidden surprises lurking in our finances.

Worst of all, he’s likely lost his job after that email I saw by mistake. Fuck me. I hang up and drop my face into my hands to collect myself.

Ethan sets a stack of dishes by the sink and pats my back, reminding me of his presence. “Hey, don’t beat yourself up. I might not know you, but I know that’s the last thing Nicky would want. He adores you.”

Much as it’s hard to see right now, Ethan’s right. I force a tight smile. “You know him pretty well, huh?”

“We were best friends for a long time,” Ethan says with a self-deprecating shrug.

I take a deep breath. “Yeah. Seems to me like you still are. I should, uh, see what I can salvage.” I gesture toward the mangled meat. Ethan screws up his face in disgust.

“Um, yeah, he still can’t cook worth shit, huh?”

I chuckle, and Ethan joins in ruefully.

“Nope.” I shake my head. “It takes too much patience to follow a recipe when he’s manic. And he loses track of what he’s doing if there are too many steps or too much waiting involved.”

“That sounds like our Nicky,” Ethan says it so fondly that I can’t begrudge him that little ‘our’. Part of me wants to ask him what claim he has on my boy, but I know the answer. Love.

Nicholas loves him. Not the same love he has for me, but it’s still love. And from their interactions lately, it’s requited. After seeing how Ethan has stepped in to accept Nicholas in his depression nest, staying up late to play video games with him when he needed a friend, I’ve come to like him. And now, as he doesn’t bat an eye at Nicholas’s over the top plans to bite off far more than he can chew in the kitchen, I can see why Nicholas adores him.

Ethan could be good for Nicholas. Something he needs. A softer sort of caring than the stern control I give him.

“Okay.” Ethan surveys the mess, then claps his hands together decisively. “How about I try to save the steaks and you can clean enough dishes for us to eat off? Since I’m not sure where everything goes.”

“Sounds good.” I nod.

Ethan smiles and rolls up his sleeves to get to work. The two of us move around each other awkwardly at first, me collecting barely soiled dishes from every surface and him seasoning the steaks liberally with salt and pepper.

“You two have quite the kitchen setup. I take it that you cook?” Ethan asks as he unearths a cast-iron skillet from under two other pots Nicholas must have set atop it.

I suppress a groan. Based on the way he’s got them stacked and the wet outline of a steak left in the pan on top, I suspect Nicholas tested which of our pans would fit all three of the steaks. So those will all need a thorough wash. Wonderful.

“I do. Not as much lately. I’ve been swamped at work.” I grab the dirty pans and add them to the obscene stack I’ve still

got to wash.

Ethan gives me a sympathetic smile. “Ah. Nicky mentioned you’ve been busier than usual lately. Want to talk about it?”

“Not much to talk about.” I shrug and turn to finish loading the dishwasher so I can start it. Ethan has things stacked nicely, so I don’t have to rearrange much to jam in a few more items. “My favorite coworker, Pam, is out on parental leave and her temporary replacement is taking forever to get up to speed, so I’m stuck picking up the slack. And that’s meant more travel than usual, which I am coming to realize no longer works for me.”

“Ah. Sorry to hear it. Is there anything you can do about it?” Ethan turns on the burner to heat the skillet and preheats the oven. “I’m going to sear these, and then throw them in the oven to make sure we kill any germs he might have pulverized into the meat, if that’s alright?”

“It’s fine. I can live with medium to medium-well.”

“Cool. And your work? Anything to be done there?”

“Not easily. There isn’t much to be done except continue training the new guy. But once I wrap up my current project, yes. I have some ideas.”

“Cool. Hope it all works out.” Ethan sounds genuine as he reaches for the packet of disinfecting wipes beside the sink. He starts wiping down the meat-contaminated work surfaces, adding Nicholas’s utensils to the sink full of dirty dishes.

“Thanks. What about you?” I ask.

There’s a large pot of water on the back burner and I brace myself before checking the contents. Three large potatoes bob in a bit of water. Not quite enough to cover them, we’ll need to add more. Nicholas peeled them, but left them otherwise whole. They’re going to take a while to cook that way.

“Mashed potatoes?” I ask, tipping the pot toward Ethan.

He chokes back a laugh and glances toward the hallway to be sure Nicholas isn’t listening in before he shakes his head

and corrects me. “He said he had a brilliant plan for the perfect baked potatoes that would be ‘fluffy like mashed’.”

I groan. “He doesn’t like the skin. And I guess he figured they’d bake faster if he boiled them first?” I poke at the water to see if he started cooking them yet. Still cold. I don’t think baking them is going to work well without their skins.

“Guess we’re making mashed potatoes.” Ethan finishes wiping his workstation clean. “Got another cutting board?”

I hand him one that somehow escaped Nicholas’s notice. Ethan fishes out the potatoes to chop them into smaller chunks, then returns them to the pot. I go around replacing the seemingly random assortment of ingredients Nicholas took out.

“So, you were telling me about your work?” I prompt after a moment of peacefully sharing the kitchen with my metamour. I’ve done this song and dance before. But usually Nicholas’s hookups just watch me cook for them instead of pitching in to help.

They always seem awkward and unsure of their place in the house I share with my pup. Ethan seems like he’s at ease around me as we collaborate to fix dinner. I want to get to know him. Already, I can see how we might fit together in a way that is entirely independent of Nicholas, but still tied to our mutual love for him.

The warm glow of possibilities unfurling suffuses through me, despite the less than ideal circumstances of the evening. Working alongside Ethan in the kitchen fills me with a sense of comradery. I’ve missed all the domestic moments my job has been stealing from my family time lately.

“I’m a financial advisor at TD. I’ve worked for the bank in various roles for going on eight years now? Started as a student intern and never left. It’s been a culture shift moving out west, but I like it so far. Same company, same general job description, but the clients are different here.” Ethan shrugs. “It’s steady work that pays the bills, so I can’t complain.”

From what I know of his story, that makes sense. The kid has had to fend for himself since his first semester at university; it's no wonder he pursued a career that promised him financial stability. "Good for you. So, what do you do for fun, then?"

"You mean like video games with your husband? Or kinky bedroom fun?"

Ethan shoots me a cheeky grin as he drops a double fistful of cubed potatoes into the pot of water to make room on the cutting board. He adds salt and sets it on high to boil. He's got a cute little dimple when he smiles like that. I want to see more of it.

"Also with my husband," I add dryly. For a second his smile freezes like he's worried I might have objections to that. I don't, so I smile to soften the words and he laughs.

"True. It's been amazing reconnecting with him. I, uh, I'm not sure how to say this without it coming off weird, but like, I appreciate you sharing his heart with me?" He screws up his face and shakes his head. "Ew, yeah, that sounded weird, right? I just mean, not everyone would be comfortable with our history, so I wanted to thank you for not making him choose between us. And being so chill with me. I can see why he adores you."

"You can?"

Ethan nods. "Yeah. You give him what he needs."

"So do you," I say, without thinking it through. Because Ethan gives my pup part of what he needs. And so do I. And as much as I've been working through my jealousy about Ethan in the abstract, my metamour is just what our Nicholas needs.

Ethan is a friend and confidante. The sweet, caring boy to his overeager puppy. I wonder if he would play that way with us both. Only one way to find out for sure.

"So, I'm sure Nicholas has mentioned that we sometimes have three-ways with his other partners. Is that something you would be open to?"

Ethan blows out a breath, freezing with the knife hovering over the last potato. I want to take back the words at seeing how uncomfortable they make him. This isn't the time. Except I know this is exactly what Nicholas wanted when he invited Ethan to dinner tonight. He wanted us to bond.

“Uh. You know I'm trans, right?”

“I gathered as much from the stories Nicholas used to tell me about you. And for the record, that doesn't change my question in the least. I am sorry you didn't get to disclose that information in your own time. And for what it's worth, I'm sure Nicholas didn't intend to out you when he told me how excited he was to run into you again after all this time.”

Ethan shrugs. “I mean, it's hard to blame him for caring enough about me to still be telling our stories after the way I cut him out of my life. I wish—I should have trusted him. Then he could have told you stories about all the wild things he used to do with Ethan instead of having to use my deadname. Right?”

I shrug. “I can't say you didn't hurt him, but I think you were probably hurting too, from what he said. You made the best choices you could at the time.”

“I'd make different ones now, if I could do it over.” Ethan sighs and methodically chops up the last of the potato.

“Then that's what counts.”

“I'd be down to fool around with you two. Can we discuss it more with him? When he's better.”

“Of course. For now, would you mind answering a few questions for me?”

“Yeah. Nicky knows what I like already. I'm pretty sure he was hoping we'd hit it off tonight. Might as well tell you too.” He gives me a cheeky smile.

“Might as well.” I agree. “So, what sort of kinks would you be open to including in a scene with both of us, if any?”

“Well, Nicky already told you I enjoy being tied up for sex, right?”

“Yes.”

“I also enjoy playing with him as a puppy.”

“As in with both of you as pups?” My mind races ahead with potential scenarios for a matched set of pups at my beck and call. We could have fun with that.

Ethan gives it some consideration, then shakes his head. “I don’t think that’s me. I wouldn’t mind calling you Daddy or Sir when we’re, uh, doing a scene. Or if it feels right.”

“I’d like that. And could I call you boy?”

Ethan’s eyes light up and he nods. “Yes, please.”

“Have you done many scenes, boy? Been involved in kink before?” I throw in the diminutive to break the ice. He seemed uncertain about titles, so sprinkling them into conversation seems like an easy way to help him get comfortable with it.

The word flows easily from my tongue after years of playing with Nicholas and his various boyfriends, but there’s something about using it on Ethan that’s different. Right. I want to hear him call me ‘Sir.’ I want his respect and for him to look at me with the same open affection he has for my puppy. He flushes prettily at being called ‘boy’, but doesn’t otherwise acknowledge it.

“Sort of? I’ve only really started to explore kink in the last few years. After my bottom surgery. Before that I wasn’t comfortable being naked with other people. Not even partners I trusted, really. It made dating awkward for the longest time. So, yeah. I am open to at least hearing out just about anything you two might be into doing with me.”

I smile at him. “It’s good that you didn’t say you’d try anything with us; blanket statements like that can get you into trouble. So we’ll talk out any scenes we might have in advance. I won’t spring piss play on you midstream or anything.”

Ethan makes a face and I laugh.

“Not your thing?” I ask.

“No.” Ethan shakes his head.

“That’s fine. Tying you up and telling my pup to mount and breed you?”

“Mount yes, breed not so much.” He shudders. “Pregnancy freaks me out.”

“Noted. Any other hard limits?”

“Probably no bodily fluids? Except cum, and I mean, spit is okay. I’ve noticed he’s very, uh, mouthy?”

I laugh, because yeah, Niko loves to tongue-bathe the people he loves. “He is. You can tell him no if you don’t like it.”

“I like it. And I like it when he tells me what to do. I know he’s a switch. I’m not.”

“You just like to submit?”

“Yeah. I like taking care of him when he’s a pup, but in like, a devoted to him, service sort of way. Not in a bossy, ‘telling him what to do’ way, if that makes sense?”

“It does.” I tip my head to consider him. “Tell you what, I’ve got a checklist; why don’t we all fill one out and share the results as a starting off point to compare how our interests align? I know they can be a bit cliché, but there’s a reason for that, right?”

“Yeah. Sounds good.” Ethan tosses the last few potatoes into the pot and then comes over to help me wash the dishes.

We start out with him drying and putting away, but it quickly becomes apparent that it would be faster if we swap roles. Since Nicholas took out so many dishes, it’s hard for Ethan to discern what goes where.

By the time the potatoes are soft enough to mash, and the perfectly seared steaks are in the oven to finish cooking, we’ve restored the kitchen to a usable space.

“I hate to abandon you in the kitchen on our first dinner date, but would you mind terribly if I step out to have a little chat with Nicholas?”

“Not at all. This should be ready in about ten more minutes. I’ll get it all plated up and wait for you guys. Unless you want me to give you some space?”

“No. Stay and join us; it’s been good chatting with you.”

Ethan beams at me. And I have the strangest urge to kiss his cheek, right over that beguiling dimple of his. I don’t, instead I pat him on the back as I pass him. “The food smells delicious, boy. I can’t wait to try it.”

“Thank you, Sir,” Ethan says, ducking his chin bashfully.

God, that makes my pants tight. That tentative little ‘Sir’ from him is like music to my ears. And he said he was open to playing that way with me, so I refuse to carry guilt over getting turned on by him or that title leaving his lips. Or wondering how he’d sound bound and on his knees for us as he begs Daddy to give him what he needs.

Hot on the heels of that little fantasy, guilt swamps me. Nicholas isn’t well and here I am fantasizing about his boyfriend. Except, this situation with his mania is temporary. It’s something I know we can handle. We’ve gone through it before and will likely go through it again. He isn’t to the point where it’s an immediate crisis; he’s safe in our room. He’ll be alright.

And it’s a relief to know Nicholas has found another partner who can come alongside us when he needs support. Someone who sees his illness for what it is, and wants to help. That, more than anything, is what’s drawing me to Ethan right now. The fact he loves my boy as much as I do and I want to share with him. Nicholas, our hospitality, sex, everything.

Still, we need to address the matter at hand first. I’m not sure how far Nicholas’s exciting day extended beyond his online shopping and the kitchen, so I’m nervous as I slip down our hallway to check on him. The guest room looks untouched when I peek inside, other than the bed being rumpled from Nicholas and Ethan sleeping in it a few nights ago.

Nicholas was supposed to change the bedding after his sleepover. Instead, he just piled his depression nest blankets on

top of the duvet. Looks like he's got some laundry to add to his chore list for the week.

I ease the door shut and go down the hall to our bedroom. Niko is in his crate, like a good boy. When I step into the room, he wriggles his ass. There's no tail to wag, but I know he would be doing exactly that if he had one in.

When he crawled inside, he pulled the door shut behind him. It isn't latched. Still, he doesn't try to leave the crate before I give him his release command. The pet bed lining the bottom is comfy enough that I'm not worried about leaving him in there to cool off for a while when he needs it.

Several bags lie where he left them piled precariously near our closet, a visual inventory of where he went today. I recognize some higher end logos. The boy sure can cover some ground when he's like this.

It's like a switch flips in his brain and he is constant, whirling energy in need of an outlet. All drive, no steering to help him channel his energy productively. Which is why we have our systems in place to help him. Systems that I let fail.

"Hey, pup. Daddy's excited to see you too. Come here." I swing the door to his comfy human-sized crate open and fling out my arms to catch him.

Niko jolts to his feet and barrels into my arms. Even crouched low and braced for the impact, he knocks me on my ass and I've got my arms full of my eager, wriggly puppy.

Niko whines fretfully as he licks every inch of my face and presses his bulk as close to me as he can get. Like he wishes he could fuse his body with mine and make all the racing thoughts go away.

"I know, boy. I know. Daddy's here. I've got you. You don't have to be Nicholas tonight if you aren't ready. My sweet Niko. When you're ready, we need to discuss what happened today, but it's okay if you need time. Just one quick thing first, okay?" I gently, but firmly grip his chin until he settles and makes eye contact without trying to lick me. "You need permission for big purchases, remember? So if you bought

anything that broke our rules about new lines of credit or large cash purchases, I need the receipts before bed tonight. Can my good boy fetch all the receipts from today? Everything you bought or ordered.”

Niko whines as he paws at my hand. And then he goes to get his wallet from next to the pile of shopping bags. I stand and straighten out my clothing. Niko crawls back to me, gingerly gripping the worn leather in his teeth.

Slips of paper poke out around the edges. Niko sits at my feet, gazing up at me anxiously. When I flip open the wallet, there are a handful of crumpled receipts there. I scan the numbers, wincing internally and hoping that most of what he bought can be returned.

There’s a shiny new card for a store line of credit tucked next to his bank card. That’s going to need closing. We’ve been through this song and dance before, although it’s been a long while since it’s been an issue. Our rules, his therapy, and his meds have worked for years to keep his mania in check and curtail his spending when he has the odd hypomanic episode.

Niko inches closer, pressing his chest into my legs and whining. I pat his head and ruffle his hair. He tries to lick my hand, then buries his face against my thighs. “You’re my good boy, huh, Niko?”

He barks his agreement.

“Want to come eat dinner with Ethan and Daddy?”

Niko whines and paws at me.

“You can join us as a pup, if that’s what you need right now.”

Niko wriggles his ass and whines. I find one of his tails and clip it through his belt loop to help ground him in his pupspace. He’ll have a harder time getting into trouble that way.

Niko follows me out to the kitchen. I need to get his meds refilled. And call his doctor about whether to start him back on his usual dose ASAP or start with low and slow again. Failing

that, I'll ask at the pharmacy. It's been a while since he started the medications. Still, with all the blood tests they did to be sure his levels were safe, I don't want to take any chances with his health.

I also vividly remember reading the stats about self harm when starting meds like this, with him being depressed so recently and all this boundless energy; it makes me worry. I'll have to keep a close eye on him. I promised to take care of my pup, and the fact I don't know for sure how long he's been off his meds is a problem.

I'm kicking myself for not taking action as soon as I noticed he was depressed. He rarely cycles this quickly, but he's been on meds for most of the time I've known him. For now, I go with my gut and lead my boy back to the kitchen. He's safe for now and I'm sure getting back on his meds and a check in with his therapist will help nip this episode in the bud.

"Oh, are we having dinner with Niko tonight?" Ethan asks. He's made himself at home in our kitchen, setting the table as the food finishes cooking.

It would be nice, a perfect romantic meal between the three of us, if Niko weren't struggling. Niko grins as he bounds up to his boyfriend and plants both hands on Ethan's shoulders to get into prime face-licking position. Ethan giggles and lets him get away with the terrible manners, laughingly protesting as he giggles into my pup's mouth. He eventually pulls Niko into a proper kiss that has my pup whining with need and my dick perking up.

I can't deny they look good together. Happy. For all that I've struggled with trusting Ethan, considering their past, I love seeing Nicholas happy. That he's happy with another man is inconsequential.

"Hey, I know food is just about ready, but would you mind staying with him while I run to the pharmacy?" I interrupt when Niko deepens the kiss and gives every indication he's about a second away from dry-humping Ethan right there in the kitchen. Shameless little horndog that he is, I don't doubt he'd do it either.

“Don’t you want to eat while it’s hot?” Ethan asks, pulling away from Niko.

Niko settles onto his haunches, sitting at Ethan’s feet and nudging his face against his boyfriend’s hands to solicit attention. Ethan obligingly pats his head. Niko’s tongue lolls out in a happy pant as his gaze flicks between me and Ethan.

“I’ll eat once I get his med situation figured out. The pharmacy closes in an hour, so I should go now.”

“Want us to come along?” Ethan offers.

“I don’t think he’s up for that right now. Stay, enjoy dinner. I’ll be back as soon as I can.”

“No, it’ll keep warm in the oven. I don’t mind mine a little more cooked if you don’t. We can eat when you get home. Maybe he’ll be ready to be human Nicky again by then. Huh, Niko?” Ethan scruffs Niko’s ears.

Niko woofs affably. I go over to kiss his brow. Ethan is watching us when I straighten up. I ignore the part of me that sort of wants to kiss his cheek as I thank him for taking care of the man I love. The man we both love. Instead, I clap a hand on his shoulder.

“I’m glad you’ll be here for him. I’ll be back as soon as I can, boys. Behave while Daddy is out.” I leave the admonishment vague enough to apply to them both, and it’s fulfilling to call them both my boys.

They both gaze up at me with matching innocent expressions that do things to my heart. They look so right together. I want them both on their knees for me. And I want to watch Ethan dote on our puppy, but the sooner I leave, the sooner I can get Niko his meds.

I grab the empty prescription bottle and our insurance card. As I’m walking out, I dial the number to leave a message for Nicholas’s therapist. I’ll apprise her of the situation and schedule an urgent appointment for him when she gets into her office tomorrow. We’ll have him right as rain soon.

I’ll leave a message with the doctor’s office too. The odds aren’t good that I’ll get in touch with an actual human until

morning, but I want to resolve this as fast as possible. Still, as I stride out the door, it's a profound relief to know I'm leaving my pup in loving hands while I do what he needs to help him.

Chapter 13

Ethan

Clark leaving me with Niko after the cooking debacle seems like a turning point. Before tonight, I got the impression Clark was tolerating me. As though I was just the next in a long line of temporary flings.

Or worse, that he saw me as some sort of threat to his happiness with Nicky. Clark never did anything overtly to make me uncomfortable visiting or voice chatting with Nicky, but I wasn't sure where I stood with him. And he's hot enough that his silver fox charm intimidated me on the few occasions we met in passing. But tonight, he seems happy for me to be here, relieved that I can stay with Nicky while he runs errands.

For the first time, I can see a path to what Nicky has hinted at wanting. Some sort of relationship where I can be with them both. Clark is hot, so I wasn't opposed to the concept, but after working in the kitchen together and worrying over Nicky together, he's more than a sexy stranger; he's fast becoming someone I can relate to.

As soon as Clark leaves to get his meds, Niko paces around their home. He whines like he's looking for Clark. I'm sure he's insecure after everything; I know I would be in his position.

“Your Daddy had to run an errand, Niko.”

I try to distract him by scruffing his ears and petting all over his back the way he likes. He whirls and snaps at my hand, but he's gentle enough that I'm pretty sure he doesn't mean anything by taking my hand between his teeth. He's just grumpy. I still leave him alone once he releases my hand from his mouth.

Niko is keyed up enough that his pacing soon turns into an awkward four-legged human version of the zoomies that I'm nervous will end with him crashing into furniture.

“Go get your toys,” I say, hoping to channel all that energy.

Niko dashes to the guest room door where he paws and whines pathetically until I open it for him. That gets me a happy tail wag. Niko licks my fingers before he plunges his face into a basket of dog toys and pulls out a soft braided rope. He parades it in front of me, taunting me into grabbing for it. Then he darts out of reach.

We play like that until he charges out to the living room with his prize. He seems delighted when I chase after him and keep the game going. I eventually get hold of his toy, and he growls playfully as I tug gently.

After a bit of fruitless tugging and playful growling, he releases his grip. I sit in the middle of the living room, gliding the toy across the low pile carpet for him to chase and mouth at, barking every so often.

We must play for longer than I'd thought; it seems like no time at all before I hear the door open and Clark's footsteps in the hallway.

I brace for his reaction to his pup playfully growling as I tease Niko with his toy. Clark smiles when he walks in on the two of us playing.

"You got his meds?" I ask.

He's holding up a crinkly paper bag triumphantly, so I'm pretty sure I know the answer. "Yep, they had it ready. I guess he called it in, but they were out of stock at the time and he never made it to pick up the refill after work yesterday. We had a busy night."

"Oh." The explanation is so benign it makes me sad to see how much such a simple oversight messed with Niko's equilibrium. Granted, he's been so stressed about work and probably about seeing me, even if our dating is a positive stress. I hope it is, anyway.

"Yeah. We'll be having a chat about that," Clark says, but he's smiling at Niko as he speaks.

Clark steps into the living room. Niko sees him and turns his attention to greeting his Daddy with an excited bark and full-body tail waggle. He gathers himself to jump up on Clark,

but Clark snaps his fingers and gives a command instead. “Sit.”

Niko drops his ass to the floor and sits up like a good pup.

“Good boy.” Clark scratches Niko’s head. “That’s my good boy. Did you have fun with your boy while Daddy was away?”

Niko barks his agreement.

“You like having a boy to play with, huh?” Clark rubs his palm down Niko’s throat. Niko’s eyes flutter shut, long lashes dark against his cheeks as he gives a needy little whine. I glance away. The moment between them seems intimate. Too intimate to share with an outsider.

Except, after tonight, I don’t feel like an outsider when it comes to Nicky. It’s like he invited me here because, on some level, he wanted me to see him at his most vulnerable.

I’ve seen him like this before. Manic, or I guess hypomanic, technically. Not that I knew what it meant or had the right labels for it at the time, but it never changed how I see him. There were times when his highs made him the life of the party, coming up with wild plans and giving extravagant gifts, and fucking any guy who looked his way.

And his lows made some of our friends drift away, when he wasn’t ‘on’ all the time and needed to retreat to a quiet room. He didn’t have the energy to do much more than lump on the basement couch to eat snacks and play video games some days. But he was always my Nicky. Mine and Leo’s best friend.

He’s still the same person, under the moods and all the adult responsibilities and the ways our lives have diverged. And I’ll still stand by him no matter what. Whether he’s the ball of energy, or the depression burrito version of himself, or anything in between, I care about him. And it’s abundantly clear Clark loves him just as unconditionally.

“Time for your meds and dinner. Are you eating as Niko or Nicholas tonight, boy?” Clark asks.

Niko whines and rubs a paw over his face.

“That’s fine; you can stay a pup as long as you need to, baby.”

Niko nudges his face against his husband’s hand. Clark pats him, then tugs at the chain around his neck. I know what that chain means to them both, and it fills me with a strange warmth to get to witness their tender rituals. I love seeing Nicky getting loved on.

“That’s right, puppy. You’re mine and I’m going to take care of you, just like I promised.”

Niko licks Clark’s fingers, then bolts for the kitchen.

“Guess he’s hungry,” Clark says with a chuckle. “Come on, if you get the food reheated, I’ll fix him a plate and get him dosed with this.” The pills rattle in their bottle when he holds it up again.

“Sure,” I agree.

Niko takes his pills without a fuss. Clark cuts up all the food on Nicky’s plate into bite-sized chunks and places them in a dog dish. He moves the little stand the bowls rest on next to the table. Then he fills up the water dish and sets the bowl of food down with a command to wait.

Niko looks eagerly between Clark and the bowl. Clark ignores the pup as he helps me finish setting the table and offers me a glass of wine. I decline and Clark pours us both glasses of home-brewed iced tea.

Through it all, Niko waits, body coiled, for Clark to give him permission to eat. Clark gives every pretense of ignoring his pup, but he’s always got a line of sight on Niko as he moves around the kitchen, on the alert for Niko’s needs.

The fond smile on Clark’s lips makes it easy to see why Nicky loves him. Clark is so attuned to him and his needs. It’s beautiful to watch. I want to be a part of that. A part of them.

“Take a seat,” Clark gestures for me to relax. I bring my plate to the table and sit. Clark sits across from me with his plate. “Dig in.”

I take my first bite under his watchful gaze. The delicious shiver of being closely observed strips me bare, emotionally.

“Good?” Clark quirks a brow.

“Yes,” I say.

A part of me wants to tack on a Sir. Or Daddy. It feels right. Clark just has this vibe that makes him seem like someone I could rely on. Someone who takes care of the people he loves.

I want to experience that same caring he’s lavishing on Niko. I press my lips together to hold back the titles. It’s not something I’ve gotten into the habit of using.

Clark gave me permission earlier, and I liked calling him that in the moment while we were cleaning the kitchen together. There was something freeing about serving the two men I’m sharing dinner with that made it feel correct for the situation. But now I’m not sure I’ve earned the right to give him my submission. Just because I’m with Nicky, doesn’t give me any claim on his husband.

Clark’s lips quirk in amusement. “I’m glad you like it, boy.”

“Thank you, Sir.” I say, almost by reflex. It’s a relief for him to take the initiative, like a tacit permission to fall into that dynamic with him as we share our meal.

Niko whines.

Clark ignores the sound and cuts into his dinner. I’m fixated on his lips as he chews his first bite. Lips my boyfriend kisses. I want to kiss them too.

“Can I call you Daddy?” I blurt

He wipes his mouth, and that amused look turns into a full-blown smile. “That depends on why you want to use the title with me.”

I consider for a moment; how to say this. I borrow something Nicky said a while ago. Sometimes he shares his boyfriends with his Daddy.

“I want Nicky to share me with you.” Because when I’m with Nicky, I want him to take charge, like Clark does with

him. I want his dominance, and I want Clark's dominance as an extension of that.

And that's mostly right. But I also want to give myself into Clark's capable hands, independent of Nicky. I want him to care for me the way he does for Nicky. I want that deep tone of command to hold me in his thrall. That unquestionable control that has the impulsive pup still suspended, frozen as he watches us eat, eyes following our every bite.

Clark sets aside his fork, his entire focus on me as I try to explain what I want with them. Both of them. He's watching me with hunger in his eyes, and I'm pretty sure the overcooked steak isn't the only thing whetting his appetite. His gaze is so intense, and I want it on me.

I want to let myself go with Nicky and trust that his Daddy will take care of us both. It's not even about sex, although I certainly would enjoy that with the two men. It's about the connection between them.

I long to insinuate myself into every part of Nicky's life. Now that we've found each other, I never want to let him go again. And I also want to know Clark on that more intimate level.

"I see. And if he shares you with me, would you be my boy?"

"If that's what you want. And his boy."

"You want me to take control?"

"Yes, Sir. Daddy," I lick my lips, the second title even less familiar on my tongue than the first. Strange, but in a good way. And the heat in Clark's eyes as I say it has lust pooling low in my belly. Yes. He's Daddy, to Niko, and I think he could be that to me as well. If I open myself up to them both, the way I hope to do.

"Like we agreed earlier, that is something we will discuss further when Nicholas isn't indisposed. For now, I have no objections to you calling me Daddy if the urge strikes you, boy."

Boy. Clark called me ‘boy’ in that velvet-soft purr of his that sounds like sex. The word warms me to my toes, settling over me like a blanket. It wraps around the small, scared part of me that’s been braced for rejection ever since I told my dad who I am.

Acceptance. Not just that Clark sees me as the man I am, but of a deeper, more private part of myself. The part that wants to give up control to my partner. To obey without question. To trust so deeply that I can give up, well, everything, to another person. I haven’t trusted anyone like that in a long time.

In retrospect, that’s probably a huge part of why my previous forays into kink have gone so poorly. I can never quite let go, surrender to a dominant. But Clark makes it seem so effortlessly caring that I think—with him, and with Niko at my side—I can. I can be brave enough to bare my soul to them.

“Yes, Daddy.” This time, the word tastes even more perfect. Sweet as honey.

“Eat your dinner, boy.” Daddy picks his fork back up. “Niko, go ahead.” Niko lunges forward to scarf down his food.

“Ah, slow bites, pup.” Daddy gives a sharp reprimand and Niko eats more gingerly after that, giving Clark the occasional glance to seek his approval. He still finishes his food well before Clark and I are done. He slinks under the table to stay between us.

Niko fixes me with his beautiful begging eyes and I slip him a bite of meat. He laps it delicately from my fingers and the warmth of his mouth wrapped around my fingers sends a pulse of pleasure right to my dick. When I meet his gaze, I’m pretty sure he knows exactly what he’s doing to me.

I shift in my seat. Daddy is watching us with a knowing smirk.

“No slipping him table scraps, boy,” Clark says.

Under the table, he strokes his socked foot along Niko’s hip, like he’s petting him. Niko sighs contentedly at the touch,

settling between us, touching us both. I enjoy the peek into their private little ways of showing affection.

“Sorry, Daddy.” The title sends a deliciously naughty thrill through me. I like calling Clark that.

“Eat,” Daddy grunts. So I eat my dinner with Niko pressing his face into my lap. It should be awkward to have my boyfriend’s face in my lap, mouthing at me through my pants while his husband looks on impassively. It’s not though. No, it’s one of the hottest things I’ve ever done. It leaves me delightfully untethered from social conventions.

Clark’s commands show he cares. Niko’s attention feels like adoration. As if I’m more than a convenient distraction when his Daddy is busy with work. They’re both opening up space for me to belong here with them.

I somehow float my way through general small talk. I eat my fill under Clark’s watchful gaze, with Niko’s warm breath ghosting over my lap. Daddy asks more about my job, and my move back to Vancouver and general getting to know you type stuff. I ask him similar questions in my turn.

When he finishes his food, Clark wipes his lips on his napkin, leans back in his seat, and smiles at me while I finish my last few mouthfuls. Even after what Niko did to it, the food is good, and the company is even better. I wriggle in my seat in anticipation.

“Is there something on my face, Daddy?” I ask when he just keeps watching me. The title still gives me a little thrill of nerves.

“No, nothing on your face.” Daddy smiles. “You like calling me Daddy, huh?”

“Yeah.” I nod, no sense denying it.

“And Nicholas mentioned you met again at Kylee and Q’s pups and littles munch. You said earlier you’re not a pup. Are you into age play?”

“In theory. I’ve had dates with caregivers. None of it quite matched up with what I wanted. Like I said, I’m into getting tied up. I had a few sessions with a friend who does ropes and

that was awesome, but it wasn't a sexual thing and I wanted it to be. I liked the playdate I had with one Daddy dom, at first. He gave me rules to follow that made me feel taken care of, but age play just didn't work for me. To me, playing with blocks and stuff is boring, and wearing a diaper is not my thing."

"But you enjoyed having a Daddy?"

"Yeah."

"And you enjoy playing with my pup." That isn't a question, but I nod anyway.

"I love playing with Niko. He's the best boy." I take his face between my hands and scratch his scalp as I say it.

Niko wriggles happily when we talk about him. Clark chuckles.

"He is. He's also a handful. So age regression doesn't have to be part of Daddy kink, but I think, from the ways I've seen you two interacting, that you might enjoy playing as a middle. If that's something you're interested in? Are you aware of what that is?"

"No."

"Basically, it's age play for a slightly older little. Someone who is big enough to give Daddy a hand with his pup, and play video games. Old enough to want independence, and young enough to still want a Daddy's guidance and care. Does that sound like you?"

"Yeah." I nod. "As long as that can also include getting tied up and fucked six ways to Sunday."

Daddy chuckles. "It can include whatever the three of us want. I doubt you'll find Niko objecting to sex. That's one of the few constants with him even when he's having a depressive episode. The only time I've ever seen him with a less than active libido was when he tried some antidepressants to help with lingering symptoms. He hated it."

"Oh."

“He’s normally pretty stable on his meds. Sometimes if there’s a big disruption to his routine, or he has a major setback like the recent stress with his job, he gets breakthrough symptoms. Usually depressive episodes. And when that happens, it can be harder for him to follow his rules to stay healthy and take his meds. But I should leave the details of his condition to him to confide.”

“Yeah. He’ll be okay again, right?”

“Yes.”

Niko woofs.

“Right, well, it’s been a long day. Would you like to stay the night?” Daddy asks.

“Um, in the guest room, or...”

“Wherever you’re comfortable. Nothing sexual is happening between you and me until Nicholas is able to discuss it with us. He’s not in any state of mind for that tonight, but I’m sure he’d appreciate having us both close. Do you want to join us in our bed?”

I hesitate, but ultimately, his offer is too tempting to refuse. Curling up next to Niko sounds perfect. I want to hold him close and I want to be here so I can be certain he doesn’t do anything reckless. I’ve seen the ideas he gets when he’s like this.

Sometimes when we were younger, his ideas scared me. Ideas like that he could fly in his homemade superhero costume. He jumped off his parent’s shed and broke his collarbone that time, but it could have been so much worse. I didn’t understand the mental state behind that decision when we were kids, but if he gets those ideas now, he could hurt himself so much worse. I don’t want to leave him alone to find out.

“Yeah. I’ll sleep with you guys. If that’s okay? I put my parrot to bed before I came over here anyway, so she’ll be fine for the night.”

“Sure, let’s take care of the dishes then I’ll get you boys tucked into bed then.” Daddy starts to gather up the dirty

plates.

I try to hide my disappointment. “Just Niko and me? I thought—”

“For now. I need to finish up a few things for work before I join you boys.” Daddy gives me a fond smile and reaches over to ruffle my hair.

I’d normally find the gesture demeaning, but there’s so much affection in his smile and his promises that it makes me feel small and cared for rather than belittled. This might be what it’s like to have someone who takes care of me; if it is, I want more. All of this. No wonder Nicky loves having a Daddy.

True to his word, once I help him clear the table and deal with our dinner dishes, Daddy leads Niko and me down the hall to their bedroom. Niko crawls along at my side, close enough that I can rest a hand in his hair and rub his ears as we both follow his Daddy to bed.

I falter as we pass the guest room where I’ve spent the night with Nicky several times before. If I take this next step—go all the way to the main bedroom that Nicky shares with his husband—what will it mean? What am I committing to? And am I really in a good place to be making a major decision to sleep with my metamour, however platonic the gesture?

Nicky whines at my hesitation and noses at my thigh. His pleading eyes and paw pressed lightly over my stockinged foot decide for me. I don’t want him to have to choose between us tonight.

And I want to be wrapped up in Clark’s care. His boy, without the worries of the world on my shoulders. If Daddy is in control, then I don’t have to be. I can rely on him to take care of us both, and I need that. It’s been so long since I had anything like that kind of safety net to fall back on.

Daddy glances back at us when he notices I’ve stopped. He gives me a wordless look, one brow raised in question and hands spread wide, giving me time to choose. I step toward

him, slipping my hand into his for him to lead me the rest of the way to his bed.

Daddy doesn't make a big deal about it. He squeezes my hand and leads Niko and me to bed. Without consultation, he pulls out two pairs of Nicky's pajamas and lays them out on the bed.

"Did you have anything you need to do before bed?" Daddy asks as he pulls a spare toothbrush out of a drawer in their en suite washroom.

"No, Daddy."

"Good boy, brush your teeth and put on PJs."

I step up to the bed and brush my fingers over the soft fabric of Nicky's pajamas. He's enough bigger than me that I think I'll really feel like a preteen again, swimming in a hockey jersey I borrowed from Leo. I like that thought. And I like the little thrill of wearing my lover's clothing. It's intimate and perfect.

"Get dressed," Daddy repeats. "They might be loose on you, boy, but I want you both comfy for bedtime. Once you're ready, it's lights out."

"Niko will need help with his teeth, right, Daddy?" I ask as I watch him nose at his clothing.

Daddy chuckles. "Yes. I suppose he will. Is my big boy going to take good care of our puppy?"

"Don't patronize me, Daddy." I roll my eyes.

Then I can't help the smile because much as it seems a little silly, I do like him calling me his boy almost as much as I love him calling Niko ours. He's sharing not just himself, but his husband with me and being included here, in the center of their lives, that's priceless.

This isn't some sort of bedroom game that I'm in the middle of. This is being with them for the ups and downs. For better or worse. That level of commitment would scare me if it were anyone else. But it's Nicky, and I've loved him since before I

really knew myself. Before I understood what love could be. And Clark is turning out to be a wonderful bonus to that love.

“But, yeah, I’ll take the best care of our pup,” I say.

Then I tug Niko toward the bathroom and brush both of our teeth. He seems to appreciate having me hold him while I scrub his teeth, and it’s kind of nice to take care of him like that. It gives me a hint of what Clark gets out of this.

Taking care of someone I love in the most basic of tasks has my heart all aflutter. Sort of like putting action to the idea of doing anything for the one I love. Daddy leans in the doorway, watching us together with a tender expression on his face. And I like that too. I want him to be proud of me, to call me his good boy and tuck me into bed safe and sound.

It gives me pause to consider stripping in front of him for the first time. But as I reach for my hem, he steps into the washroom and closes the door, giving me privacy. I slump with a strange mix of disappointment and relief at the reprieve. I’m sure it’s only a matter of time before he sees me naked, but it might be for the best that it’s not tonight.

One step at a time. For now, letting him take care of me as his boy—or his pup’s boy, or whatever we’re doing here—is enough without blurring the lines with sex. Not yet.

I hastily pull on Nicky’s pajamas. They smell like his and Clark’s laundry soap. Like being draped in a hug. Once I’m changed, I help Niko into his clothing. Niko hops onto the bed and curls up in the middle with a satisfied little bark.

“You ready to be tucked in, boys?” Daddy calls from the washroom.

“Yes, Daddy.” I agree.

Daddy shoves Niko over and lifts the blankets for me to crawl in, then he wraps us both under the covers. He leaves enough room to join us on Niko’s other side when he finishes his work.

Daddy’s breath is minty fresh as he leans over us, kissing Niko’s mouth and then my cheek.

“Goodnight, puppy. Sweet dreams, boy.” Daddy gives each of our cheeks a tender stroke. He turns in the doorway to smile at us. “Sleep now. I’ll be in the living room if you need me.” He flicks off the light and eases the door shut behind him.

Niko snuggles into my side, licking my face and wriggling against me until he gets comfy enough to sleep.

“Night, puppy. I love you,” I mumble to him, patting his head.

Niko kisses me and huffs a soft little bark. Like he’s agreeing that he loves me too. He’s still for a moment, before wriggling around again.

We spend a frustratingly long while lying there in the dark with Niko squirming every time I get close to drifting off.

I can hear Clark typing something in the other room and the unfamiliar sounds of their house around me. Niko tosses and turns with restless energy. I hum a lullaby, hoping to drown out whatever racing thoughts are keeping him awake.

That seems to help. Niko snuggles into me. I turn onto my side and hug him tight, like a living teddy bear. Niko nuzzles into the crook of my neck and soon his breathing evens into sleep. The last thing I remember is humming softly under my breath as I join him in dreamland.

Chapter 14

Nick

The weekend passes in a whirlwind of chaotic thoughts. It takes a few days for my meds to kick back in and help me find an even keel. At first I'm tempted to ride the high a little while longer. It's just so nice to feel. Anything.

No more numbness, no more chasing sensation purely to defy the listlessness of depression. No more desperate need to chase after the unattainable.

And then the reality of my actions crashes in on me when I realize I actually sent in my resignation without thinking it through and spent enough money to make my head spin. Daddy reverses all of my credit card purchases and returns most of what I bought in person. It occupies most of his weekend, but he manages it. All while taking Ethan and me out to burn off my restless energy.

We visit Q and Kylee for some pup time in their basement playroom. Kylee gives Ethan free rein with the obstacle course. He runs Q and me both through it countless times until well past the point Q wanders off to snuggle with their Mommy and I'm left panting with effort.

Between my pup space calming the racing, intrusive thoughts, and burning off energy, I'm briefly better after that. The same as on Friday. It helps that Maddy squeezes me in for a last-minute therapy appointment before dinner.

On Sunday, I can't quite get into my puppy headspace. There's far too much swirling through my mind and the meds are starting to help. I think they are, anyway. But if I don't distract myself, I'm going to obsess over it.

I spend the day cleaning and doing yard work in our tiny patch of backyard. Working myself to exhaustion seems like the best way to avoid bad choices, and it does the trick. By dinnertime, I'm happy to eat the meal Daddy cooks for us and then snuggle with him on the couch while I play games online

with Ethan without the constant need to move or do something.

Between Daddy's physical presence and Ethan's digital one, I've found a calm in the center of my storm. And then I get a reply to my work email from Principal Bragley. Fuck. I was avoiding thinking about whether I have a job to go to in the morning.

I log off our game, making my apologies and saying goodnight to Ethan in a daze. Then I stare at my phone until Daddy breaks me from my frozen inaction.

"Come here, let's get it over with." Daddy gathers me into his lap as I click open. "I've got you, no matter what it says."

For a long while, I can only stare in dawning horror at the response thanking me for my years of service at the school. Somehow that makes everything more real. Daddy can read me like a book and he holds me tight.

Like a thousand other times in the past couple of days, I'm reminded how lucky I am to have Daddy. How many partners would be as understanding as him over the way I very nearly wrecked our finances?

One little shopping spree might not have bankrupted us, but in a single day I blew through all our credit limits. Not to mention every cent of cash I had on hand, and racking up several new lines of credit.

We also got lucky in that he was able to undo the damage and I didn't do anything more reckless than plotting to attempt cooking a steak with a kitchen blowtorch. An action which Ethan was, thankfully, on hand to nip in the bud before I got any bright ideas about ways to increase the flame's efficacy. My new gadget was wholly inadequate to the task of cooking an entire steak, let alone three of them.

It's always sobering to look back on the brilliant ideas I had when I was manic. This time is no different. I might not have torched the kitchen, but I did torch my job. Possibly my career. Daddy can't undo that like he did the credit charges.

As the high tide of my mania ebbs, and I read over Principal Bragley's response to my resignation, Daddy holds me while I cry. It's cathartic to let my emotions flow through me. And the email could be worse.

At least Bragley asks to arrange a meeting to work out logistics tomorrow morning before class. Since it's so close to summer break, he hints that they want me to stay until the end of the term.

"I screwed up," I blubber into Daddy's shoulder.

"Hush, done is done. And you've been miserable. This is all going to work out, baby." Daddy pats my back soothingly. His words reassure me like nothing else. "We'll come up with a plan after you solidify how you are working out your notice and all the details. We're alright financially for now. All the overtime hours I've been pulling are good for padding our savings."

If he says we'll be alright, I believe him.

"Yeah?"

"Yeah." He pats my thigh and I snug myself more firmly into his lap. "This could be good for you, Nicholas. You'll find a better position where you are happier."

"Mhm." I nod as I sniffle into his solid warmth.

That part is harder to take at his word. My doubts make me miss the unshakable self-confidence of mania. It's so much easier to believe in myself when I can't even fathom not doing so. Some things are harder when I'm stable. Some days it's easy to question why I bother with meds. Why I'd want to be stable when I could ride the high.

Except I make terrible impulsive choices when I'm manic. Choices that scare me once I'm more lucid. I know that. Hence why I'm a tear-streaked mess in Daddy's lap right now when there are so many ways I'd rather spend my time with him.

Daddy rocks me gently. I nudge my nose into his armpit where I can breathe in his comforting scent. Daddy chuffs a pleased sound, totally noticing that I'm sniffing him. Good. I want to make him smile and stop feeling so guilty about my

choices. Clark is perfect for me and I hate that my actions hurt him.

I have so many good things in my life right now, I can't bear the thought of this last episode being the one that pushes Daddy too far. Not that he's ever given me reason to believe he'd leave me over my mental health.

He's always been so supportive of getting me help to manage it. He provides the framework I need around my diet and sleep schedule. And normally he's strict about enforcing our rules. He understands how much I rely on the structure his care provides for me.

I could do that for myself. Before we met, I did. But I also love having a Daddy who takes care of me in a real and meaningful way. Kink isn't a game for us; it's about so much more than that. Clark, with his rules and his control, makes me feel loved so deeply it's an unquestionable bedrock of my life.

Which is why I feel like shit, knowing how much he's beating himself up over my most recent lapse. Most of the time, the rules are all I need to stay healthy. But I'm not normally a sneaky asshole who tries to brat my way into punishments or hide when I'm struggling.

It was just too many things coming at me all at once and I couldn't cope. More stuff to unpack with Maddy at my next appointment, I suppose. For now, it's nice to just relax into his comforting embrace.

The meds are helping already. My thoughts are calmer as I savor the moment of closeness that's been so rare of late. At least it was an easy call to go back on my lithium. That's progress.

When I first got diagnosed, I struggled with accepting I need meds, probably for life. Going from crutastic to on top of the world practically overnight makes it hard to want to come back down. Until I do. And I look back and realize how easily I could have torched everything I care about.

This time, everything appears to be working out alright. Daddy is still holding me, my world is still turning. Slowly but

surely, I'm getting back to my normal.

Everything may seem a little muted, but I can live with muted. Medicated isn't the same dullness as depression. Depression is like trying to access my emotions through six feet of cotton.

Medicated is just like wearing a pair of gloves to protect myself. Things aren't as sharp as when I'm manic, but that's not necessarily a bad thing. Maddy compared it to wearing earplugs in a construction zone. It mutes all the sounds, but I need the protection.

It's a healthy thing. This is taking care of myself. Daddy cajoles me into bed early Sunday night, and making love to him is taking care of both of us.

I'm functional enough to make it into work on time for my early morning meeting on Monday. I have my chat with Principal Bragley. We arrange for me to stay in my current role until the summer recess in just over a month.

After the roller coaster of my albeit brief bout of mania, the dust appears to have settled. My last lurking fear is that I half expect Ethan to wash his hands of me.

It's only been a few weeks of dating, and usually this is the point where being emotionally turned on for a new boyfriend starts to wear on me. Often, if there's nothing beyond the initial spark of physical attraction, that's when the intense first blush of new relationship energy fades for me. It's when I have a habit of letting the whole thing unravel.

Except Ethan doesn't need me to be at my most charming or sexy to want to spend time with me. And I am attracted to him on so many levels beyond the purely physical.

After work, when I'm debating whether to text Ethan for a gaming session, Daddy nudges me to call him. That makes me smile. My brilliant plan to cook them a gourmet dinner and make them like each other might not have worked out the way I envisioned, but the end result is better than I dared hope for.

Something changed between them that night. I'm not sure exactly what it was, but waking up wedged between my two

favorite people the next morning was a bliss I want to experience again and again.

I set up my laptop in the kitchen so I can be close to Daddy while he tries out some new recipe he's excited about. It's been a while since he indulged in trying something new. I love surreptitiously watching him doing something he enjoys.

"Stop ogling me and call your boyfriend," Daddy teases when he catches me staring at him. "You won't stop worrying until you check in about how he's processing everything that happened. Besides, we should invite him over to discuss where the three of us go from here."

Daddy's right, and Ethan is online, so I start a voice chat to see if he's up for a game. He answers right away. It's a tremendous relief that my mania didn't scare Ethan away outright. It's tempting to let sleeping dogs lie and just lose myself in his digital presence. Daddy hums a song as he cooks. The delicious smells and seeing him happy is anchoring.

Instead of pretending nothing happened, I bring up the elephant in the room.

"So, now you've seen me manic, are we still good?" I ask Ethan over my headset.

"I've seen you like that before, Nicky," Ethan reminds me. "Like that time when you jumped off the shed with that homemade glider. Or the time you found that tutorial for DIY Halloween pyrotechnics. Or when—"

"Okay, enough. I get it." I find myself chuckling at the embarrassing old memories. "You've got all the dirt on my teenaged indiscretions."

"Yep, and don't you forget it. There's not much you could do to scare me away, Nicky. Nothing I saw this weekend changes anything between us that you don't want it to change."

On some level, I know that. Nothing has changed between us since that night. He hasn't created distance or avoided me. It's a tremendous relief to hear Ethan confirm in no uncertain terms that my erratic behavior didn't scare him away.

Daddy and Ethan both remind me daily with their actions that I'm loved and cherished. I hope that I can show them how deeply I reciprocate their love.

"And the parts that we all want to change? Don't think I didn't notice you calling Clark Daddy. He wants you to come over for dinner again now that I'm in a better headspace. We both do. This time, we can all discuss what we want from our relationships."

"Sure. I'm ready for more with him, if he still wants that. More with both of you."

"You are?" My breath catches and I almost pinch myself to be sure I'm not dreaming.

"I am."

"Cool. Well, we were thinking dinner here and then afterward we could take you to check out Adventures as our guest, since you haven't been to the club and Martin has all kinds of fun toys for us to play with that we don't have at home."

"That sounds perfect. I have a work thing tomorrow, but later this week?"

"Yes. Can I add you to a group text with Daddy so the three of us can arrange plans and stuff together?"

"Good call." Ethan agrees affably. "I don't want to leave Daddy out of the loop."

Damn. Hearing my boyfriend call my husband 'Daddy' makes my belly swoop with delight. "I'll do that later tonight. For now, I think we've got time for one quick mission before dinner. You up for it?"

"Always." Ethan sends me a game request and we fall into our usual banter.

I'm still giddy at all the possibilities opening up before us with the conversation we have planned. Hopefully, this will mean I can have them both. I don't mind sleeping in the guest room with Ethan when he stays over, but it would be awesome to have both my men at the same time. I want to all fall asleep

together in the big bed I share with Daddy again, and not just in a platonic cuddle pile like last week.

My first therapist, before I found Maddy, said I was hypersexual like it's a bad thing. We weren't a good fit and I never even got around to bringing up kink with him. I'll be the first to admit that I sometimes use sex to chase the euphoria that often hovers just out of reach when I'm depressed. But that's something I've accepted about myself.

I enjoy having lots of sex, no matter what my mood is, and I refuse to be ashamed of that or any other part of myself. I was so relieved when my meds didn't disrupt my libido too much. That was one side effect I'd worried about the most.

The shaking hands and headaches I can handle. And the tremors and stuff mostly went away once I got used to the meds, but taking away my libido would have seemed like losing part of myself.

From our first appointment where we discussed meds, Maddy accepted that was a priority for me. She agreed we could work together to find medications that help me without compromising who I am. I got lucky that it worked out for me with lithium.

Which is good, because the lithium does wonders for me and I am satisfied with my sex life just the way it is. The only improvement would be if Ethan and Daddy want to share me. Or I suppose—considering their bedroom preferences—it would be more like me sharing Ethan with Daddy.

I have high hopes that's exactly where we're headed. As much as I love Daddy, I'm falling for Ethan all over again. I'm learning to love the boy who used to be my best friend in an entirely new way from when we were kids together and I want him. I already love them both, so it would be a dream come true if they can love each other too.

Chapter 15

Clark

I groan when the call comes through from my boss that I have to go back to Ontario. Vince needs me to help a client get set up with our tech in their newest factory. I wasn't supposed to have to travel again so soon, but Pam still has nine more months of parental leave with her new baby. Her temporary replacement, hired to cover her leave, still isn't up to speed enough to send him.

Plus, this client historically needs plenty of hand-holding. I'm the only option for the trip. It's not ideal, but it's also impossible for me to refuse.

When I took my current job, the heavy travel seemed like a perk, but that was over a decade ago. It was before I had Nicholas in my life. These days, I'd rather stay home with my husband than go globetrotting on my boss's dime. Not to say I dislike the actual travel, just that I miss my boy while I'm away without him.

More to the point, Nicholas is still struggling with the situation at work. He's stressed about finding a new job, and adjusting to being back on his meds after his manic episode. The one silver lining to Nicholas's impulsive resignation letter is that he kept it vague and cordial enough that he is finishing out the last month of the school year.

So he at least has his usual routine to maintain and all summer to find something new and adjust to the change. It's just too bad that our primary social outlet, Adventures, is closing due to water damage and it might be awhile before we can play there again.

I'd been planning to ease Ethan into kink by taking him along with us on a guest pass. That will have to wait now. At least Martin is definitely planning to reopen after taking advantage of the closure to do some remodeling. We'll all miss the familiar faces and regular scenes in the meantime. Losing

the club—however temporarily—is like losing our second home. Nicholas is taking it hard.

I don't want to go out of town when he's been having such a hard time. On the other hand, I can't exactly refuse to go. Nor do I want to leave him alone in a hotel room for hours each day if he were to join me. Even if a part of me likes the idea of my pup waiting for me. His presence would vastly improve staying in a hotel at the end of a long day troubleshooting issues and training factory staff on our tech.

In my fantasy, I'd get an enthusiastic greeting from my eager pup, maybe a sloppy blowjob while I peruse the room service menu. Then a nice hot shower with extra jets while we waited for dinner to be delivered and I could indulge in a good hard fuck before snuggling him in bed. I could have him keep my cock warm for hours while I read or watch mindless television.

Realistically, I'd come home to a trashed room and a stir-crazy pup. Niko would be keyed up from waiting around all day, with nothing to do in the small town where the factory is located. He'd be bored to tears and that wouldn't help his current mental state. And he'd want to be fucked into the mattress to help him settle.

So I don't suggest bringing him along, much as I want to keep him close. When I go to break the news that I've got an unexpected work trip, Nicholas is online, playing video games with Ethan. And that gives me a brilliant idea.

Nicholas has someone to watch over him while I'm gone. Ethan. The boy I'm slowly making mine would be the perfect pupsitter while I'm away.

"No!" Nicholas wails into his headset, voice pitched into some abomination of an accent I can't place. "A pox upon you and all your descendants! Avenge me!"

"Hey, babe, sorry to interrupt. Can we talk?" I ask once he completes his theatrics. Damn, but he's adorable when he's being silly. I love the side of him that Ethan brings out.

“Oh, uh, yeah,” Nicholas straightens up from his slouch, pausing the game. “Sorry, Eth, I have to go AFK for a minute.” He listens to his boyfriend’s response, gives a noncommittal grunt, then sets aside his headset and controller and turns to face me, giving me his full attention. I smile at him, appreciating the effort to focus on me, since this is an area where we’ve argued in the past.

“I just got a call from the office.”

Nicholas groans and slumps back against the couch. “When do they need you, and how long?”

I hate the resignation in his voice. Hate making him think for a second he’s anything less than my priority. I sit next to him and pat his thigh.

“I’m supposed to fly out Thursday, so I can train their weekend crew and their weekday folks. And it’s an installation, so I am guessing the better part of a week. Sooner if everything goes smoothly.”

“These things never go smoothly, Daddy.” Nicholas takes my hand, turning it to twine our fingers. At least he doesn’t seem to blame me. That’s good. I can work with that.

“I’m sorry, Nicholas. Are you going to be okay?”

“Does it matter?” Nicholas pouts. Or maybe he does blame me. I blow out a breath and run my free hand through my hair.

“Yes. It absolutely matters.” I bump our knees together and squeeze the hand I’m holding. Nicholas sighs heavily, then leans his body into me, resting his head on my shoulder.

“Sorry. That was bitchy. I haven’t been doing so hot lately.”

“I noticed. You know I’m here if you want to talk about it.”

Nicholas sighs. “No, I’m just anxious about the job thing.”

“It’s going to be a big change.”

“Yeah. But it’s the right move. I just can’t go there every day and know that they like, broke my trust and they don’t think it’s any big deal. I know it’s not personal, and I should just get over it, but I can’t.”

“They broke your trust, baby. It’s okay to feel betrayed by what happened.”

“You don’t think I’m overreacting?”

“No. I really don’t.”

“Cool. That’s good. You really aren’t mad that I quit with nothing new lined up?”

“No. I know you’ll find something else and we can afford for it to take a little while. You know I make good money, boy. I want you to take the time to find a good fit for yourself. Have you seen anything promising?”

“Yeah. I think so? An old school acquaintance I reached out to says he’s leaving his job at Golden Oaks Elementary. He thought I might want to apply there, since they’re actually inclusive. He’s queer too, so he gets what it can be like.”

“Why is he leaving, if it’s so great?”

Nicholas chuckles. “It’s not the school. He’s expecting twins in like a month and he just resigned instead of going back from his extended parental leave from his eldest. So he’s going to have his hands full with three kids under two.”

“Oh, wow. The more power to him and his partner, I suppose?” I ask more than say. That sounds like a lot for anyone to handle.

“Partners, he’s got two of them.” Nicholas wiggles two fingers in the air. “And yeah, Emil’s thrilled about it, so congratulations are definitely in order.”

“That’s wonderful for him and his family,” I say, though privately a toddler and twin newborns sounds like a nightmare to me.

“Yeah. And for me too, if I get the job. It’s out toward Port Moody, middle grades, and they really seem to take inclusion seriously. I reached out to him, and sent in an application, so we’ll see if anything comes of it. But I’ve got a good vibe from it. And in the meantime, I’m going to keep looking and applying.”

“I’m proud of you, Nicholas. It’s always scary to make a big change like this, but I think it could be good for you.” I hug him around the shoulders, rocking him from side to side until he flashes me a grin.

“Yeah. I think so too. You know Principal Bragley said I owe the school ‘discretion’ about the cheating thing, since they’ve looked the other way about my lifestyle choices? He wants me to keep my mouth shut.”

“The puppy play? I didn’t realize you were open about that at work.”

Nicholas snorts. “As if! No. He meant you. That I live with a man. It’s been made abundantly clear that I’m not supposed to talk about my husband around the students. Totally fine for my straight coworkers to talk about their families, but I need to keep my mouth shut and my head down and I can’t do it anymore, Daddy.”

“I’m sorry baby, I didn’t realize that was still an issue.”

“It’s not everywhere, just they have their own little peccadilloes and I can’t do much about it if I don’t want to make it a huge thing. So, yeah. I’m glad I resigned. Just wish I’d taken more time to get my ducks in a row first.”

“I’m still proud of you for standing up for yourself, baby. Would this be a bad time to mention I’m thinking about making a change too?”

“You are?” Nicholas gives me some major side-eye. “No, not a bad time at all. But you love your job.”

“No.” I shake my head. “I *love* you. I like my job. And I’d like it more if I didn’t have to fly around the country at the drop of a hat. So, I’m exploring my options and once I have an offer on the table, I’m planning to ask if they will cut the travel from my contract or I’m walking.”

“Really?” Nicholas’s face lights up and he squirms next to me, unable to contain his excitement.

“Yeah, baby, really. I’ve put in my time on the road. Now they can either appreciate what I do for them, or I take my talent elsewhere. Just like you.”

“That would be amazing, Daddy!” Nicholas loops his arms around my neck and kisses me. I let him draw me into an extended lip lock until he straddles me and starts grinding our dicks together. Much as I’d love to get off with my boy, he was in the middle of an online date with his boyfriend and I don’t want to interrupt too much.

I ease him back, clearing my throat. I remind him he’s still got Ethan on his game chat. “Your boyfriend might not want to listen to you humping me on the couch, boy.”

“He might, I could ask him,” Nicholas teases with a coy little grin. He settles back next to me even as he reaches for his headset to place it back over his ears. “I had him on mute, though.” He winks at me.

I chuckle. “Right, well, I had an idea to run by you. How would you feel about a pupsitter while I’m away on this work trip?”

“I don’t need a babysitter, Daddy.” Nicholas rolls his eyes.

“I know. But I worry and I hate leaving you alone when you’re down.”

“I suppose. I’m doing much better now, though. Who did you have in mind? Want to board me with Q and Kylee?”

I chuckle at the thought of the two pups playing together the entire time I’m gone.

“That could be an option, but I was thinking you and Ethan seem to be getting serious. You could invite him over to stay the week while I’m out of town?”

“Oh. Yeah. That could actually be really nice. But is it too fast?”

“It’s a sleepover, baby. You’ve been dating for over a month now and he’s spent the night before. I don’t think it’s too fast, but the pace you take is really between the two of you, isn’t it?”

“I suppose so. You don’t think I’d scare him off if I spend most of the weekend in my pup space? I can be a lot to handle.”

“Wouldn’t you rather know that sooner than later if he isn’t into that aspect of you? Besides, he seems to like your puppy side from what I’ve seen.”

“True. Okay. I’ll ask him. And I’ll ask to have another proper dinner with you first. One where I’m in my human headspace so we can hash out how something between the three of us might look. I want you to get to know him, Daddy. Ethan is... I like him a lot.”

“I know you do, baby, and I’m glad. Ethan seems like a sweet boy. I’d love to play with you both more. For now, I should get my travel plans booked, so I’ll let you get back to your game, alright?”

“Yeah. Okay. Um, would you want to snuggle me while I play?”

“Sure.” I kiss his temple, then go to grab my laptop so I can sit with my pup while I work out the arrangements for the trip. He drapes himself over my legs, as he unpauses and unmutes the game and returns to bantering with Ethan. Nicholas wriggles around on my lap with no pretense at innocence. He’s trying to get me hot and bothered, and he’s entirely successful at it.

Chapter 16

Ethan

It's weird to show up on Nicky's doorstep with Gandalf in her travel carrier and an overnight bag. Their place isn't really bird-proof, but I've got her bedtime cage folded up in the bottom of my bag for her to sleep in. The guest room is tidy enough that she should be fine out of her cage in there to stretch her wings.

Clark is the one who asked me to stay over. So the potential awkwardness of spending the night in my lover's bed while his husband is out of town for the weekend isn't what's got me second-guessing being here.

It just seems momentous. Like a step I can't take back. A further leap of faith that Clark and I can both be what Nicky needs. That we can be something to each other. More than just the other man in our mutual lover's life.

Clark, trusting me to help Niko deal with being alone and upset about his absence, is a vote of confidence. I'm not the oblivious teenager I once was. I recognize that sometimes, with Nicky, depression—or I guess bipolar—looks like frenetic energy.

Broad smiles and bawdy jokes and a sex drive that won't quit. A brain that won't turn off and keeps him up for hours when all he wants to do is sleep. It's a mire he can't wallow out of on his own. All the while, he puts on the pretense that everything is better than fine.

If he prefers to forget himself in mindless sex for a time, I can do that for him. If he needs someone to hold him while he can't sleep, I'm here for that. Even if I didn't realize that was what was happening when I first came back into his life. I'm glad to be there for him in whatever way he needs a friend.

Still, he seems better lately. Then again, I saw Clark's guilt over not noticing what was going on with Nicky sooner with his last episode. So I'm happy to give him peace of mind that

he's being proactive over supporting Nicky's mental health while he's out of town.

If Clark needs his husband to have a pupsitter during his trip, well, I'm going to be the best damn caregiver that puppy has ever dreamed of having. I mean, barring his Daddy.

I'm not anywhere near as close to Nicky's friend, Q, as he is, but we kept in touch after the munch I attended. So I asked them what sort of things I could do for a pup to help him relax and have an awesome weekend. There's fun pet goodies tucked into my bag for Gandalf and Niko.

Nicky lets me in when I ring the doorbell. At first, he looks confused to see me standing there, and then he grins and waves me inside. "You didn't have to ring; I told you it was unlocked."

"Sure, but I didn't want to barge in and startle you or anything."

"You can though. You're always welcome, Eth. Um. On that note, here, Daddy said I could give you this." Nicky thrusts his hand toward my chest.

I set down my bag and hold out my hand reflexively. Nicky drops a key into my palm. I stare at it, speechless.

"So, it's not a big deal. Since you're staying here for the week, I figured you should be able to get in and out on your own. And I want you to come over whenever you want. Might be an incentive to keep the playroom tidy." He winks at me.

Under the flirty light tone, he fidgets nervously. He doesn't want me to make a fuss over this, but inside I'm freaking out. He's talking like this is a gesture of convenience. As if this is equivalent to giving the neighbor a key so they can water your petunias. It's not the same thing at all; not when we're dating.

Not when I've been flirting with his husband. At least the three of us had our dinnertime chat last night and it went well. The whole thing had the potential for the discussion to come across like a kinky job interview. Complete with a tour of their kink club.

Except, much to Nicky's dismay, a burst pipe meant the club had to close for the foreseeable future and we couldn't go. I was disappointed about the change in plans, but not nearly as upset as Nicky and Clark over the news.

It all worked out anyway. We had a fantastic meal at their place, courtesy of Daddy, and an intimate evening in. Instead of being stilted or awkward, our conversation flowed like water and made me excited to try all the things Clark and Nicky want to do with me.

The only reason we didn't act on the desires we all outlined last night was that Clark had an early flight to catch in the morning. He said he wants to take his time with us when we act on our desires. Nicky complained that he's edging us all week, and I can't deny that waiting has the anticipation building already.

All that context makes exchanging keys a big step. Doesn't it?

I squeeze the key in my hand. The edges dig into my palm. He wants me here. They both want me in their space. It might be a leap, but it means they intend on me being a permanent fixture in their lives. That's what I want too. It's what I was just considering.

And really, Clark asking me to stay with Niko this weekend is a bigger deal. Between trusting me with Niko and trusting me with access to their place, there's no contest over which means more to both men.

"Eth?" Nicky cocks his head at me.

"Thank you, Nicky."

I shove the key into my pocket and reach for him. I cup the back of his neck and pull him in for a kiss. Showing him with lips and tongue that I love him and I accept what he's offering. Whatever he's offering me. Gandalf squawks a raspy hello from her carrier at being jostled by our kiss.

Nicky pulls away from me, his eyes dancing with delight. "Oh! I finally get to meet the great wizard!" He drops into a

crouch to peer into the mesh front of the carrier. “Hello, pretty bird.”

“Hello,” Gandalf repeats the greeting. “Gandalf is good birds.” She clucks and trills at the attention, ending with a whistle.

“Can we let her out?” Nicky asks, gazing up at me with big pleading eyes.

“Sure. We should get her situated in the guest room first. I want to keep her where she can’t get into anything dangerous.”

“Okay.” Nicky hops back to his feet, grabs my overnight bag and leads the way to the guest room. I follow him with Gandalf still in her carrier. He sets my bag beside the dresser and I place the travel carrier on the top so I can unzip the front.

“Step up.” I offer Gandalf my hand as I give the command. She hops from her perch to my wrist and fluffs out her feathers, as though she’s shaking off the cramped confines of the soft carrier.

“Good Morning,” she trills. “Love you.”

I laugh. “Silly bird, was it bedtime in the dark carrier?”

“Good night.” Gandalf bobs her head, and leans toward me, then flutter-hops up to my shoulder where she preens my hair and clucks contented bird sounds. Nicky is staring at us wide-eyed as a kid at Christmas.

“Can I pet her?” Nicky steps closer. Gandalf preens her back.

“Um, I’d love to tell you yes, but she might bite you. At least, when she’s sitting on my shoulder.”

“No bites. Gandalf is good birds,” Gandalf interjects. “Good birds don’t bite.”

Nicky laughs, his expression utterly charmed by my pet. “You are a very pretty bird, Gandalf.”

“Pretty bird.” Gandalf lifts a foot to her beak and preens it.

“Want to offer her a treat and see if she’ll perch on you instead?” I suggest.

“You certainly are.” Nicky nods to my bird. “Did you bring stuff for her?”

“Yep, there’s a baggie with her food and some treats in the side pocket of my bag there.” I gesture. Nicky opens the compartment and pulls out Gandalf’s treats. My traitorous pet hears the telltale crinkle of her treat bag opening and flaps down to land on Nicky’s back. He laughs.

“Oh!” He arches away from her claws, but then holds still so as not to startle her. “Hello there, little wizard, your claws are sharp.” Gandalf traverses up his back, using her beak to steady herself when her talons get caught in his shirt or if he moves unexpectedly and startles her. She settles onto his shoulder and ruffles her feathers.

“Gandalf is good birds,” she says. Which is pretty typical when she wants a treat.

“You are,” Nicky agrees, holding up a bag of seed clusters to show me. “Can I give her one of these?”

“Step up.” Gandalf lifts one foot. As if she wants to choose the easiest trick in her arsenal to earn her treats.

“Sure.” I nod. “Want to see her do a trick?”

“Like what?” Nicky’s excitement is obvious, and Gandalf bobs her head, picking up on his energy.

“She likes to sing and dance,” I suggest. Gandalf whistles.

“Oh, what’s her command for that?” Nicky gazes at my bird, as if she might break into a choreographed routine like that classic cartoon with the dancing frog. That would be a fun trick to teach her some time.

I start the opening bar of her favorite theme song. “Gandalf, who lives in a pineapple?”

And she sings the rest of the song, adding in some embellishments when she gets to the whistling parts. She gets really into it, swaying her body along to the words as she sings. Nicky gives a delighted round of applause when she finishes.

“Thank you, thank you,” Gandalf says in her best announcer voice. I might let her watch too much TV.

“Good bird.” Nicky offers her one of the seed clusters. Gandalf makes a ‘you got a coin’ sound from Mario. Then she takes the treat. Nicky chuckles.

“She’s a hoot. I might steal your pet.”

“She’s a handful, but I love her.”

“Love you.” Gandalf transfers the treat to one talon to say the words.

“Do you need to get anything set up for her?”

“Yeah, I think I’ll put her overnight cage in here and cover her up so she can sleep. It’s her bedtime. I brought a towel to protect the dresser; she can be messy.”

“It’s fine.” Nicky waves away my concern. He’s still enraptured by my parrot as she sits on his shoulder, crunching happily on her treat. “I can hold her while you set that up.”

So I get out her things and assemble the collapsed cage. Nicky croons to my bird, trying different cartoon themes to see if she’ll sing along. I make sure she has fresh water and some food, then adjust her perches and throw in a few toys since I don’t have her day cage here. It’s way too big to be practical to move for a visit.

I don’t let myself consider the possibilities that the key that seems like a beacon of future potential awakens inside me. A future where my bird and I make a second home here with this man and his husband.

One where she has perches and a day cage in their space and Nicky is a regular part of her life. Where she picks up on the household sounds here and the common phrases he and Clark say because she’s around them enough to want to copy them.

It’s a future I want with them. Nicky is gently rubbing a finger along the top of Gandalf’s head when I get her cage all situated. She makes some low video game sound effects in her throat as she turns her head to the perfect angle for him to rub

an itchy spot. She's getting new pin feathers there, and she rubs them against his blunt nails. Nicky holds still and lets her use him like a back scratcher.

"She's so soft," he coos when he catches me watching. "You need to show me all her tricks this weekend, okay?"

"Okay. But not tonight. It's birdy bedtime," I sing-song as I offer Gandalf my hand. "Step up."

She obeys and I ferry her to a perch inside the cozy sleeping cage.

"Good night," she clucks as she steps onto her favorite braided rope perch. She sidles close to a cloth preening toy she enjoys snuggling next to at bedtime. I blow her a noisy kiss, which she returns with a raspy, "love you."

I latch and cover the cage and Gandalf makes a few more content bird sounds, mumbling sweet nothings to herself in the dark cage as she settles in for sleep.

"Love you," I say back to her, then turn to face Nicky. He's grinning at me.

"I'm not joking about keeping her. She's a riot. Her noises crack me up."

Nicky seals the bag of treats and sets it on the dresser beside Gandalf's cage. I know he means it. He's always laughing at her mimicry of random game sound effects during our voice chats. Ever since we reconnected, we've been gaming together most nights when neither of us has other plans.

"She's pretty much the best," I agree. "So, have you eaten? Was there anything you wanted to do tonight?"

"LAN party? Since we're actually in the same place for once?"

"I didn't bring my rig."

"Oh. Right. You play on a desktop still?"

"Yep. I've still got way more power than your so-called gaming laptop at a fraction of the price. And I don't have to worry about singeing off my naughty bits when it overheats."

Nicky sticks his tongue out at me. “My bits are just fine, thanks. That’s what a cooling fan and using a table are for. And unlike you, I can play anywhere with my setup.”

“Sure, sure. Since we’re in person for the next couple of nights, I figured we could do offline things?”

“Yeah? Did you have anything particular in mind?”

Nicky rakes his eyes over my body and licks his lips. He has this way of looking at me when he’s turned on that makes my knees weak. It’s just this intense focus that seems like it’s all for me. I want to bite his pouty lower lip as we grind our dicks together.

Maybe I should want to go out for dinner instead of what we’ve been doing. Socially acceptable ‘real’ dates. Something where we can chat and share the details of our lives and who we’ve become over our years apart, but we talk plenty. Mostly in between trash talk about the games we’ve been playing, but still.

I don’t get to touch him anywhere near often enough and I don’t want to go somewhere we have to watch our level of PDA. Besides, I’m supposed to be pupsitting, which means it could be fun to play with Niko as a puppy this weekend.

“Your Daddy said you might want extra puppy time while he’s away? So you don’t dwell on missing him? Would you want to play with me like that again?”

Nicky licks his lips. “We could do that. Did you enjoy it last time? I don’t want you to get bored if it’s not your thing.”

“I like you as Niko. And I wanted to try something, if you’re okay with it?”

He perks up and smiles at me. “Sure, what did you have in mind?”

“I want to try being little with you. Q said they like playing with their little friends as a pup because they all spoil the puppy. And it sounds fun.”

“How little?”

I shrug. I've been interested in this type of play for a while, but most of what I've seen is too young for my comfort. Not that I'm judging people who like it, it's just not for me. I don't want pacifiers and diapers. Or coloring books and story time. And the idea of a Dom of any sort bathing me makes my skin crawl.

I want to be smaller without being entirely a child. Like how Clark described middles. That resonated with me. And the way he treated me that first night was a tantalizing taste of what that might be like in practice. He let me call him Daddy and tucked me into bed with Niko, and I loved it.

"I want to try being a middle," I say.

"Fun." Nicky nods. "How old? Like are we talking, begging your folks for a ride into town, or after they let you and Leo have bus passes?"

"Twelve-ish." I say decisively.

About the age I was when I used to dog sit for our elderly neighbors when they visited their grandkids in the US. Leo and I helped the Gundersons with all kinds of tasks for extra spending money. That bit of cash in our pockets was a heady thing at twelve. Back when I got my first cell phone and permission to take transit without an adult.

The long summer days running wild with Leo and Nicky gave me my first taste of freedom and responsibility. But always with the safety net that I'd have my parents and Nicky's ready to swoop in with help if we ran into any situation we couldn't handle on our own.

"Yeah, I can see that." Nicky grins at me. "We've got the marathon gaming down pat."

"Hey! There is nothing wrong with enjoying the same hobbies we liked when we were younger."

"Never said there was." He's still smiling as he rubs his hands together with boyish glee. "This is going to be fun."

I'm hoping he's right. That I can recapture my adolescent sense of wide-eyed wonder with the world. Go back to the part

of me that hadn't yet learned what it felt like to want to crawl out of the skin I was born in.

When my belief that love didn't come with conditions was still intact. I recall the pride glowing in my chest at feeling so grown up before I had to shoulder the full-weight of adult responsibilities on my own.

That ineffable joy the first time the three of us—Nicky, Leo, and I—wandered into a grocery store with cash in hand. We felt so adult as we filled up our basket with whatever junk food caught our eyes. We didn't need permission, and it seemed like the world was ours for the taking.

“We are going to have a blast,” I agree.

“So, you're going to be my pupsitter? Just like back in the day, huh?”

“Pretty much.”

Nicky stayed with Leo and me at the Gundersons' house when we watched their two senior dogs. They left us money to order pizza or something, but Leo suggested we could get *anything* with that crisp twenty-dollar bill, so we did.

The three of us shared a package of pizza bites that we somehow managed to both burn and leave half-frozen. We paired it with a jar of frosting and a tube of pre-made cookie dough for dinner. It was a glorious feast that we spent years fondly reminiscing over, because we got to make our own choices and no one could stop us.

That's the age I'm shooting for. When the world hadn't lost any of its shine and I could look at it with a child on the cusp of adulthood's sense of boundless possibility.

“Cool. We can watch out for each other while Daddy is away. I'd like that. You're sure you want to play this way with me?”

“Yes.”

“Do you need help to get in the right headspace? Have you done age play before?” Nicky asks.

“Sort of? I played with a Daddy who wanted me to be little. I wasn’t very good at it. He ended up spanking me for being a brat over not getting into the scene he wanted and I wasn’t into that either.”

“Right, well, he sounds like a crappy Dom if he got mad at you for not enjoying a scene or being able to find a certain headspace.”

“We weren’t a good fit,” I say diplomatically, though I agree with his assessment.

“Well, for tonight, sometimes props and costumes can help me get in the right frame of mind. Like my puppy gear. When Daddy puts in my tail and buckles on a play collar, I know I get to be a pup.”

“What do you suggest I wear for being a tween?” I arch my brow at him.

“Middle stuff? I’d get you a flip phone for the nostalgia, or some fun high-tops?” Nicky crosses to the closet and rummages around through a messy tangle of stuff before he pulls out a yellow converse. “Knew it was in there somewhere!” He thrusts the shoe toward me and digs around for its partner. “Remember how you used to draw on these when we were kids?”

“Yeah.” I turn the shoe around to examine the worn canvas. “Your folks got you the custom ones and Leo and I were super jealous. And you brought over the fabric markers for us to customize our cheap knockoffs so the three of us could have matching shoes.”

“I remember. And then you ended up having the coolest shoes because you spent ages covering them in little doodles.”

“You begged me to do yours as well.”

“Yep.” Nicky gives me a rueful smile. “And it pissed off my folks that I messed up the expensive new shoes they got me.”

“You didn’t rat me out to them, even though they grounded you.” I bump shoulders with him, this man who has always had my back.

“Hey, that would have been self-sabotage since I was relying on you and Leo to sneak me contraband snacks and notes and music through my window.” He pulls out the other shoe and an oversized Canucks jersey.

“True. Good times.” I take the second shoe from him and hold them up. “What am I supposed to do with this?”

“Yeah, so. I know they’re a bit too large, but try these on. We’ve got some felt-tip markers in the living room.”

“I don’t know, man. I mean, I’m a Leafs fan now.”

“Get out.” Nicky deadpans. He clutches the jersey to his chest with one hand and points toward the door with the other. “I never thought I’d see the day I heard such treachery from a friend.”

“You don’t even like hockey,” I point out, reaching for the jersey.

Leo did. And I liked what my brother liked, so we wore matching jerseys as kids. My favorite part about baggy sports shirts and tucking all my hair into a matching ball cap was that people would mistake me for a boy.

At least until I got old enough for my voice to get me misgendered. Despite my best efforts to mimic the changes in Leo and Nicky’s cadences and talk in a lower register like them, my voice always used to give me away.

It was hard to train that away even with T. But for those golden tween years, I could just be one of the guys. I didn’t understand why that made me so happy at the time, but it’s obvious in retrospect.

“Think that will help?” Nicky brandishes the clothing at me. “It’s stuff I don’t wear as often, so it got stashed in here when I moved in with Daddy.”

“Yeah, thanks, Nicky. You sure it’s okay to borrow all this?”

“Yeah. Of course. My casa is Sue’s casa, or whatever.”

“Dork. I’m not even going to correct you.”

He grins. I shrug the jersey on over my shirt, jam the cap over my head and lace the shoes onto my feet. They're a bit big, as expected, but I wore a women's size ten before I gathered up the courage to shop in the men's section.

Now, after almost a decade on T, my feet fit a men's ten, so Nick's size elevens aren't too terribly loose on me. I cinch the laces tight and it's a reasonably good fit. About like wearing his hand-me-downs when we were actually twelve.

“Okay, I'm digging this. Markers! I'm going to color them with rainbows. And of course, a Niko puppy. And Gandalf.”

Nicky grins at me and ruffles my hair. “Sounds perfect. Want to put my play collar on me?”

“Sure.”

Nicky eases open the drawer and selects what he wants, then hands it to me. He lowers himself to kneel in front of me and holds his day collar out of the way for me to fasten the play one around his neck. Once it's buckled and adjusted, I ease the headband with two pointy ears into place, ruffling his hair.

The matching tail snaps around his belt with a fastener. He wags it and crowds into my space to lick my face. I giggle and take his face between my hands to keep him from licking me to death. I rub behind his ears and he gazes at me with a dopey grin on his face.

Nicky—no, Niko, he's definitely Niko right now—scratches at his ears, then rubs his face along my chest. He noses at me until I give in and pat his head.

His tongue lolls out of his mouth in a happy doggy grin and when he catches me looking, Niko licks a stripe over my face. I can't help laughing. His playful energy is contagious. And I grab his face in both hands again to scratch his ears.

“We have to let Gandalf rest and replenish her spells. Come on, Niko. We should look at the list your Daddy left so I can be sure to take the best care of you.”

I tug on his collar, and he follows me out of the room on all fours. He crowds at my heels, making me laugh at his

insistence on staying right underfoot. I'm going to take such good care of him this weekend. So good that neither Niko nor his Daddy will ever want me to leave.

In the kitchen, I find a note from Clark inviting me to help myself to anything in the fridge if Nick isn't in a headspace to offer me hospitality. It reminds me of the notes the Gundersons used to leave when I was their pet sitter. Basically, I have free rein of the house so long as I clean up after myself and take care of his treasured pooch.

I glance down at said human puppy where he's panting and gazing up at me with liquid-honey eyes I could lose myself in for days.

"You want dinner?" I ask him.

Niko woofs happily and spins in a circle at my feet. When I don't immediately make his dinner appear, he barks more insistently.

"Guess you are a hungry puppy. Hmm? Your Daddy says he left you some puppy chow? But what do doggos like best? You want a big juicy steak, puppy?"

Niko barks.

"Or we could order in."

Pizza sounds good, but I don't think it's good for dogs. Meat should be, though. Hence all the bone stereotypes. I check the fridge to see what they've got to eat.

As I'm letting the door hang open to poke at the selection on their shelves, Niko noses in beside me and sniffs at the food. I laugh as he grabs the corner of a package of pepperoni sticks and tries to pull it out. I grab his prize from his jaws before he escapes with it.

"Are those for you?" I ask him.

Niko whines, fixes me with the most pitiful puppy-dog eyes, and wags his tail hopefully. He paws at my hand when I don't give up the treats soon enough.

"Yeah? They're for good boys?" I pull open the zip seal on the package. Niko growls playfully. "And you're the very best

boy, aren't you?"

Niko barks his agreement and twirls in a circle at my feet.

"Okay, fine. You can have one, but that's all. I don't want you to ruin your supper." I pull out a pepperoni stick and offer it to him.

Niko takes his snack delicately between his teeth and retreats with it. I seal up the package. He flops down on the little rug by the sink to wedge the treat between his forepaws and gnaw on it while I go back to perusing our dinner options.

Oops, I left the fridge open. I tuck the pepperoni bag back next to a block of cream cheese and try to inventory the rest of the food quickly.

Chicken and rice are supposed to be good for dogs. And they've got a container of sliced mushrooms that look like they are on the verge of being too dehydrated to taste good. I pull out chicken, mushrooms, and a few other things.

Then I rummage through their pantry for anything else that looks like it would work with my vague recipe plans. Cream of chicken soup, Mom used to use that instead of cream of mushroom, so that should make things nice and creamy.

I preheat the oven, season the chicken, then start prepping everything to dump in a casserole to bake until the chicken is hot enough, and the rice is done. Niko finishes his snack and pads back over to stand close to me. He noses at my legs and stands poised to catch any food that I might drop.

"If I dropped some raw chicken, would you eat it?" I ask as I absently scruff his ears.

Niko huffs out an affronted sounding woof.

"Does that bark mean 'of course not. Don't be daft.' Or was it more of a 'duh, it's food and I am dog; that morsel is going down the hatch?'"

Niko whines and noses at me until I drop a slice of raw onion as I'm adding it to the dish. He catches it midair, wolfing it down in a single swallow. Ick. I scruff his head.

"That didn't look tasty, boy," I comment.

He licks my fingers. I've washed them since touching the raw meat, but I don't know that he was paying enough attention to notice that detail. So between that and the onion, I guess there's a decent chance he'd reflexively go for any food I dropped to him in his pupspace. Good to know.

I'm not about to hand him raw chicken to eat. Even if the thought of kissing his second-hand slimy chicken mouth didn't make me gag. Salmonella is not our friend. I cover the pan and pop it in the oven. Then turn to squat down and fuss over Niko.

"Is my good boy going to have stinky onion breath?" I ask as I pet him and play with his soft puppy ears.

Niko excitedly gives me a sample of his breath, licking at my face. Yeah, he smells oniony. And I still like having his tongue on my face. I pull him closer and kiss his forehead.

"You're a very good boy. Want to play fetch or something while that bakes?"

Niko barks and trots off to find a toy. I follow him into the living room.

Chapter 17

Nick

Daddy is coming home tomorrow. Super early. I might wake up to him joining me in our big bed. If I go to sleep in our bed. Nuzzling closer to Ethan on the living room rug, I whine. I don't want to choose between curling up next to him in the guest bed where we've slept tangled together all week, and waking up next to Daddy.

I wish I could have both. And all that melancholy makes it hard to stay in my pup space. Not that I really need more puppy time. I've been able to spend most of my non-work hours in pup mode this week. Ever since Daddy left and Ethan came to stay with me.

It's different being a puppy with Ethan. Daddy is stern and gives me strict rules and punishments. Ethan is all play and fun and doting. That's the only word to describe it. He dotes on me like a kid with his first pet. Like I'm his best friend and he adores me with every fiber of his being. That love is mutual.

He is constantly slipping me treats and playing games and fussing over me. On Sunday, he spent hours grooming me. Like, full on puppy spa-day brushing my body with a soft brush, shaping my nails with a file and meticulously painting them in a clear coat. He even polished my play collar to a dull gleam. He spent ages laying on his belly on the rug facing me and patiently brushing the polish over each nail no matter how much I fidgeted at the attention.

In the past week, we've worked through every dog trick he could think of with me to see which I knew and which he could train me to do. He lets me on the furniture and on top of him.

We spend hours roughhousing and playing games that inevitably end with me on top of my naked, writhing, giggling boy as we both get off, our dicks pressed firmly together.

We're still using condoms for penetration, but I love frotting bare with him.

Sure, there are some risks involved, but they're minor and there's nothing like the silky smooth glide of his skin against mine. The hard ridge of his erection presses against mine, smaller but no less needy and no less wonderful to play with. He's a perfect mouthful and I've spent hours licking and suckling on his cock this week while he cards his fingers through my fur and calls me his good boy.

I spent the past week playing the pup to Ethan's boy. I'm falling snout over tail in love with the boy who used to be my best friend. Who still knows all my oldest jokes and makes me smile more than I have in a long time.

Between my meds, getting back to my usual routine, and extra appointments with Maddy, I've course corrected. My supports got me out of my depression spiral, past mania, and back onto an even keel.

Time in my pupspace helped, and so did Ethan. The buzz of our new relationship helped blunt the hard edges of my worst thoughts' gravitational pull on my mood. Sometimes it helps to have positive things to focus on, and reconnecting with Ethan has been amazing.

Daddy helps too; his constant soothing presence is my bulwark. Daddy is enough for me. He's exactly the right Daddy for me. The perfect blend of strict and indulgent. But I need Ethan now too. I need the things they both offer me.

When Daddy takes care of me, I feel loved because he gives me boundaries and rules. Sometimes I crave the sharp sting of his hand on my ass when I need a correction. The squeeze of his hand on my throat, holding the very beat of my heart in his hands.

When Ethan takes care of me, it's an entirely unique experience. Daddy puts me to bed when I need it. Ethan tumbles into bed beside me with our bodies entwined, lulling me into dreams until we can't keep our eyes open any longer.

Daddy feeds me healthy food. Ethan feeds me my favorite treats. Daddy gives me commands to obey. He lets me submit to him the way I need, sometimes fighting him for it.

Ethan gives me challenges to impress and please him. He lets me woo him with my charms. Makes me want to be his obedient boy. He gives himself to me.

Daddy demands my pleasure, claiming it all for himself. Ethan, well, he lets me pour all of my passion into his body. Lets me fuck him and hump him and love on him to my heart's content until I'm bursting with it.

They both give me the rough affection I sometimes crave in their own ways. And they both show me I'm adored. And I love them both in entirely different ways.

It's not quite like previous relationship patterns I seem to repeat. The one where I fall hard in lust, fuck around for a while, and then let things fizzle as fast as they started. It always ends when I can't keep up the facade of being constantly on and happy and sexy.

I don't need to perform for Ethan. He seems just as happy playing 'got your paw' with Niko as he is playing video games with Nicky. And I love hearing him call me that. It brings up so many treasured memories from our shared youth.

After a week of being Niko with him, I'm growing closer to Ethan. Comfortable with him. And it's oh so natural to strip to my jock and let him put on my pup gear for a lazy night in. He's a pro at getting me settled into my play collar, paw gloves, plug tail, and pup hood by now.

Then he gathers up the colorful sharpies he brought home earlier this week and settles in to doodle on the canvas shoes I gave him. I enjoy watching him concentrating on his design as he draws a puppy paw over the toe of the shoe. And that makes me think he might think of me as much as I think about him.

It doesn't solve the problem of where we're sleeping tonight, or make me stop missing Daddy, but it's something. I

snuffle into his lap and nuzzle at his crotch to get his attention. Ethan laughingly shoves my face away.

“Does my Niko puppy want attention and loves?” Ethan sing-songs to me, on to my games.

I bark and mouth at his bulge.

Ethan tousles my ears. “Fine, let me just put this away and you can have belly rubs.” He reaches for the cap to his marker.

I wriggle onto his lap, enjoying the attention and the way he smiles at me as I squirm to drape myself over his legs, much like an oversized lapdog. His spluttered protests would be more convincing if he weren't laughing and petting me all over as he voices them.

I love making him laugh. And I love his hands on me and I love him. Love him with the same deep and abiding passion I reserve for Daddy. I turn onto my back so I can gaze up at Ethan.

I'm panting and inviting belly rubs. Ethan obliges and I lap at his face with my tongue. The comforting weight of my wedding ring rests on my chest. Ethan rests a palm over the ring, cupping it against my heart.

“I love you, Niko, but you're being a pest,” Ethan says, but that doesn't stop him from pulling me closer for a kiss.

I lick into his mouth as I tug his shirt up, hoping to get him naked, unable to put into words how wonderful it is to have the warmth of his hand pressing against my collar. And for the first time, I wonder what it might be like to have two rings clinking together there instead of the one. Symbols for both the men I love and my commitment to them.

I want Ethan to wear a matching symbol, the way Daddy does. I want them both for always. That's a scary thought, but I think it's one I'm going to pursue when I'm not busy kissing my boyfriend while we wait for Daddy to get home to us.

Chapter 18

Clark

I'm not sure what to expect as I let myself into the house after my flight home. I finished early enough in the day to get my red-eye home changed to an early afternoon departure from Pearson. Nicholas wasn't answering his phone when I called to update him, so he's probably distracted with Ethan.

That should make me happy, not set a ball of anxiety roiling in my chest. Part of my worry is that he's not answering because he's wrapped up in a depression blanket burrito. But I can admit to myself that part of it is envy.

I enjoy being the one who lights Nicholas up. I love being the one he comes to with all his big troubles. It's such an empowering thing to take care of him when he needs me.

The ugly flip-side of that is some visceral part of me resents not being needed anymore. It's an impulse I quash with extreme prejudice as soon as the thought rears its head, but it's there, nonetheless.

No matter my baser inclinations and their attendant guilt, I am always happy to see Nicholas thriving, regardless of my role in his wellbeing. So when I open the door, leave my bag by the shoe rack, and pad down the hall to check on my boys. I'm not entirely prepared for what I see to hit me in the solar plexus quite the way it does.

My gut reaction isn't jealousy or to wonder what I've missed out on all week. It's an overwhelming sense of compersion. Happiness at seeing my boy happy in another man's arms. Or in this case, his lap.

My Niko sprawls across Ethan's lap, shamelessly demanding belly rubs, while Ethan laughs.

"Hey! You're gonna smudge it," Ethan protests, holding an old shoe of Nicholas's aloft in one hand.

He's brandishing a sharpie in the other hand, and his lips look freshly kissed. Niko takes full advantage of Ethan's full hands to curl up and lick his mouth. Ethan splutters. Niko whines, wriggling around and trying to lick more insistently.

Our pup can be a brat about that, but Ethan seems more delighted than upset and he abandons the shoe and sharpie in favor of grabbing Niko's face. He kisses my boy on the nose while he scruffs at the pup's floppy ears. Ethan coos sweet nothings about how he's the bestest best boy. Niko sneeze-barks right in Ethan's face, and wrenches free when Ethan releases him to wipe his face.

Niko rolls to his feet, dances back a few steps and drops into a playful bow, barking a doggy dare at Ethan. As I observe unseen from the doorway, Ethan mirrors the position, and both boys on their knees present a fine sight.

I can't help the fantasy of striding into the middle of their game and having all that playful focus on me. Both boys ready and eager to please their Daddy.

Niko's ass is a sight for sore eyes, lifted toward me framed by a jock as he wags the plug tail stuffed into his ass. A sign he's got my hole all nice and ready for me.

"Oh, you want to play, do you?" Ethan says, inching his hand toward Niko along the carpet. "Nice paws you have there, Niko. It would be a shame if someone took them."

Ethan lunges for my pup's forepaw. Niko growls and mouths at his hand and snatches back his paw. Ethan feints for his other paw and Niko dodges, only to get caught on the other side. Ethan laughs, Niko yips.

They keep at it until Ethan captures both of Niko's front paws. Then the pup lunges forward to tumble him onto his back and drapes his weight on top of Ethan. He shifts around to settle between Ethan's thighs. The boy opens to my pup willingly with a breathy moan.

I know my pup well enough to realize where this is going. As much as I love a good voyeurism scene as much as the next

guy, Ethan didn't agree to my watching the two of them getting off together tonight.

I should turn away. Go down the street to grab a coffee, give them time to indulge, and then come back more loudly. However, I can't quite tear myself away from the pair. And we talked about playing together. It's something all three of us want.

Instead of backing away, I clear my throat, drawing Ethan's attention first, and then Niko whips around and bounds over to me. His erection juts proudly toward me as he throws himself into my arms.

I hug my pup, accepting his eager licks, and wriggling, wordless demands for my touch. But I also keep an eye on Ethan as the boy pulls on a baggy jersey to cover himself. He keeps darting glances our way, inching toward the couch and acting awkward, as though he thinks himself an interloper at our reunion.

That gives me a twinge of guilt. I'm the one who interrupted them. This is his time with Nicholas, and my momentary petty delight in being the one Niko ran to sours. I love my boy enough to not want to come between him and Ethan. Or play childish loyalty games with him.

"Sorry to interrupt your fun, puppy. Go sit with your boy, yeah?"

Niko licks my face, a wet swipe over my stubble, and then he's off to rejoin Ethan. Niko sits beside the other boy and gazes up at me adoringly. His tongue lolls out like there's nowhere else he'd rather be as Ethan pats his head.

"You're back early," Ethan observes. "He was a real good boy for me, Sir. Thanks for letting me stay with him."

I stride over to the couch, well aware of how much I enjoy seeing the tableau before me. My pup and his boy both gazing up at me attentively. I want to revel in it, but I don't have that kind of relationship with Ethan. Not yet. "I thought we agreed you would call me Daddy, Ethan."

Ethan's throat bobs as he swallows hard. "Yes, Daddy."

“I know we talked about doing a scene together after my trip. Do you still want that? To be a part of our dynamic?”

“Yes. Nick said you sometimes top his boyfriends. I want that. I want you to call me boy and to play with you both. Daddy.” He tacks on the title, still seeming unsure about using it. His tongue darts out to wet his lips. I’m tempted to claim them in a bruising kiss. But not yet, parameters first.

“You want me to tell you what to do with our horny little puppy? Or no, that’s not quite right, is it, boy?”

“Daddy?”

“No, I think you want me to tell our puppy what to do to his boy, don’t you?” I gauge his response to the filthy fantasy as I spool it out for him, tailoring it to his reactions. “You want me to command our pup to mount your hot little ass and hump you until he covers you in his cum and then laps it all up. I won’t let him stop until you’re a wet sloppy mess begging him to make you come too.”

Ethan’s eyes dilate. He swallows hard, lips open in a kissable pout, head tipping in a barely conscious nod as he tightens his grip on Niko’s play collar.

“You’d like that, huh? You want Daddy to decide when my boys get to come, and how, don’t you? Want Daddy to be in control of both my little sluts. Are you my little slut for tonight, Ethan? Is that what you want, boy?”

“Yes, Sir. Daddy. I—” Ethan’s throat works as he tries to find his words and I resist the urge to palm my erection at the mental image of him swallowing around my cock. “I want to be your slut. With Niko.”

“Do you want me to watch?” I ask.

“Yes, Sir. Daddy.”

“And can I touch you, boy?”

Ethan hesitates for long enough that I decide not to push him for that yet.

“Only Niko for tonight, hm? You aren’t ready for Daddy’s monster cock, are you, boy?”

“Maybe next time? Sorry, Daddy.”

“No apology needed, boy. I won’t touch you without your consent, and my—our—pup is going to take very good care of both his people tonight, aren’t you, puppy?”

Niko wriggles happily and barks an affirmative.

“Do you want to see him take his Daddy’s cock after he gets you off?”

“Yes, Daddy. Sir.”

“Just Daddy is fine, boy. No need to use both titles. I’m going to touch myself while he mounts you. You can tell us it’s too much at any time. Are you familiar with traffic lights?”

“Red to stop, yellow to slow down, and green is all good.”

“That’s right. Niko, do you remember your safe sound?”

Niko growls out the low bark and lifts his paw to rub at his muzzle, showing me he remembers.

“Good boy. You want to play with your slut for me?”

Niko barks his assent.

“Yeah? Show Daddy how excited your boy makes you,” I demand.

Niko obediently rolls onto his back, legs splayed out to give me access to his hard cock. I nudge his balls gently with my toes and he whines.

I press his dick against his belly with the sole of my foot. Then I turn my attention to Ethan as my pup pants and lets me step on his junk. Of course I’m gentle with him, but I love the submission, the acceptance that I could hurt him. His complete trust that I won’t take this too far.

“Hm, you’re so ready to fuck your little bitch, aren’t you, my good boy? Ready to have a hot, wet hole wrapped around your cock? You want it so bad you’re going to have a hard time holding back, aren’t you, baby?”

Niko whines, hips lifting against my foot, like he’d be perfectly happy to rut against my sock. That’s not far from the

truth. I chuckle.

“So horny. Do you want your boy’s mouth stud puppy? Want him to suck you?” Niko whines hopefully, barks a yes.

I chuckle. “Not today. He’s going to present his pretty ass and you are going to mount him and fuck your cock along his crack. You aren’t getting that hungry little dick inside of anyone tonight, puppy, are we clear?”

Niko yips noncommittally.

“Is that a yes?”

He barks a yes.

“Good boy. Ethan, are you ready for him?”

“Yes, Daddy.”

“Hmm,” I stroke my chin as I examine him, enjoying his rapt attention, drawing out the game. “I don’t think you are. I think a handsome gift needs to be wrapped up pretty, don’t you?”

“If you say so, Daddy.” Ethan glances toward the toy room. I chuckle, amused that he knows where we keep the good stuff.

“Yes. I do say so. Take off your clothing, then get on your knees for him, boy, present that ass. Niko, sit and stay while Daddy gets what we need.” I give him the hand signs to go with the commands, brooking no room for him to disobey. I turn on my heel and stride to the guest room to grab a few toys.

Behind me, there’s scuffling sounds as Ethan scrambles to obey, shuffling forward to turn and present the pert curves of his ass to us both. When I step back into the living room, I’m pleased to see that without being told he presented himself to us. Ethan looks enticing bent forward, his chest on the carpet as he reaches back to part his cheeks and show my pup and I his hole.

I have to squeeze my balls to control my reaction to that delectable sight. Typically, I don’t fuck other people; Niko is all I need. But I kind of like the idea of my puppy watching

while I take his boy. I hope to share Ethan with him in more ways than I usually do.

Ethan seems tense at first though, his fingers clinging too tight, his muscles locked. That won't do.

“Gorgeous, boy. Do you like being called beautiful? Because that's a lovely hole, Daddy can't wait until you decide to share it with him. Is that something my good boy wants?”

“Ugh. Daddy. It's not pretty.”

“Ah, I see. Is my boy embarrassed to show off his hole?”

Ethan nods, cheek rubbing against the carpet.

“Use your words, boy. Are you embarrassed for Daddy to see that sexy tight hole?”

“Yes, Daddy.”

“Huh. And are there compliments that you don't want me to use in referring to you, boy?”

“No. General compliments, like pretty, don't make me dysphoric.” He's still holding back, so I let the silence stretch after his answer and he rewards me by blurting out his reservations. “It's just weird that someone like you finds my body sexy.”

“Someone like me?” I arch a brow at him.

“You're a quintessential silver fox, Daddy. Hot AF.”

I chuckle at that. “I'm glad you think so, boy. It works out for us all that I prefer handsome studs like you and Niko, huh?”

“Yes, Daddy.”

“So, back to that sexy hole of yours; should our puppy kiss it and make it better?”

“Yes, Daddy,” his answer is a breathy whisper, and if I knew him better, I might make him repeat it. Beg for it, even, but I don't want to push too hard during our first time doing this. Sharing my—our—Nicholas.

“Excellent. There’s just one more thing. We need to wrap you up pretty with a bow.” I let the hank of rope unfurl in front of his face, enjoying the light of excitement that fills his expression.

“Yes, please. Tie me up, Daddy,” Ethan agrees.

“Just your wrists for tonight, I think. Can you bring your palms together behind your knees for me? I want you to be comfortable if it takes Niko a while to finish with you.”

“Yes, Daddy. I can do that.” Ethan wastes no time in taking up the position. I kneel behind him to wrap the bight of the rope around his wrists in a quick and simple double column tie. It doesn’t take long to loop the rope around both wrists three times. Then I can cinch the center snug enough to hold him.

At least, that’s my plan, but before I finish the tie, the little brat squirms. He tries to tug free as I work. I recall Niko laughing about Ethan’s attempts at playing escape artist.

Well, two can play at that game. I gently swat his ass with a bit of the slack, just hard enough to get his attention, not enough to hurt or leave a mark. “Is that how you’re going to play this, brat?”

“Sorry, Daddy,” Ethan says, without an ounce of contrition.

“I see how it is.” Thinking on my feet, I switch to a Lark’s Head double column tie instead.

It’s a little more work to pull the tails through and secure him, but this time, when he struggles, I already have control of him. It’s a snap to take up the tension while he squirms, then go back to finishing the tie when he settles.

Ethan moans as I work on him. He rocks his dick against his ankle and it’s pretty clear the struggle turns him on, so I don’t begrudge him his enjoyment. Even if it makes my job more challenging.

If he was ready for me to be overtly sexual with him, I’d reach between his legs and work his cute little cock. This is so clearly turning him on, I’d tease him until he’s reduced to wordless pleas.

But he's not ready for that, so I content myself with lingering touches on his wrists as I tie him. He'll let me play with his dick when he's ready. I can be patient until that day comes.

Once I have Ethan secured, I double check that I can slip a couple of fingers between the cuffs and his wrists and that nothing pinches or hurts.

"How's that feel, boy?" I check as I stroke the soft insides of his wrists.

"Good, Daddy," Ethan says. "So good."

He struggles and moans as his movements pull against the ropes. He can squirm all he wants, but it won't tighten the rope holding him in place. With the way he's positioned, even just the one simple tie has his arms locking him in the position I want. This should give him the illusion of more extensive restraints, while I let Niko tease and fuck him. Perfect.

"There, pretty as a picture. Niko, get him ready." I point and snap my fingers. Niko eagerly buries his face between Ethan's ass cheeks, licking like he's starving for it. Niko spears his tongue into the boy's tight pucker and laps along his crease.

Ethan makes the most beautiful, pained sounds of pleasure. In no time he is pushing back into my pup's mouth, spreading himself open and moaning as he struggles against his bound wrists. Desperate to open himself more to Niko's eager mouth. His arms keep him from spreading his legs or doing anything other than deepening into his pose, arching his back and pressing his ass against our pup's mouth.

I step around to get a view of Ethan's face where he's hidden it, tucked against his shoulder. "That's it, you like that, don't you, slut? Love Niko's tongue working you open? He wants to be inside you so bad. Do you want him, Ethan? You want my puppy buried inside that tight hole?"

"Y-yes, Daddy. Ugh, so good."

"Tell Niko how good it is, boy. Let him know what a good pup he's being for you."

Niko wags his tail and redoubles his efforts at the second-hand praise. I reach into the side table for lube and slick my hand to jerk myself while Ethan babbles praise to Niko. He has my pup whining and wriggling with pent up desire.

“Oh, fuck, Niko, you make me feel so good. Want you inside me so bad. Fuck me. Make me yours.”

Pre-cum wets the tip of Niko’s dick when I step in close and reach under him to stroke his length. I jerk him roughly and Niko pumps into my fist, accustomed to my touch.

“Think he’s ready?” I ask. Niko woofs. I ruffle his ears. “Mount up then, pup. Rub your dick against his crack and between his thighs to your heart’s content. You aren’t to fuck into that tight little hole. Just imagine how tight he’ll be, wrapped around your cock. Milking your balls dry. You’d like him to squeeze around you when he comes, wouldn’t you, boy?”

“Daddy!” Ethan whines.

I chuckle. “You want it too, huh? Want him to mount you? Fuck into you? Not today, my little sluts. I want to see him paint your ass in jizz. You good with that?”

“Yes, Daddy.”

“He gets tested regularly; has he shown you his results?”

“Yes, Daddy. I want him.”

“And you, pup, you good?”

Niko barks an affirmative, and considering what they were doing when I walked into the room, they obviously haven’t been shy about their junk touching. Still, I don’t want to assume anything and let my boys get carried away by the heat of the moment into something they might regret later.

Niko scrambles into position, glancing to me for permission. I nod, and he lines up his dick between Ethan’s ass cheeks and thrusts.

“That’s it, Niko, good boy, hump him like he’s your toy for the night, boy.” I nudge my pup’s ass with my toes and he thrusts harder, grunting with the effort. Ethan rocks back to

meet him, and the two of them writhe together. Their bodies form a sweaty tangle at my feet as they obey my commands.

I stroke myself languidly as I watch them put on a show. Niko presses himself along Ethan's body, plastering his chest to Ethan's back. Boy and pup skin-to-skin from shoulders to groins. I circle them to get a view from every angle.

I love the soft sounds they both make. Niko's breath comes in pants from his exertion, his muscular ass flexes with each thrust, tail wagging in his hole. Ethan moans and begs, incoherent with lust, as Niko's cock rubs against him. The two of them fuck with wild abandon.

Niko's getting close to coming. I can tell from his higher whines and the sharp staccato of his thrusts. He laps at the sweaty skin between Ethan's shoulder blades, then glances toward me with a plaintive little whine.

"That's it puppy. You ready to give him your load?"

Niko yips.

"Okay," I say. "Down." He groans as he obeys, moving gingerly away from Ethan.

Ethan also whines a protest, "No, Daddy! I was so close."

"Daddy decides when my sluts come for me," I remind him. And then I grab Niko's dick and jerk him hard and fast, aiming the tip at Ethan's lower back. "Niko, Come."

Obedient as ever, Niko comes, pearly ropes of jizz shooting onto Ethan's back and over his pretty ass cheeks.

"Good boys." I don't stop milking every drop from my boy until he whines, uncomfortable from the overstimulation. "Lick up your mess."

Niko obeys. Ethan struggles with his bound wrists, clearly intent on touching himself. That won't do at all. If he was my boy for more than a scene, I'd slap his hand away and do it for him. He's not though.

"Your boy is feeling unappreciated, Niko, pleasure him with that talented tongue of yours." I shove his face between Ethan's thighs, but the angle is awkward.

“Ethan, on your back please, Niko will keep that cock of yours nice and cozy warm until you have permission to touch it.”

Ethan freezes. Then he gingerly attempts to turn onto his back. The way his wrists are bound makes it awkward.

“Daddy!” he whines as he tries to rock onto his side, or pull his legs up enough to free them from his wrists.

“If you need help, all you have to do is ask.” I say, amused by his fruitless efforts.

“Yes, Daddy.” Ethan struggles longer. It’s clear every grunting, squirming effort has him more turned on as he rocks his hips. He’s seeking friction that I have no intention of letting him find until he’s in Niko’s mouth.

I watch him impassively. Niko keeps lapping at his ass and lower back, impeding his flailing efforts at obedience. I snort.

“That tickles, puppy!” Ethan protests as he squirms.

“Are you sure you don’t need help?” I finally prompt when he’s starting to seem frustrated.

“Will you help me, Daddy?”

“With pleasure, my boy.” I scoop him up and gently roll him onto his back. Niko dives onto his cock as soon as I step back, lapping eagerly at his prize. Ethan howls out with a pleasure-drenched sound. He lets his legs fall open, bound wrists snug against his ass, to give Niko access to his bits.

“Just hold it, Niko,” I say after a moment. The pup freezes, holding Ethan in his mouth. The boy whimpers and bucks, trying to take what he needs. Niko rests both forepaws on his belly and hips, holding him still and giving a low warning growl.

“Good boy.” I suppress a chuckle.

“Daddy?!” Ethan protests.

“Niko will keep your cock warm for me while I fuck his tight little hole. Then, after Daddy comes, he can enjoy his treat and suck your brains out through your cock,” I explain.

“Ungh,” Ethan groans and thrashes his head from side to side. He’s still struggling to get some sort of friction, but Niko knows who to obey and doesn’t budge. “Nicky didn’t tell me you’re a sadist,” Ethan complains.

I chuckle. “Because I’m not. I just like making my boys work for their pleasure. Just think how good it will be when he sucks you off. Think how wonderful it’s going to be when he moves against you every time I thrust into him. Like I’m fucking his mouth onto your length, boy. He’ll be like our double-sided fuck tube. You want that? To feel me fucking our pup?”

“Yes, Daddy. I want that.”

“Good. Then all you have to do is hold back your orgasm until I say so, alright?”

“Yes, Daddy.” Ethan nods.

Niko wriggles his ass in anticipation. I walk around him to remove his plug and make sure he prepped his hole for me earlier. Both boys moan in stereo, I’m sure the vibrations of Niko’s content little moan at being breached sends lovely sensations through Ethan’s cock.

When I sink into the familiar warmth of my husband’s ass, it’s like coming home all over again. We fit together like nothing else and I’ve missed this. Missed him. Our couplings always satisfy me, but there’s something special about including Ethan for the first time.

The three of us coming together feels like a beginning that I can’t wait to explore more of. Holding back is going to be exquisite torture for both my boys. I only hope I have the wherewithal to make it last.

Chapter 19

Ethan

I might never get over the slick heat of Niko's mouth latched onto my dick. As he just holds me there, his tongue pressed along the sensitive underside of my cock, I feel the warmth of his every breath. The vibrations of his soft moans while he gets plowed by his Daddy's monster cock, each thrust rocking him against me.

He mentioned his Daddy is hung, but his words did not prepare me for a porn dick in person. Clark's girthy length is intimidating, and I'm glad I've got time to work up to taking it myself. But watching him ease into Niko with a heart-meltingly tender expression makes me want to grow close enough to have Daddy fuck me too.

I'm not ready for it today, but someday I want to be pinioned between these two men, have them both telling me what to do. I want to struggle against their restraints, cradled in the certainty that the two of them can hold me tight.

For now, though, this is enough. The rough friction of the ropes around my wrists reminds me of Daddy's control, even as he focuses his attention on Niko. The silky warmth of Niko's mouth, even though he's not doing anything more than warming my cock.

And then Niko lets out a hard huff of breath as his Daddy enters him. It sends vibrations through my groin. Daddy thrusts, and Niko trembles and gasps as Daddy's cock stretches him to his limits.

Some might think I can't measure up, but it's hard to feel bad about my cock when Niko is taking both Clark and me with equal enthusiasm. There was a time when I worried about being too small or having surgical scars.

I've experienced rejection over it, but ever since my surgery, all I have room for when I look at or touch my junk is a deep satisfaction that my body is whole. Complete in a way

it never felt before. I don't care what anyone else thinks of it; it's a dick, and it's mine, and that's all that matters.

Besides, right now, Niko is using it to make me fly to new heights of pleasure. I try to buck into his mouth again. I'm desperate to fuck into him, but he growls low in his throat and uses his forepaws to pin me down more forcefully. That only makes attempting to move all the sweeter. I love fighting against his restraining hold almost as much as tugging fruitlessly against the ropes binding my wrists.

Niko squeezes me harder, the pressure tingling in the pit of my stomach. I moan as he slurps me into his mouth like I'm his favorite treat. His drool drips over my balls, tickling me. It makes me squirm, which tugs on my restraints and sends me flying toward a release I'm under strict orders to hold back.

"Fuck, Niko, need you, puppy. Please? Daddy, need more." I look up at Clark imploringly. He smirks at me as he rocks into Niko more forcefully, driving the pup's mouth onto me.

"You'll take what I give you boys," Daddy says. "He feels so good, doesn't he? I want you gagging him with your cock until I'm done. But you may beg your heart out, Ethan."

"Please, need him to suck me. Need to fuck him. Need—" I break off as Niko swallows around me, sending pleasure jolting through me, taking me right to the edge. "Ungh, more."

I'm so close now; it wouldn't take much, just a little more squirming. A little more fighting against the inevitable control of the two men looming over me would do the trick.

Part of me can't help wondering what will happen if I break the rules. Will I earn a punishment? A spanking, maybe?

The friction of the rope when I tried to get free earlier stung deliciously. Daddy's gentle swat with the rope's slack as he tied me up is the palest reflection of what he could do to me if I asked for an impact scene. Do I want more of that? I didn't think so, but I liked the way the rope felt. The crack of his voice as he corrected me.

The not quite enough physical sensations from Niko warming my cock and all the unexplored possibilities

stretching out before me are a delicious, teasing torture. This is wonderful.

“That’s it, puppy, so tight for your Daddy. I missed my tight little fuck hole,” Clark praises Niko.

The sweet words have Niko mouthing at me, making pleased little noises that tickle and thrum along my nerves. It’s like every shiver of pleasure that goes through him translates through to my junk, like I’m connected to a live wire. The three of us are moving as one for this crystalized moment in time.

Niko encompasses me in floaty warmth. Like I’m part of a feedback loop of mounting pleasure that will never plateau, just keep building and building and never come back down.

I love being a part of this. Never want it to stop. I don’t want to lose him again. Lose this connection to another person. A bond so intense he feels like an extension of me. The way it used to be with Leo and Nicky and me. The three of us felt so invincible. Until we weren’t and everything fell apart.

“That’s it, right there, baby, so good.” Clark’s pace quickens and he reaches to tug on Niko’s collar, making Niko suck in a breath and moan around me. I jackknife up into his perfect suction as the sounds of skin slapping skin emphasize how hard Daddy is fucking Niko.

“Good boy, take it all, Nicholas. My sweet Niko. Suck off your boyfriend, make him come for us, puppy. Take both your men and make us both come inside you. Let us share how good you feel.”

Niko whines and starts sucking, eagerly working my entire cock, licking and swallowing like he can force my orgasm out of me. The pleasure is almost too intense to handle after begging him for it. Clark groans long and low as he comes inside Niko’s ass.

“That’s it, good boys. Come for us, Ethan. Give Niko your pleasure.” Daddy’s gruff command tips me over the edge. Or it

might be the thing Niko does with his tongue at the same time. Or both, the combination of their desire focused on me.

“Oh, god, Niko. Daddy!”

I clench my fists and bite back a sob. My entire body shudders through a release that’s so intense I think I might come apart at the seams if I didn’t have Niko holding me together. He doesn’t relax his hold and the ropes are still there, a reminder of Daddy’s calm control.

The waves of orgasm seem to crash over me for ages, going on and on. I shudder and shake under Niko. He sucks me relentlessly through it all, not giving me an inch to hide from the intensity. Everything takes on a hazy quality as I skim along the peak of pleasure. I’m floating in bliss that stretches to eternity.

I’m pretty sure that was the best orgasm of my life. And when it’s over, Daddy is there, cleaning Nicky and I both up. Daddy’s voice is asking me something that I can’t focus on, but I nod anyway, happy for him to take care of me. His hands are gentle as he unties me and rubs at the rope marks on my wrists. I like the rumble of his voice as he talks.

He taps my cheek to get me to focus on him. I blink blearily.

“I know you’re still flying, boy, but can you tell me if your wrists are alright?” That must have been what he was asking before.

I nod, a silly grin on my face that I can’t help. “Perfect. Thank you, Daddy.”

He tousles my hair. “You were perfect. Both of you. Want to snuggle here or in bed?”

“Here.”

I smile dopily at both men as Niko stretches out on the carpet beside me and offers me lazy kisses.

He snuggles in close, his limp cock nestled against my thigh. Daddy covers us in a blanket, then pushes a reusable straw between my lips. I’d rather be doing more kissing, but a glance over at Nicky shows he’s getting similar treatment.

Nicky rolls his eyes and mumbles in an undertone, “just drink. He won’t stop hovering until you do.”

“Hey, don’t be cheeky, boy.” Daddy’s stern reprimand is at odds with his fond smile and the way he brushes his fingers through Nicky’s hair. Nicky leans into the touch, eyes squinting closed as he revels in it. I shiver, wishing I shared their rock solid connection.

Daddy pats my head next. “I can already tell you’re going to be my good boy, aren’t you, Ethan?”

“Yes, Daddy,” I agree, warmth tingling through me at the praise and his soothing touch.

Clark wants to keep doing this with me; he as much as said so with that single line. He wants to keep including me. I can be with both of them. I sigh contentedly, curling up with Nicky, secure knowing that Daddy will take care of us.

Chapter 20

Nick

I could get used to waking up wedged between Daddy and Ethan. Unfortunately, it's a weekday, so there isn't time to revel in the cozy warmth of our blankets. Daddy snuggles into my back for a moment, kissing along my nape as I grind back against him lazily.

It wouldn't take much to make use of the morning wood I've got nestled against Ethan's ass. He rocks back to meet me and, mm, yes. I want to fuck him while Daddy fucks me. A repeat of last night's activities.

The three of us had a date yesterday. A light dinner, bubble tea, and a film festival that Kylee got tickets for but couldn't attend because Q has been clingy and miserable with morning sickness. The movies were more Daddy and Ethan's thing than mine, but it was fun to go along with them and see them both enraptured by the screen.

I'm not big on deeper meanings in short films, but I love listening to Daddy waxing poetic about camera angles and arguing over interpretations with Ethan. Watching the two of them bonding with their heads tipped together as they chatted afterward gave me all sorts of warm, tingly emotions.

Even if I'm pretty sure Daddy is mostly parroting lines from Martin and Kylee. Those two are passionate about film; Daddy just picks up a thing or two from being friends with them.

I enjoyed the way all three of our hands brushed in the shared popcorn bag and the crackling anticipation of sex as we piled into an Uber to get home. The longing glances and lingering touches. It was a perfect night, one of many we've had recently with Ethan.

Daddy has been on a few solo dates with Ethan now too, so it's been fun to see them getting closer. The next date with all three of us is supposed to be a puppy mosh, and I'm definitely looking forward to it.

On the nights Ethan goes back to his place, I miss him. Our spacious bed doesn't quite seem full enough without him in it these days. I want waking up sandwiched between Daddy and Ethan to be an everyday thing, but I haven't quite worked out how to ask him for that. Or how to tell Daddy.

I can't exactly marry Ethan since I'm with Daddy, and it's only been a few months since we reconnected, but I'm serious about him. I want to commit to him. But for now, I'm just glad to have Ethan here.

I slip my fingers into the waistband of Ethan's pajamas. A flare of possessive warmth washes through me at the reminder that he's sleeping in my clothing. A primal part of me loves seeing him dressed in my things.

I bury my nose in his shoulder, breathing in the scent of him mixed with Daddy and my laundry detergent and shower gel. Getting clean with him after the sex was almost as nice as getting dirty.

"My ass is sore from last night." Ethan bats my hand away before I get too carried away with fingering him.

I lick his neck. "Want me to kiss it better?"

Ethan groans into his pillow.

"Hate to break it to you, but we've got to get to work, boys," Daddy throws cold water on my amorous intentions.

"Aw! No fair. I can make it quick," I grind against him, hoping to entice him into a quickie.

Daddy swats my ass and rolls out of bed. I whine at the sudden coolness at my back and turn to pout at him. "Daddy's a big meanie."

"Ruiner of fun," Ethan agrees sleepily.

He grinds his ass against me, and that's all the invitation I need. I grab him and roll over him to pin him down on his back so I can slot our erections together and hump against him. I fumble with our pajamas to stroke him.

"Mm, someone is musical this morning," Ethan teases as he rolls his hips to meet me.

“You always make me horny.” I hastily push my fingers into my mouth to get them wet, then work my hand into his pants to jerk him.

When I glance over, Daddy is watching us. His brow arches in amused exasperation, as if to say ‘really?’ Well, that’s not a command to stop.

“We’ll be real quick,” I wheedle.

“You better be, if you want to come at all before the weekend, puppy. Five.” Daddy holds up five fingers.

I groan and grind more forcefully against Ethan. Ethan bucks up to meet me. He pulls my face down into a hungry kiss with one hand and reaches the other into my pants, curling his fingers around my cock and jerking me. I moan and thrust harder.

“Four.”

I deepen our kiss, swallowing Ethan’s moans. He releases my cock and reaches around to fondle my ass. I part my legs to give him more room. He teases my rim. I pull my hand free to wet my fingers again, then press my spit-slicked thumb firmly against the sensitive head of his cock, working the soft skin there.

“Three.”

“Oh, I’m close. Don’t stop!” Ethan begs.

Ethan bucks underneath me, frantic with need. I kiss his neck and he arches for me, finger delving inside of me, fucking me. Oh fuck. My balls are tight, on the verge of release.

“Two.”

That implacable countdown is going to wreck me. I thrust my dick into Ethan’s, riding his finger.

“Need more, open me up, Eth,” I beg. He works a second finger inside me, but it’s slow going without lube. I wince as I adjust to the added pressure. Ethan pulls out to spit into his hand before trying again, scissoring me open with ease once there’s something slippery to work with.

“One.”

Oh, Ethan crooks his fingers just right to have me seconds away from coming. I grind hard against him. The friction is just what I crave.

I mouth at his chest, wanting to taste him as I come, needing contact with his skin, needing him. I’m right on the verge. So close, I hump Ethan frantically, squeezing him tight so he’ll feel confined the way he likes. He bucks into my grasp, struggling beautifully under me.

“Time’s up. Stop.”

“Daddy!” Ethan cries in protest. I ignore the command and suck hard on his nipple as I keep up rubbing on his cockhead. Ethan arches, and his cock pulses in my grasp as his body goes rigid under me. “Fuck, Nicky!”

I’ll never tire of my name on his lips as he comes for me. So good. I’m grinning like the Cheshire cat as I gaze into his O face, memorizing every detail. I kiss the butterfly birthmark by his ear and I wish I had time to bask in the afterglow, but we really should get ready for work.

For a second I forget I haven’t come, just reveling in the fact I gave him pleasure. Except, as I rock my hips to chase my climax, Daddy’s hand smacks hard against my half-exposed ass cheek, jolting me back from the edge.

“Time to get out of bed, boys. Nicholas, I hope that was worth wearing your chastity until the weekend.”

I groan. “Daddy!”

“You agreed to the terms, now you’ll live with them. Give Ethan one last kiss and get your butt ready for work, boy.”

“No fair,” I grumble under my breath. But I’m smiling as I kiss Ethan with just a hint of tongue and then roll out of bed to clean up and change. Ethan snorts as I hitch my disarrayed pajamas back into place on the way to the washroom.

Daddy goes to get his suit on. I might spend a bit too long with my toothbrush hanging out of my mouth as I watch him

get dressed in the mirror reflection. In my defense, Daddy is sexy as fuck in a suit and I didn't get to come this morning.

“Quit perving on Daddy in the mirror when you're supposed to be getting ready,” Ethan teases me. Busted. He rests a palm on my hip to reach around me for his toothbrush.

I grin at the fact that he's got a toothbrush that lives next to mine and Daddy's these days. Ever since that first night when he slept in our bed. He grinds against my ass as he stands behind me, and I scowl over my shoulder at him.

“No fair teasing me when I can't come. What happened to being the good boy?” I ask, taking my toothbrush out of my mouth so he can understand me.

“Less chatting, more brushing, boys,” Daddy calls mildly, without even glancing our way.

He's adjusting his tie. Hot. Ethan and my eyes lock in the mirror. Ethan fans himself and mouths 'sexy' to me. We exchange a grin, and I think he feels just as fortunate as me at the privilege of sharing that sexy hunk of a man with each other.

Ethan brushes his teeth next to me and it's another little thing I want to keep doing forever. When he's done, he puts away his brush and gives me a cocky grin.

“I'm a *very* good boy, Nicky. Except for when it comes to you. I will always love getting into trouble with you.”

“Hey! Are you saying I'm a bad influence!?” I feign outrage.

Ethan hugs me around the chest and laughs. “Not at all. Just, you're the only one I want to be in trouble with. You make it worth it, every time.”

“Clock's ticking, boys. Nicholas, come sit on the bed, please.”

“Yes, Daddy,” we both chorus. Ethan goes to his overnight bag to get dressed. I pout at the sight, a visual reminder that his presence here isn't a permanent fixture.

“We should clear a drawer for you to leave things here,” I blurt as I watch him. Ethan drops the shirt he’s holding.

“There’s not a lot of room here,” he hedges.

“Well, in that case, you should shop for a bigger bed at your place,” I shoot back.

Ethan flashes me a wicked grin. “Is that your way of fishing for an invitation?”

“Yes.”

“I *do* need to update the furniture. We could go shopping together? All three of us.” Ethan darts a look toward Daddy. “If you both want?”

“That sounds fun.” Daddy smiles indulgently at Ethan.

“And I have a key to your place, but I could give you both keys to mine. I guess I haven’t invited you since it’s more out of the way and your place is more convenient. But you’re both welcome to visit.”

“Yes!” I agree.

I’m already calculating how much more often I’ll get to see him if we spend some nights at his place. That way he won’t have to worry about leaving Gandalf to her own devices overnight or schlepping her across the city.

As it stands, he usually has to go home to put her to bed before coming over for dates. Or else he brings her and lets her sleep in the spare cage we picked up for her while he was pupsitting me, since she was restless in the smaller travel cage for the week.

I like Ethan’s bird. Daddy seems amused at her vocabulary, though he isn’t quite as enamored as I am. That’s fine, since they get along.

I sit on the bed and Daddy takes my cock cage out of the drawer where I prefer for it to live gathering dust. I groan theatrically as he holds it up for me.

“Don’t pout, you earned it.”

“Can’t we just use an honor system, Daddy?” I whine.

“I’m afraid not. That’s Daddy’s pretty cock and I want it locked up tight until you’re allowed to play with it again.”

“Ugh. Fine.” I spread my legs to give him access, and Daddy kneels in front of me. It makes my dick chub up and I wince at the reaction, knowing what’s coming. I whimper as he gives my balls a careful twist that has my back arching.

“Agh.” I whine at the twinge of pain, but it’s minor. My dick deflates enough for him to cage it, and that’s the entire point.

“Sorry, boy. Had to get it to go down somehow.” His wry grin tells an entirely different story.

Daddy is not at all sorry. He enjoys tormenting me like this. Well, I enjoy having him in control of me, so I can’t truthfully complain, but I do it anyway, to keep up the pretense. It’s more fun when I give him at least a little fight.

“Ethan could have helped with that,” I wink at Ethan.

Daddy chuckles. “He can help when it comes off on Saturday.”

“Sounds like a date,” Ethan grins.

He’s already dressed in snug slacks that make me want to climb him like a tree. His button up and suit jacket are hanging in the hall closet to avoid wrinkles. I lick my lips at the thought of surprising him at work sometime, just to see him all put together and sexy in a suit in his own element. I shake off the mental image as the cage gets uncomfortably tight around my junk. This is not shaping up to be a fun week.

“Saturday? But the weekend starts Friday after work,” I whine, mostly to push his buttons.

I distract myself from wondering if Ethan will let me help him with his tie. I like the idea of being the one to secure it around his throat. Like tying him up, a private way of tethering him to me before he leaves the house. Mmm. I am definitely going to suggest that.

“Saturday,” Daddy repeats, utterly calm.

“At midnight?” I press my luck.

“Don’t push me, brat. Or it will be Saturday at 11:59 PM.”

“Fine. Saturday when Daddy says. Ugh.”

Ethan comes over to poke at my cock cage. “How is it? Being caged, I mean?”

“Annoying.” I pull a face. “Makes me horny as fuck.”

Ethan laughs. “You’re always horny. Ready to play the trumpet at a moment’s notice.”

“Just remember how hard you come when I finally take it off and you’ll be fine,” Daddy reminds me. He pats my thigh and goes to finish getting himself ready.

“Yes, Daddy.” He has a point. I sigh and admit to Ethan in an undertone that I know Daddy will overhear, “Also, it’s nice having another constant reminder of who I belong to.”

My hand goes reflexively to my day collar and I close my fist over the single ring. I flash to wondering how different it would feel with two rings dangling over my heart. Two loves. Two promises.

I close my eyes against the wave of desire that spurs. One step at a time. Ethan said he’d give us keys to his place and take us furniture shopping. I shouldn’t jump the gun on asking for more.

“I bet.” Ethan strokes the cool metal of the cage longingly.

It occurs to me he might want a similar physical claim to match mine. I glance at Daddy, not sure how to ask if that’s something Daddy would consider. Or whether it’s my place to confirm if Ethan might want it. Or if they even make cages that would fit him.

They must. Q has something custom that works for them. I bet Ky would know who to talk to about buying something that would work for Ethan’s anatomy. I try to use couples telepathy to get Daddy to offer Ethan his own cage. But when I catch Daddy’s gaze, I think I might just look silly with my eyebrows wiggling and my eyes bulging and mouth pressed tight on the actual words.

Daddy rubs his hand over his mouth to hide his amused smirk. Then he asks, “Would you want to be locked up for Daddy too, Ethan?”

Ethan nods eagerly. “Yes.”

“You want Daddy to lock up both his special toys?” Daddy reaches for Ethan and my boyfriend steps into my husband’s arms, letting Clark rub his palm over Ethan’s crotch.

I lean back to enjoy the best personal porn show a pup could ask for. Sadly, there isn’t time for more than a bit of fondling, but I’d love to watch them fuck some time. Ethan has been getting more comfortable with Daddy touching him, playing with his dick while he preps Ethan for me to take.

So far, I’ve mostly been between them during our sexy times. Maybe that will change soon. I’m a greedy boy, so I haven’t questioned it, but I can share.

“Yes, Daddy.” Ethan nods again.

“I’ll look into our options,” Clark gives Ethan’s dick one last squeeze. Ethan tips up his mouth for a kiss. Daddy gives it to him. “You boys drive me to distraction; we’re going to be late to work. Nicholas, stop gawping and get dressed. Ethan, go get the coffee started, please. I’ll toast some bagels for the road.”

The two of them leave me to finish getting ready. I dress awkwardly, getting used to the weight of my cage between my legs. It doesn’t take me long to move more normally, which is good since I can’t exactly teach while I’m hobbling around bowlegged.

This cage is low-profile enough that I’ll be the only one to know I’m wearing it. But I am always aware of its presence when I have to wear it. Most of the time, I like the reminder of Daddy, no matter how frustrating it is not to have control of my orgasms.

I catch Ethan before he leaves, just as he’s looping his tie around his neck. Three travel mugs of coffee sit on the side table, ready to go out the door.

“Wait. I was hoping you’d let me tie it for you.” I reach for the length of blue and silver silk, pausing for permission before I touch it.

Ethan swallows hard, eyes wide with desire. His tongue darts out to wet his lips. I stare at them, wanting to kiss him. He’s so adorable. “Yes. You can put anything you want around my neck, Nicky.”

“Keep it on until I see you tonight? I want you to wear it and remember that you’re mine. My boy.”

“Please.” Ethan slips it from his neck and holds the tie out to me in his open palms, offering it like a collar.

I loop it around his head, using the fabric to caress his neck. Taking my time with the knot, I let him lean into the ritual of it. The sensuality of soft fabric and the rasp of the knots forming under my hands binding him to me. I’m tying him up in the most socially acceptable way possible and he’ll wear my knot all day long, like a badge of honor.

Someday, I hope I’ll send him off to work wearing our collar, placed there by my hands or Daddy’s. I’d like that claim on his heart. For now, I snug the knot into the hollow of his throat and kiss his cheek.

“There, now everyone you meet today will see it and only you and I and Daddy will know it means you’re mine. Ours.”

“Thank you, Nicky.”

“I love you, Ethan.”

“I love you too, Nicky.” He presses two fingers against the knot in much the same way I sometimes need to touch my collar to assure myself it’s real and not a wonderful dream. I tug my chain. And we stand there, gazing into each other’s eyes, basking in so much that remains unspoken about who we are to each other.

Daddy clears his throat from behind us. “I hate to interrupt the love fest, but it’s time to leave, boys. I’ll just have time to drop you both off before my interview if we go now.”

“Yes, Daddy,” we chorus.

I don't want to make Daddy late for the interview with a new company that he's been looking forward to for weeks. I'm not sure if he actually wants to switch companies, but the job description includes a more flexible schedule, no travel and best of all, he can work remotely.

The extra flexibility would be perfect if I get the job I'm hoping for at Golden Oaks to the east of downtown. Closer to Port Moody. Closer to Ethan. I have everything crossed that it works out, so we can have more time with Ethan. More ways the three of us can intersect our lives.

Ethan grabs his stuff, Daddy hands me my breakfast and gives us each a chaste kiss before we file out to his car to leave.

Chapter 21

Clark

I receive the call with a job offer Friday morning at my desk. It's tempting to accept on the spot. But the entire point of applying was to use this offer as leverage. I like my current company and coworkers. So if I can get the same perks without the unknowns of navigating a new job and company culture, it makes more sense to stay where I am. Instead of pouncing, I thank the HR rep and promise to consider the contract.

Next, I open up a message with my boss and ask for a sit down meeting when he's available. This isn't my first time negotiating with Vince, but I've never done it with one foot out the door. There's freedom in that.

No matter the outcome, I'm going to be closing the chapter on constant work travel and putting work before my family.

Nicholas is my priority. Thinking of my boy puts a smile on my face. I pull out my cell to text him with the news I got the offer I was hoping for. When I unlock the screen, the cover photo of my two boys smiling into the camera when we went to the beach last week zings through me.

Family. Over the summer, that concept has expanded to mean more than just Nicholas. Ethan is a part of us too now. With every date, every shared meal, every sleepover, and shared joke, he's worked his way into my heart, wedging himself in next to Nicholas.

Watching Nicholas fall in love all over again has been beautiful to share. And without even realizing it, I fell along with him. How could I not when Ethan brings so much joy into our lives?

I wasn't looking for another boy or a permanent third, but he's insinuated himself into my affections with all his wicked sweetness, in and out of our bedroom. Hesitating between the group thread and the one with just Nicholas, I open the text

thread with my husband, meaning to tell him I got the job. My fingers have other ideas, telling him what I've only just realized.

Daddy: I love Ethan.

I don't have to wait long for a reply. He's probably goofing around with Gandalf since he's helping Ethan declutter his house now that school is out for the summer.

Nicholas: I know, Daddy. Pretty sure he loves you too.

Nicholas: You should maybe be telling *him* that though. Not me. He won't say it first.

Nicholas is right about that. Our boy can be bold and brash, but he's also sensitive to potential rejection. I understand why he's that way. I should tell Ethan how I feel. No. I should show him.

Daddy: Mind if I take him on a date tonight instead of the three of us doing dinner?

Nicholas: Only if I still get to see Gandalf tonight. Need my birdy fix.

Daddy: I'm sure Ethan won't mind you birdsitting.

Nicholas: I'll ask him. After you figure out your date.

Nicholas: You two want to go back to our place and I'll stay at his?

Daddy: Sounds like a plan. Sure you don't mind?

Nicholas: I'm rolling my eyes at you, Daddy.

Nicholas: You realize that my entire master plan is for you guys to fall in love, right? Then we can all move out to his house in the burbs and I can steal Ethan's bird.

Nicholas: Cue evil laughter.

Daddy: Egads. You are truly a villainous mastermind. Making people love each other. How diabolical.

Nicholas: Thank you for appreciating my genius.

Daddy: In all seriousness, though, how would you feel if I offer him a collar?

There's a pause where I sweat bullets, thinking I took it too far, or hurt him. I should have asked in person. I never want Nicholas to feel insecure in my love for him for a second.

His next message is a brief video clip of him. When I hit play, his voice—joyfully screaming—plays over the tinny phone speakers.

“Ahhhh! Daddy, yes, collar him and make him ours.” Nicholas is grinning into the camera and nodding his head. Before I can even finish watching, my phone rings with a call. I shouldn't be answering while I'm on the clock, but it's a slow day and I need to talk this out with Nicholas.

When I answer, Nicholas starts talking a mile a minute.

“I am a big fan of this plan. You can get him one that matches mine. I want to give him a ring to put on it. Like yours. And I want one too, from him. Also, we should move in together. It's silly to have two places when we spend most nights together anyway, and our place isn't big enough for the three of us and Gandalf. She needs her big habitat. I know we can't all like, make it legal in the sense of marriage, but we're all he has. So can we look into options to make him legally ours if anything were to happen? Medical power of attorney or something? I'll ask Q if their brother would know he's a lawyer—”

“Breathe, baby,” I interrupt him, laughing at his enthusiasm. “I know you're excited, but we need to ask Ethan before we go making plans to fold him into our family.”

“Ugh. Fine.” Nicholas huffs. I can picture his adorable pout and the way he's probably fondling his collar. “I won't make any solid plans until we ask him. But he'll say yes.”

“I hope you're right. For tonight, I'm just going to tell him I love him and offer him the collar. I'll let you know how it goes and we can give him matching rings and promises of in sickness and in health together. How does that sound?”

“Good,” Nicholas says. “I want to be there for the rings part. And to do the asking. Did anything prompt this epiphany of yours?”

I glance around to be sure I'm still alone in my office. That might be slightly paranoid, but I need the upper hand to negotiate later. My door is still closed.

"I got the job offer, and I was thinking how it will be nice to put family first. And it occurred to me that includes Ethan now."

"Aw, that's sweet Daddy. I want him to know he's part of our family. I love you both so much." Nicholas sighs dreamily.

"I love you too, pup. I've just got to talk to Vince about whether he can match the offer. But either way, no more travel and a contract that lets me do remote work, so I'm not spending long hours in the office all the time."

"Sounds perfect."

"I think so too."

In the background, I get a calendar reminder of a work meeting; better wrap up our chat if I want time to message Ethan for a date.

"I should go; text me later?"

"Ugh," Nicholas groans. "Fine. Bye, Daddy. Let me know about tonight. I'm sending you collar pics for Ethan. Love you. And tell me how it goes with Vince and the job offer."

"I will. Enjoy the rest of your day, puppy."

"I will. Bye, Daddy." Nicholas hangs up and I have an interoffice message from Vince to meet with him later today.

It's hard to focus on my work with that hanging over me and wondering how he'll react. I message Ethan to arrange our date. He takes longer to get back to me than Nicholas, but I expected that. We make plans, the perfect distraction from stressing over my meeting with Vince. That turns out to be angst over nothing.

We've always worked well together, and I've put in my time on the road. Vince all but begs me not to go and agrees to meet the terms of the offer I've got on the table. He even throws in a ten percent raise as an added incentive to stay.

No wonder, considering that he's already training Pam's temporary replacement. Losing both his most senior engineers would certainly sting. I leave the meeting with the ink drying on a brand new, much more favorable contract. One that no longer includes mandatory travel once we get a few of the junior engineers fully trained to handle client visits and installations. It also allows for me to do the bulk of my work from home. Now all we need is for Nicholas to line up a new teaching job for the fall and everything will look rosy on the work front.

I meet Ethan at a trendy little restaurant on the waterfront. He beams when he sees me, and I flash him an answering smile as I greet him with a peck on the cheek. This part of town is safe enough for some light PDA, near the rainbow flags of Davie Street and the West End. Ethan sidles closer to me and I take his hand to lead him into our chosen restaurant.

"How was your day?" I ask.

"Good. Work was nothing out of the ordinary and I got a surprise date with a sexy Daddy I've been seeing." He swings our joined hands and gives me a coy little grin. "What's the occasion?"

"Does there need to be one?" I ask. And a part of me wants Nicholas to be here with us. So we can all celebrate my job news together, but that can wait. With any luck, it can be a joint celebration when Nicholas lands a new teaching contract.

Besides, much as I'm excited about the coming changes to my work life, that isn't why I invited Ethan out tonight.

"No. Just, you said there was something you wanted to discuss with me. I'm curious."

"You know what they say about curiosity," I tease him.

Ethan sticks his tongue out at me. "Good thing I'm not a cat then, Dad." He imbues that last word with so much sarcasm I can practically picture him as a teenager rolling his eyes at me. It fills me with affection. This boy is the perfect fit for our

family, and I'm glad it's just the two of us tonight. That I get him to myself for this.

"Good thing." I agree with a chuckle. "I'm not sure how Niko would react to a kitten."

We pause our conversation as we approach the host's stand and I tell them our reservation information. We're shown to our seats and given menus and a welcome spiel.

As soon as the host is out of earshot, Ethan says, "We both know he'd react to me as a kitten the same way he always does—like a horndog."

I laugh, because he's almost definitely correct. Nicholas is predictable and he can't seem to get enough of our boy. "I suppose you're right."

"Nothing wrong with that. So. Are you going to leave me in suspense all night?"

"I just might. I enjoy my boys squirming with anticipation. Are you still wearing your cage?" I ask.

After some trial and error, we found a nub style one from a custom seller online that works with his anatomy. The boy enjoys wearing it between visits with Nicholas and me, since he's into the idea of his pleasure belonging to us. He has a spare key in case he needs it. So far, he seems to prefer to wait until Nicholas or I unlock him with the one I keep next to Nicholas's cage key in our bedside table's drawer.

"Yes, Daddy." He squirms a little as he answers, as though to remind himself of the weight of his cage between his legs.

"Good boy."

Ethan pouts at me over his menu. I consider drawing things out, but he's so damn adorable that I can't help myself or hold it back a moment longer.

"I love you."

Ethan gapes at me. "Y-you do?"

"Yes."

"Oh. I..."

My heart sinks as the moments stretch without him saying it back. Maybe he isn't as into me as I thought. It's possible I misread things, or that he's only been accepting me as part of a package deal along with Nicholas. There is no doubt he loves my pup, but that doesn't mean he has to love me.

Even if he's more into the kinky fun that I bring to the table than me as a person, we can still make this work. Still be whatever we are to each other. Logic notwithstanding, it hurts to think my feelings are one-sided, and it stings to have misread him so badly.

I try to hide my hurt. Regardless of tonight's outcome, I don't want my issues to come between Ethan and Nicholas. I can go back to being metamours with him, if that's what he wants.

Despite my best efforts at stoicism, I must look as crestfallen as I feel, because Ethan's eyes widen. He places his hand over mine, squeezing me tight and shaking his head.

"I love you too, Clark. I just didn't expect this. You invited me to dinner to tell me that?"

"Yes. And to give you something." My head spins with dizzy relief that he reciprocates. The emotional whiplash is almost enough to send me reeling. I wasn't seeing things that weren't there. Ethan loves me. And in that case, he might still accept the collar in the thin jewelry box I picked up on my way here.

"Ooh, presents? Are you trying to buy my love, Daddy?" Ethan leans over the table and bats his lashes at me. "Because spoilers, it's already yours."

"No, brat." I chuckle at him. "Nicholas tried to warn me; you're a handful."

"He *does* know me pretty well." Ethan winks.

His smile puts his irresistible dimple on full display, and I can't wait a moment longer to make him mine. I pull out the simply wrapped box and slide it to him. "I'd like to think we both do. And I want you to wear my collar and be a part of our family."

Ethan presses his hands to his mouth, eyes glistening with emotion. “Are you sure? What about Nicky?”

“Nicholas knows I’m offering you this, and he is on board with my asking. He wants you to be his boy. Our boy. We both want you to know you always have a place with us.”

“Yes. I want that.” He nods. “More than anything, Daddy. I want to be with you both.”

“Go ahead. Open it.” I gesture to the box lying untouched on the table between us.

His hands tremble as he peels off the wrappings the shop did up pretty, and flips open the lid. He gasps at the chain, almost identical to the one I got for Nicholas, except that where Nick’s chain is silver, Ethan’s is interlocking links of silver and gold. Because we chose his collar to reflect that he belongs to both Nicholas and me.

I video called our pup at the store to have him help me choose the design, and that was his reasoning for choosing this one. It resonated with me. The collar is mine to give, but I want it to represent Nicholas’s place in his life too. Ethan offers himself and his submission so beautifully to my pup as well as me, and his collar should match that.

Nicholas agreed. He said it was between the two of us for tonight. And he’s right that Ethan and I need this time to celebrate our connection, independent of Nicholas.

“It’s perfect, silver for my silver fox, Daddy, and gold for Nicky, sort of like his eyes.”

I smile. “He helped pick it.”

“Put it on me?” Ethan offers me the box. I rise to stand behind his chair and loop the chain around his neck. I take my time, caressing his shoulders as I settle the collar in place and fasten the clasp at his nape. Then I bend to kiss him there, where my collar touches his skin. Ethan shivers and lets out a breathy sigh.

“Can we skip dinner to celebrate at home, Daddy?” he asks as I trail my hands down his arm to squeeze his hand on my way back to my seat.

I chuckle. “Not a chance. We are going to eat our delicious meal while you think about how long you’ve been caged for me. Meditate on how much you want Daddy to fuck you in nothing but my collar on your throat.”

I find his foot under the table and caress my toes along his instep. Ethan shudders.

“You play dirty.” Ethan whines.

“Never claimed otherwise.” I grin at him.

He’s barely glanced at his menu by the time our server comes to take our orders. Too busy fondling his new collar and casting lust-filled gazes my way as I play footsie with him under the table.

From the way he’s squirming, I imagine he’s turned on as hell despite his chastity. Good. I want him needy and desperate when we get home. Tonight, I want to take my time making love to him.

When he stares blankly at the menu, I order for him. We’ve eaten here before, and I know what he likes by now. I check in with him to be certain he doesn’t want anything else before confirming that’s everything, but he just nods and agrees to what I said. So either he wants it, or else he’s too distracted to care what he eats. I’m good with either option.

To be honest, I’m not much more focused on the delicious food than he is. I still draw things out. Turning every morsel into foreplay. Linger over every deliberate bite, just to watch him get more hot and bothered with every moment he has to wait is worth delaying my gratification.

I can’t stop watching him either. He looks damn good wearing my collar, seeing him there, so eager to have me, tests my resolve. In the end, we forgo dessert in favor of getting to the true main course of the evening.

Back at our place, Ethan crashes into me as soon as we’re behind closed doors. He kisses me up against the entry hall wall, fumbling at my pants until I capture his wrists and turn the tables on him.

I pin his arms above his head, and my cock aches at the way his eyes flood with desire at the hint of restraint. He struggles in my grasp as I press him against the wall, trapping him with my body, nudging my thigh between his legs for him to writhe against. Ethan moans.

“Oh, fuck, please unlock me, Clark. I need you so bad.”

“You want me to fuck you, Ethan? Right here in the hallway like a needy slut?”

He nods.

I smother any verbal response he might have made with a demanding kiss that stills his struggling for a moment. Ethan melts into me, opening for me to plunder his mouth. He arches his groin against my thigh, letting me feel the hard bulge of his cage squeezing his junk. I love this, love his token resistance and how much it turns him on to fight against his own desires.

“No, I think you want Daddy to chase you down, pin you to the bed and force you to take me, don’t you, boy?”

Ethan sucks in a sharp breath and nods. He’s told me that fantasy before, so I know it’s something he’s into.

“You can beg me to stop as much as you want, but if you really want me to stop, what do you say?”

“Red. Or yellow to check in, Sir.”

“That’s right. What happens if you say no?”

“You’ll keep going?”

“Is that what you want?”

“Yes, Sir.”

“Good boy.” I kiss him once more and he tries to turn his face away, getting into the game. I laugh and release my grip on him as I stand back. “Run.”

He doesn’t waste any time in obeying the command. I chase after him. Ethan leads me through the living room, around the kitchen island where he feints and dodges until he can get a clear shot down the hallway.

Buzzing with adrenaline, he darts into the bedroom and attempts to shut the door. I push it open and catch him around the waist. He shrieks in delighted defeat as I scoop him up and I have to clamp a hand over his mouth to keep the noise down.

“Sh.” I press my mouth to his ear, making him squirm in my hold. “Keep it down or I’ll have to gag you so the neighbors don’t worry.”

Ethan whimpers. “Let me go, and I’ll be quiet as a mouse.”

“Not a chance, my sexy little fucktoy. I’m going to be inside you tonight either way. You can either cooperate or I can make you take it.” I rub my bulge against him in promise. Ethan swallows back a moan, but valiantly sticks to the script, pulling to get free of my hold.

“No. Please, let me go.”

I toss him bodily onto the bed, ignoring his pleas. He lands twisting and makes a crawling dash for the edge of the mattress. I expect his efforts to escape and follow him down, climbing on top of him. I use my weight to pin him in place.

Ethan wriggles and bucks. We’re both turned on as hell from wrestling around together by the time I grab his wrists. One by one, I force them into the restraints I attached to the headboard before going to meet him for dinner. No time tonight to bother with fiddly ropes when cuffs will give him the secure feeling he loves with less hassle.

Ethan fights me as I fasten the wide leather cuffs in place. He keeps on thrashing as I secure his ankles to the bed as well, lifting them toward his ears. This way, he’ll be right where I want him as I plow into my boy.

Hmm. So much for fucking him in nothing but his collar. Well, I can make this work. I yank his shirt up over his head as he fights and pleads with me.

Briefly, I consider releasing one wrist at a time to slide it off, but with the way he’s struggling, I decide not to bother. Instead, I just bunch the fabric near his wrists and tuck the bulk of his shirt behind his head. Good enough. I can leave his

pants rucked at his ankles, and it will give the bonus of further restricting his movement.

I straighten the collar around his neck, admiring the way it glistens in the hollow of his throat. Marking him as mine. I want to see my boys together in nothing but their collars, both spread out for me to enjoy. Soon.

“I’m going to fuck your face now. Make you choke on every inch of my cock. Are you ready for that, boy?”

“No!” Ethan thrashes his head from side to side.

“No? Hm, well, then. I guess that just leaves your other hole, doesn’t it?” I slap his ass, the lush curve of it on full display before me as he writhes against his bonds.

“Let me go.”

“Not until I’m done with you.” I smirk at him. Ethan struggles more while I get lube and a condom.

It might be easier to position him with his clothing out of the way. I once again consider releasing his ankles to remove the garment, but that seems like a recipe for getting kicked in the head or balls with his frantic struggling. No, I’ll make it work without freeing him.

I shimmy the waistband of his pants and underwear over his ass, taking my time to feel him up as he begs. He’s no longer entirely coherent or really asking me to stop. I work the material over his thigh and toward his ankles. He moans at the added layer of restraint and I smile to myself as I finger his hole.

I told him to prep before our date. From the easy way his body lets me in, and the slickness of the lube my fingers find inside him, he complied. I moan at the thought of finally being buried inside his heat.

We’ve fooled around before. He’s gone down on me, with and without Nicholas present, but we haven’t done this yet. It will be my first time fucking his ass. Filling him up with toys isn’t the same.

I can't wait to lose myself inside him. It's probably just as well that dinner was more of a pretext to build anticipation. Neither of us ate much, and I fully intend for this to get very physical.

Ethan is panting with effort as he continues to fight his restraints, but he moans as I finger him slowly open. He seems to forget that he's supposed to be fighting me, head thrashing against the pillows as he begs for more.

"Another one, please. Need you to fill me up."

I ignore him, taking my time to stretch him out and play with his hole.

"Please, more," he begs.

I withdraw my finger, tilt his hips up, and lean forward to spit on his hole. He moans.

"Daddy! I need you," he whines.

I rub two fingers around his rim.

"Yes, please, yes!" Ethan pants.

"What happened to 'no, let me go?'" I tease, amused.

"Feels too good," Ethan says.

I chuckle and press two fingers inside of him, stretching him open.

"Ngh, yes," Ethan hisses, lifting into my touch. He's so responsive.

I draw out the fingering. Ethan continues to beg until he's moaning wordlessly. All his efforts at getting free are abandoned in favor of chasing every pump of my fingers inside his ass.

I'm fucking him with four fingers and considering whether he might want to take my entire fist someday when his body contracts around me. He lets out a shuddering sob of pleasure.

"Did you just come on my fingers without permission, boy?" I smack his perfect ass with my free hand, but I don't

stop thrusting and he bucks into the motion. His wanton moans are music to my ears.

“Hnn,” he keens, still coming, as far as I can tell. I finger fuck him through it until the orgasm fades and he’s panting under me, still against the mattress.

“Good?”

“Oh, fuck, yes, Daddy, so good.”

“Good. Now it’s my turn. Can’t wait to feel you do that with my cock buried balls deep inside you.” I don’t leave him room to say he can’t come again so soon. We both know he can, given enough stimulation and time. But first, I reach for the key to his cock cage and release his spent, likely oversensitive dick and jerk him roughly. He jackknives around the touch, groaning.

“No! It’s too much, Daddy, stop.” He renews his struggles, like he wants to bat my hand away. Except, of course, he can’t. The only way he can stop this is with his safe word. I stroke him languidly through his struggles.

“Color?” I check. More to remind him he has words he can use than because I really think he needs them.

“Green,” he all but growls, almost as though he resents enjoying the exquisite torture of being pushed past what he wants to endure. Or perhaps it jolts him out of the scene; that’s a consideration to discuss later. I’d rather err on the side of checking in too much than not enough.

I jerk him harder. Then lean down to suck him into my mouth. I work him until he’s moaning and bucking and begging me to stop or never stop. The words tumbling from his mouth cease to make any sense long before I pull off and replace my lips with a suction sleeve. The toy will do the next best thing to sucking him off while I fuck him.

I roll on the condom and trace over his hole as he continues to moan and writhe, the cuffs still holding him secure.

“Ready to take me?”

“Nngh.”

I take that as a yes and press forward slightly, letting him feel the pressure. “Still green?” I check in, just to be sure.

“Yes. Green. Fuck me.”

With Nicholas, I might accept that as an invitation to thrust all the way to the hilt. But this is Ethan, and he’s not used to my size. Despite all the games and playing at forcing him, I don’t want to hurt him. I want us both to enjoy this first time, so I ease into his body, giving him time to adjust when he thrashes and cries out.

“Agh, Daddy, you’re killing me,” he moans as my head breaches his opening.

“You want me to shove the rest in, boy?” I ask, teasing.

“Yes. Take me. Hard.” He tries to buck onto my length, but I anticipate the move and hold his hips still. The added restraint has him moaning and throwing his head back on a whine. “Oh, fuck. Yes. Make me take it, Daddy. Please.”

I pin him in place as I thrust forward, slow and steady, until my balls rest snug against his ass. And he feels as good as I’ve imagined. I hold myself there, buried inside of him, feeling his heat and gazing at the beautiful boy in my bed and in my collar. I reach down to brush the links of skin-warm metal with my fingers and Ethan arches into the touch.

“Love you, boy,” I remind him, repeating the words because I can. “Love seeing you like this, bound, naked, and at my mercy.”

“Mm. Me too. Love it. Love you.”

When I pull back to thrust into him again, I’m not fucking him; this is making love, in our own special way. I love him, and I pour that into every roll of my hips. Every squeeze of his ass as I stop him from moving, make him hold still and take everything I have to give as he gasps and moans at being taken.

I reach to increase the intensity of the toy on his cock’s suction and he arches off the bed with a howl at the change.

“Oh, fuck! Not gonna last.”

That's fine. Much as I want this to continue forever, I can't hold back much longer either. I fuck into him harder, picking up the pace, no longer holding him still. Instead, I move him, leveraging my grip on his hips to slam him down onto my cock. He meets each thrust, letting me take him as deep as I can go.

"Daddy!" he calls as he comes again.

"Ethan, love you. Fuck. You're so tight and perfect."

His pleasure, when he comes, has him squeezing my cock for all he's worth, tipping me past the point of no return. He wrings my climax out of me as I press him against the mattress.

My body rocks against him as I bury myself as deep as I can get inside my boy. I fold him in half and give him the trapped sensation he craves as we both pant for breath. We draw out the pleasure as long as we can. I grunt with the effort of each last desperate thrust.

When the tension leaves his muscles and he goes limp in his bindings, I lean over him to steal a sensual kiss. It has him making soft contented sounds into my mouth. I tug gently on the chain around his neck, the way Nicholas likes and Ethan whimpers at the reminder of my claim. He squirms under me.

"What, want me to pull out?" I ask, still cozy, warm inside of his body. I start to ease out.

"No, not that; stay a little longer, Daddy." He lifts toward me, trying to keep me firmly in place as long as he can. That sends warm tingles through me. It's verging on oversensitive, but I appreciate being wanted in the afterglow.

"It's just the thingy sucking my dick is too much. Can you take it off me? It's getting kind of uncomfortable." Ethan squirms.

It takes me a second to parse he's referring to the toy I stuck on his cock. I chuckle as I turn it off and gently ease his dick free. Nicholas calls our boy's cock fun-sized, and Ethan seems happy with the descriptor. My pup is right that it's a lovely

mouthful. I run a finger along his slick length and he sucks air through his teeth.

“Hurts.”

“My baby boy is super sensitive after being locked up all week, huh? Do you want your cage back on, or not tonight?”

“In the morning?” he asks hopefully.

“We can do that.” I kneel up and bend to kiss the crown of it gently. That gets another hissed whine from him, more squirming and moaning. And a valiant twitch toward hardness, even though I doubt he can properly get it up again soon. Twice in one night is enough.

“Time to let you loose, hmm?”

“Mm. Cuddle time,” Ethan demands.

I reach to release his ankles and he wraps his freed legs around me, pulling me down on top of him. I abandon my efforts at freeing his wrists in favor of cuddling him close and exchanging a few more lazy kisses while he’s my captive.

For all his enthusiasm, he seems drowsy, eyes-heavy lidded. So I eventually reach up to free him. He loops his arms around me. “It’s weird, being in your bed without Nicky.”

I’m not sure how to feel about his sleepy observation. On the one hand, he’s right. But on the other, it’s nice to have one-on-one time with him like this.

“Would you prefer if he’d been here tonight?” I ask, cautious not to read too much into the statement.

“No.” His hand goes to his new collar and strokes the links. “I loved having you to myself tonight, Daddy. And I love my new collar.”

“But?”

He shakes his head. “No but. He just belongs with us. I miss both of you on the nights we aren’t together, so I bet he’s missing us.”

“Are you saying you want us to go back to your place to sleep?”

He bites his lip, worrying it between his teeth. “No.” He sighs. “To tell the truth, I prefer staying here with you guys.”

That’s no secret; the boy has been increasingly reluctant about spending nights at his place. Nicholas says it’s almost exactly like it was when they were kids. I suspect that makes it a bittersweet place for Ethan to live with his complicated past with his family. “We love having you here.” I tug him closer and he snuggles into my chest.

“I’m saying that I’d like us not to have separate houses at some point. And Nicky’s been saying I should look at remodeling my folks’ place. Make it mine. Except, I think I’d rather we make it *ours*. I know you guys have a lease and this place is close to your jobs. But it feels more like home to be with you two. Could we work something out so we can all be together most nights?”

“I’d love that. And I’m sure Nicholas would too.” I smile at him, cupping his cheek. “We can discuss details with Nicholas. But speaking of jobs, in all the excitement of having you to myself, I forgot to mention, I heard back about that position I interviewed for.”

“You did?” Ethan perks up. “And?”

“And Vince agreed to match their offer point for point and throw in a raise. I’ll work remotely about half of the time, effective immediately. And three weeks per year on work-related travel, at most.”

Ethan hugs me and kisses my cheek. “That’s fantastic news, Daddy. I’m glad for you.”

“Thank you, boy. I’m satisfied with how it worked out.”

“We have to celebrate. With Nicky, of course. Why didn’t you tell me sooner? That’s tremendous news.” He sounds a little hurt at the omission, and I can’t have that.

“We will. But it was more important for me to tell you how I feel about you, baby boy. I wanted our date tonight to be about us, and celebrating our love, not my job. The whole point of asking for changes at work was to put my family first. That’s what made me realize I needed you to know how much

I care about you. To give you this.” I loop my finger through his collar and tug. “You’re my family. You and Nicholas are the life I want to balance with my work.”

Ethan’s breath hitches. “Thank you, Daddy. You don’t know what that means to me. I—it’s been a long time since I had any family to speak of. Nicky and you, you’re worth everything it took to get here.”

We kiss again then, no more need for words. I fall asleep with one of my boys wrapped around me. And dream of a not so distant day when every night will end with both my puppy and our boy here with me. If not in arm’s reach, then at least under the same roof. Soon.

Chapter 22

Nick

In the past, I've picked up a low stress summer job to fill the long lazy hours of vacation. Even something as simple as working as a camp counselor gives me the structure I need. I've long since accepted that I do best with a routine.

This summer, I'm too stressed about finding a new teaching position to do any other job searching. Which means I was going slightly stir-crazy about a week into the break. Daddy started giving me daily extra chore lists, just to keep me busy when I wasn't browsing for open teaching positions.

And then Ethan suggested that if I needed something to do, I could help him clean out all the junk filling his place. So I've spent the last couple months decluttering a decade's worth of his dad's stuff from his house and getting it into a livable state.

Not that it's something out of hoarders or anything. Just it's a big house and I don't think Ethan's dad handled losing his entire family in less than a year very well.

I can see why Ethan hates spending time there. Everywhere I look is a memory and while most of my memories of the place are good ones, I doubt he feels much positive when he looks at the pink walls of his old bedroom. Or the veritable shrine that is Leo's old room. That one is hard enough for me to pack up; I can't imagine how hard it would be for him.

It's almost like walking into a macabre time capsule. Like his parents left the space their kids used to occupy untouched after losing both their sons in less than a year. That thought makes me angry on Ethan's behalf. There was nothing anyone could have done about Leo's accident. They didn't have to lose Ethan too.

If I'm entirely honest, I also resent that his father's rejection meant I lost out on a decade of friendship with Ethan. They should have loved him enough to accept him. I hate that they failed him. And I feel a vague guilt for my anger at the dead.

And for having my own parents' unconditional acceptance through all my struggles when so many people I know aren't so lucky.

Then again, Leo and Ethan's sudden absence rocked my world. It must have been an awful time for their parents. I don't want to feel bad for Ethan's asshole father, but a part of me does as I sort through the detritus of his life. People are complicated.

At least I know Ethan is fine now. His fate after he left is no longer a giant question mark. He's back in my life and he's sticking around, even though I wasn't at my best when we reconnected. He stuck by me, through thick and thin, and I'm going to be by his side with reclaiming his living space.

The big basement where we whiled away the hours as teens seems to be where his dad stashed everything that was too painful for him to live with and too hard to let go. There are boxes of his mom's stuff piled on every surface.

I recognize the lumpy sofa underneath his mom's boxed up wardrobe. Even though I suspect there isn't much Ethan will want to hold on to, I still run most of the choices on what to keep, donate, and trash by him. It seems easier for him to handle when it's just photos I'm showing him to help sort stuff versus making him decide on the spot.

I could definitely be more efficient at the cleaning that's been taking me months. But Ethan seems perfectly happy for me to spend hours playing with Gandalf while I'm at his place, so I don't stress too much about it.

I've also filled out a ton of applications since I resigned. And gone to several interviews. But it isn't until August that I actually receive the job offer at Golden Oaks. The one my old school buddy, Emil, pointed me toward.

Signing the contract so close to the new school year doesn't give me much time to prep for my fresh start in a new district, but I've met with the admin and the other middle grade teachers. I'm excited about working with them all.

Plus, finding out I got the job less than a week after Daddy worked out his new contract means we get to celebrate together. Daddy and I have better jobs, and Ethan finally has a house that isn't completely haunted by his past.

It might take me all summer, but I finish getting rid of the junk, store the few keepsakes that he wants, and give the bedrooms a fresh coat of paint. It's ready for him to make his own as of this morning. Unfortunately for me, that means Gandalf can move back to his house. I had to move her to Daddy and my place to keep her away from the paint fumes.

I'll miss seeing the bird every day after spending my summer with her. Unless Ethan and his bird agree to stay. Or invite us to live with them.

We're supposed to have a chat about living arrangements, but it hasn't happened yet. And it won't tonight. Tonight, we are going to the Summer Fling at Adventures. And I fully intend to enjoy the crap out of the night, preferably with a scene in one of the private rooms with both of my men.

Adventures' grand reopening is like a homecoming. The club is a second home to us. A safe space to be open about every aspect of my relationship with Daddy. A place to play with friends and try new toys or have extra eyes on more risky scenes.

Getting to bring Ethan along only makes the evening better. I point out all the upgrades Martin made over the long summer and regale my boyfriend with stories about scenes past and the best annual events.

Ethan has met most of my closest friends at Kylee and Q's play parties or at my puppy moshes over the summer. But it's still nice to show him off in front of practically everyone in the local scene.

Holding Ethan's hand as I lead him around the updated common area to mingle with my friends has me all revved up with anticipation. Not the excessive buzzing restlessness of an unquiet mind, but the giddy excitement of spending time among like-minded people, doing things I enjoy.

Ethan notices Daddy first and we make our way toward him through the crowd. It's fun to flirt and cajole him into taking us to a private room. And after a brief flirtation with Rory, who was at the munch where Ethan and I reconnected, Daddy agrees to treat us both with a scene.

The private rooms at Adventures always mean I'm about to have a wonderful night. When Daddy gives me a scene here, I know it's going to be special. And any scene with both the men I love is bound to be memorable.

Things between the three of us are still new enough that I'm not entirely sure what to expect. Mostly, we've played together when I'm Niko, but I'm not in the mood for puppy play tonight. No matter how enticing I find the combination of Daddy's control and Ethan's pampering.

Daddy doesn't tell us what he has in mind, but the room he selects gives me some clues. There's bondage furniture in here. Several adjustable hard points and I know the cabinets hold various restraints.

Daddy sets his toy bag down at his feet and both Ethan and I glance between him and his implements of—well, probably more pleasure than torture.

Daddy rubs his hands together and mimes an over-the-top mustache twirl, like some sort of cartoon villain. “Well, well, well. Looks like I've got you boys at my mercy now, hmm?”

“What are you going to do with us, Daddy?” Ethan purrs. Fuck, but he's sexy as he slinks toward Daddy and runs a hand down his chest. I lick my lips; I've loved every time we shared before, but usually I'm at the center of their sexual interactions.

They might both kiss me, but not each other. They might both fuck me, but—again—not each other. I get the sense that tonight is going to change that. Irrevocably alter their dynamic. Or maybe it was the collar Daddy offered Ethan last week that really cemented things between them.

Either way, I love seeing the chain that matches mine around his neck. It fills me with a possessive pride every

single time I glimpse it, a matched pair to my own.

I'm content to date and love and fuck them both. Even if there was never anything more between them, but seeing affection between the two of them always makes my heart thump faster.

I love seeing Ethan confident enough to flirt openly with Daddy tonight. It's been fun to watch them develop a relationship independent of me. Daddy captures Ethan's wrists in his hand and wrenches them up, pulling Ethan chest-to-chest with him.

Ethan's breath quickens, and he lets Daddy pull him off balance so that he's forced to lean on Daddy's strength.

"First things first, give Daddy a kiss."

Ethan tilts his head up to accept a rough kiss from Daddy. I whimper, watching the way Daddy takes him, one hand pinning Ethan's wrists, the other holds his jaw firmly in place as he plunders Ethan's willing mouth.

Ethan's eyes flutter shut, and he leans his entire weight on Daddy, opening to him beautifully. He accepts every thrust of Daddy's tongue, molding his lips to Daddy's. They take the passion of the kiss and extend it into an erotic display that has my cock aching with need for them both.

I could watch them kiss like that for hours. Ethan's pure surrender is beautiful to behold. I love seeing Daddy's strength from another perspective. And I crave more of Ethan's submission. I'm not sure if I love it more when he's giving it to Daddy or me, but I love it. I love him.

Ethan moans. Daddy releases his hands and reaches for the front of Ethan's pants, rubbing Ethan's junk until he humps against Daddy's hand. Ethan is more hesitant about seizing onto his pleasure than I would be. Daddy doesn't push him or demand his pleasure, not yet. He pulls back, ready to draw out the scene.

"Good boy. You're horny for me, aren't you? Both of you." Daddy's gaze flicks to me, then back to Ethan. Ethan leans

harder into Daddy, pressing into the hand that's still cupping his junk. Daddy rubs him teasingly.

"Yes, Daddy." We both nod.

"Good boys. I want you both naked and kneeling for me. I want to watch my beautiful boys stripping each other bare."

Ethan hesitates. Daddy doesn't push, he holds on, giving us room to obey. Or not. I barely need the prompting to ditch my clothing with these two. Not that I'm wearing much to begin with.

I'm used to wearing little more than my collar, a harness, and jock when we're here. In the common areas, full nudity is frowned upon, but plenty of members toe that line on any given night.

In the private rooms, it's perfectly fine to strip and fuck, even if we are supposed to follow the club rules and use condoms. Ethan leans against Daddy for a moment longer, then he turns toward me. He reaches for my shirt first. I raise my hands and he peels it off of me.

"Make a show of it, boy," Daddy says.

Ethan traces his fingers over my chest. He rubs his thumbs over my nips, kisses, and licks along my collarbones, up the hollow of my throat. He walks his fingertips along the chain of my day collar to the wedding band resting on my chest and presses it against my skin.

The wistful smile in his eyes renews my desire to wear something of his over my heart. I'm itching to give him the rings in the box that Daddy helped me pick. There's one for each of us, and I can't wait for him to say yes.

I've never been one to angst over marriage and commitment. Daddy asked me to be his forever with the collar and the legal stuff was mostly so I could be on his benefits. His supplemental insurance is better than mine. It fully covers my meds and therapy. Plus, I wanted him to have legal standing as my family if I ever end up hospitalized again.

Ethan staring at my wedding band with a sort of reverent longing makes me wish I could marry them both. It makes me

want to promise him forever, as though we might actually have that long to love each other. I can't make that kind of declaration during a scene at our kink club, so I mash our lips together in a kiss to shut myself up.

Ethan moans into my mouth. I delve my hands into his pants, feeling him up, pressing our groins together. We kiss until I can barely tell where I end and he begins. I want his tongue to twine with mine forever, following my movements, stroking and connecting and imitating sex.

I want him to open to me. All of him, from his mouth, to his tight ass, to his heart. I want to crawl inside him and make myself at home.

My tongue stays too busy for foolish words to come out as I occupy myself with kissing him. I somehow fumble his pants out of the way, get my finger on his bare ass, part his cheeks and finger him open while Daddy watches us.

“Ah, I didn't say you could open him up for me yet, Nicholas. Show me his tight little hole.”

I readjust my grip to hold Ethan's cheeks apart for Daddy, no longer teasing at his pucker. I want to sink far more than my fingers into his perfect clench. But I can be a good boy when I put my mind to it. Ethan leans into the touch, pushing his ass out toward Daddy.

“Lovely, boys. Keep going.”

It takes a moment, and Ethan tugging at my pants, for me to realize he means for us to finish stripping. We stop kissing long enough to manage the task.

“Kneel.”

We both sink to our knees. Daddy adjusts our postures. Then he circles around us, offering minor corrections to our stances.

“On all fours.”

We both shift positions. Daddy admires us a moment longer.

“Such handsome boys; I'm not sure which hole I'm going to fuck first. You'll just have to prepare each other for me. Ethan,

on your back boy, Nicholas, I want you on your hands and knees, over him, positioned so that he can eat out your ass while you lick his cock. Think you can manage that?”

“Yes, Daddy,” I agree.

It sounds easy. But as I position myself on top of Ethan, I discover the position requires a fair amount of flexibility. It’s hard to concentrate on prepping Ethan when he’s got his hot mouth on my hole, eating me out like he wants to make love to me.

I’m glad we agreed to ditch protection for oral after our most recent round of testing; he tastes so good in my mouth. Much better than the fiddly makeshift condoms we used at first.

“That’s it, boy, get his hole sloppy wet for me.” Daddy’s hand on my lower back urges me to press against Ethan’s mouth. Ethan’s talented tongue has me moaning around his cock.

Somewhere distantly, I’m aware of Daddy unzipping the toy bag. He loops a blindfold over my eyes. I assume he does the same to Ethan when he taps me to lift my ass away from Ethan’s face. I miss the warm slide of his tongue thrusting into my hole and I clench against the chill of the air on my wet pucker.

A moment later, Daddy pushes a butt plug into my ass, working it in slow and steady until the base is seated firmly in place.

“Good boys.” Daddy slips his fingers under my collar and urges me up. “Here, Nicholas, come around. Ethan, lift your legs to your chest and present that pretty little hole.”

Daddy leads me around behind Ethan and guides my face to Ethan’s pert ass. I wish I could see him spread open for me, but it’s enough to bury my face between his cheeks. I lick and kiss his rim until he’s gasping for breath and moaning for more.

“That’s it, Nicholas; get our boy nice and ready for Daddy’s cock. I want him begging for it before he takes his Daddy and

pup.”

The picture Daddy paints of sharing Ethan sounds so wonderful. I redouble my efforts, reflecting my enthusiasm for prepping our boy. Ethan fills my senses, moaning and pleading for more. I continue eating him out and teasing his dick with my fingers. Eventually, Daddy nudges me away.

“Good boy, Nicholas, kneel there for a moment and wait while I get Ethan ready.”

I’m sorely tempted to remove the blindfold, just enough to peek, as I listen to Daddy guiding Ethan into position. The commands he gives Ethan are vague enough that I’m not sure what he’s doing with our lover.

When I hear metallic clanking and a bell jingling, it takes every ounce of my restraint, but I don’t move from where Daddy put me. I want to be Daddy’s good boy. Ethan whimpers when Daddy tells him to open wide, and then the next sound he makes is a muffled moan. Like he’s gagged. My cock aches at the mental image of Ethan’s mouth stretched wide while Daddy puts him in some sort of bondage. I bet he’s loving that.

I’m even more tempted to sneak a glimpse of them, but I don’t want to risk missing out on the glorious promise of sharing Ethan with Daddy if I’m patient. After what feels like an eternity of listening to Daddy murmur softly to Ethan, he comes over to me. Daddy runs his hands over my body until I’m shivering with anticipation, waiting for a command.

“Come here,” Daddy finally directs me, leading me to crawl across the room, reliant on him to guide me. I follow without hesitation, knowing he’ll always keep me safe.

“That’s it, watch your head.” He guides me under something, his hand on my head, pushing me lower. Whatever it is drags along my back, something smooth and curved. There’s another of Ethan’s muffled sounds, a sort of startled yelp this time.

“There. Turn around, and kneel up, just like that. Good boy.” Daddy pats my head. Ethan whimpers.

I wait for his next order. Daddy doesn't give me one. He simply removes my blindfold. I blink at the sudden brightness. It takes a second to register that I'm at eye level with Ethan's crotch, my mouth close enough for him to feel every hot breath over his sensitive hole.

He's suspended in a sex sling that was definitely not hanging from the room's hardpoints earlier. And he looks delectable, dangling there. I lick my lips, eager for whatever comes next. Daddy had me crawl under him, I realize, and now I'm inches from his groin and I want him.

"What do you think, Nicholas? Do you like having Ethan completely at our mercy?"

"Yes, Daddy." I glance over my shoulder toward Daddy and see that there are straps holding Ethan's ankles aloft and splayed open. I take in the sight of Ethan, fully immobilized and suspended before me. Perfection. "I can't wait to play with him."

The hammock-like sling cradles Ethan's torso securely with his ass at the edge where his hole and dick are accessible to us. Daddy put him in some sort of straightjacket that has his arms locked across his chest. The buckles explain the metal noises.

I was right about the gag, too, and he's already drooling around it. Hot. And unlike me, Ethan is still wearing his blindfold. He must love the utter helplessness of floating in the dark. Cut adrift with only our voices to tether him.

More straps hold his thighs and another cradles his head and neck. Daddy has him arranged so that we could access both his mouth and ass at the same time with minimal maneuvering. Mm, I like the idea of standing at either end of him and swinging him between us. The motion will fuck him from both ends. Hell, yes.

"Ethan, are you comfy?" Daddy asks, circling around to stand near Ethan's head.

"Mhm." Ethan garbles around the gag.

"Good boy. Show Nicholas your safe signal, so he'll recognize it."

Ethan jerks his foot and a string of bells strapped to his ankle jingles. Of course that was one of the things Daddy was murmuring to Ethan while I waited for them. Daddy always takes care of us.

“Good boy.” Daddy strokes Ethan’s cheek. “Nicholas, come see what I brought and tell me what you want to do to our boy before we fuck him senseless.”

I stand, but now that Daddy has given me permission to help guide the scene, I can’t resist the impulse to press both palms to Ethan’s luscious ass. I give the sling a little shove, rocking him. Ethan whimpers and groans as he sways. His dick standing at rigid attention is a testament to how much he enjoys being made helpless for us.

Daddy cuts me a sharp look. “Easy swinging him while he’s got that gag in his mouth. I don’t want to make him nauseous with that one in. You still good, Ethan?”

“Mhm,” Ethan mumbles around the gag.

“Sorry.” I probably should have considered the risks, but that’s why Daddy is the one who runs the show most of the time; he’s good at the details like that. I wonder why he used it if it’s risky, but then again, it sounds like he fully intends to remove it before we rock the boat with Ethan.

“Come pick out our implements of torture, Nicholas,” Daddy prompts me.

I scurry over to him, excited to get on with it. I love when Daddy offers me the chance to top alongside him. Another way of sharing Ethan, not just his body, but even more intimate, his submission. It’s one of many things I love about playing with Daddy and Ethan together. I get to submit to Daddy while Ethan submits to us both.

Daddy laid out the toys he brought from home while he was preparing Ethan. I run my fingers over the selection as I peruse the options.

“Ethan can’t come until he makes his Daddy and pup come. And switch out his gag for this one.” I hold up the o-ring style

gag with a smooth metal shelf to trap his tongue out of the way. That will hold Ethan's lips spread wide for me to use.

My dick is rock hard at the thought of the gag keeping him open for me to fuck. The little tongue depressor part will force him to cede control of his entire mouth to me. Even his tongue. Ethan loves restraints, and I think he'll appreciate the extra loss of control.

Daddy nods. "What else?"

I consider my options. The noise canceling headphones are tempting. I wonder how Ethan would handle having another of his senses restricted. Then I discard that plan. I want him to hear any commands we give him and the mingled sounds of our pleasure, so I skip past it.

Daddy laid out an impressive array. Everything from a soft suede flogger to more gags, rope, various insertables, and stuff for sensory play. I'm sure anything I choose will make Ethan squirm in his bondage. In the end, I opt for simply edging him with the wand vibrator.

Part of me just wants to skip to the good part where Daddy and I get to fuck Ethan. This is why I enjoy submitting to Daddy. He has the patience to draw things out and make us work for our orgasms.

"Will you edge him until he earns getting stuffed with our dicks?" I suggest, pointing toward the wand.

"What will you be doing if I'm using this?" Daddy asks, arching a brow at me. He picks up the toy, though, so I'm pretty sure Ethan is in for some exquisite torture. "Waiting patiently?"

"Fucking his throat?" I say helpfully.

Daddy guffaws. "Fine, greedy boy. But you aren't allowed to come without permission either, Nicholas. Swap out his gag and edge yourself with his throat."

"Yay!" I take the gag and go to Ethan's head to make the switch.

As I take his head in my hands to unbuckle the straps, he grunts, and I belatedly realize he can't see what's going on, so I narrate what I'm doing.

"I'm taking out your gag and replacing it with something else, Ethan," I tell him as I undo the strap and ease the spit-covered ball from his mouth. For lack of anything better to do with it, I lay the gag on his chest.

He's so lovely with his lips parted, waiting and receptive, docile as a lamb in his restraints. I can't resist leaning over him for a kiss. Ethan opens to my tongue, letting me take control of his mouth. I can't wait to feel him wrapped around my cock.

"Open wide. I'm going to make full use of your mouth, boy." I pull away with some reluctance and hold up the ring gag.

Ethan obeys, making it easy to fit the gag to his lips and secure it in place with the straps. Once it's nice and snug, stretching his lips into a perfect O, ready and waiting to be filled, I angle Ethan's head back and tease his lips with my dick. He's so lovely and compliant, I can't wait to have him.

Daddy brings over the wand and clicks it on. Ethan moans plaintively at the buzzing sound. Mm. I love his sounds and watching what we're doing to him.

"Relax, boy." Daddy caresses Ethan's thigh soothingly. "There's nowhere for you to go and nothing is going to hurt you. We're all going to make each other feel good tonight."

Daddy presses the wand to Ethan's cock and Ethan jerks and bucks at the sudden sensation. The motion makes the swing sway, nudging my dick firmly against his face. I could tease myself more, but I don't want to wait any longer to be inside him, so I guide my length past his lips and thrust. Ethan gags. I pull back enough to let him adjust, just holding myself in his mouth.

Ethan moans around my cockhead as Daddy teases him with the wand. He writhes as the wand brushes his tip, then moans as Daddy presses it along his shaft.

As he relaxes into the sensation, I thrust a little deeper, working up to pushing into his throat. Ethan seems to expect it this time, and he takes me easily, moaning around my cock. I tangle my fingers in his hair and lose myself in the sensations.

I fall into a rhythm, thrusting into Ethan, choking him on my cock and then pulling back enough to let him catch his breath. The constant low hum of the wand and the soft murmur of Daddy's praise blends with the vibrations of Ethan's moans.

My toes curl as I get close to the edge and have to pull back. Over and over again, I take myself to the brink while Daddy does the same to Ethan.

I lose track of the number of times I have to bite the inside of my cheek or squeeze my balls to fend off my orgasm. I'm so close. Riding the edge. From the way Ethan is trembling, and the needy sounds he's making around my dick, so is he.

"Daddy, can we come now? Please?" I ask, since Ethan can't really beg with his mouth full.

Daddy chuckles. "So soon? This was your idea, Nicholas. You asked me to keep you boys on edge."

"I know, but I'm so close and I need to come. Please?"

"What about you Ethan? Do you need to come too?" Daddy grinds the wand against Ethan, and he groans and struggles. "What's that? I didn't hear you, boy. Do you need to come?"

Ethan sobs something unintelligible around my shaft.

"Hm, is that your way of saying that you want me to fuck you now, boy?"

"Mhm." Ethan hums his agreement. Fuck, the vibrations send pleasure jolting through my balls. I groan.

"Remember, you can ring your bells if you need this to stop," Daddy reminds Ethan as he sets aside the wand and rolls on a condom. He slicks up with lube and I have to hold still for a moment as I watch Daddy slide his cock into Ethan's ass.

“Nicholas, I’m going to thrust and rock him onto you; are you ready?”

“Yes, Daddy,” I agree.

I don’t move to meet the first few thrusts, but eventually we find a rhythm to rock Ethan between us like a pendulum. His momentum fucks him onto each of us by turns. It’s a glorious slide along my cock with every swing and I’m close again in no time, already primed and ready to come from the edging.

Daddy takes his time fucking Ethan, reveling in the complete control of his body that the swing provides.

“How do you like that, Ethan? Daddy has total power over you, huh? I can move you with the twitch of a finger and you’re helpless to resist me.”

Ethan moans again at that, arching into me. He swallows around my cock and I have to pinch myself to hold off, my eyes rolling back at the pleasure.

“Fuck, Daddy, please. I can’t...”

“You can. You both can wait until I say.”

Ethan’s lips, already stretched wide around my cock and his gag, quirk into an approximation of his familiar mischievous grin. I know what he’s going to do before he swallows again, humming long and low as he does it.

He times it just as Daddy thrusts, driving me down Ethan’s throat with the momentum and I’m gone. I come, clinging to his head as he continues to slide along my length in time to Daddy’s thrusts.

Ethan splutters on my load and I barely have the presence of mind to pull out so I can stroke myself through the rest of my orgasm. The second spurt jets onto his cheek.

“Naughty boy, Nicholas. I hope you enjoyed that orgasm because you’re going in your cage for a week for coming without permission,” Daddy chides. He sounds amused at my expense, but then Daddy does enjoy tormenting us.

I groan, not looking forward to my punishment. Ethan chuckles, the sound odd with his tongue still pinned by the

gag. I'll have to get him back.

“Brat, you did that on purpose,” I accuse Ethan, but I pat his cheek and lean in to kiss him anyway.

Now that he doesn't have to be mindful of choking Ethan on my cock, Daddy thrusts more forcefully. He's really using his leverage with the swing to drive Ethan onto his length. He fucks Ethan hard and fast. It's not long before he comes too, filling up the condom.

“So good boy, love having you all trussed up for us. Nicholas, get over here and make our boy come; he's earned it.” Daddy pulls out and makes room for me to kneel between Ethan's thighs so I can suck him off. “You can come when you're ready, Ethan.”

I barely get my lips wrapped around him and suck before Ethan bucks up and comes in my mouth. I suck him through his aftershocks and continue tonguing him long past the point where I know he's too sensitized to enjoy it. Ethan groans and bucks against me. At some point, Daddy must remove his gag, because he starts to beg.

“Nicky, oh, fuck, stop. Too much, it's too much. Fuck, ungh, can't—Nicky!” If I wasn't well aware of how much he likes to put up a mock fight, I'd stop. But he isn't using his safe words or ringing his bells, so I draw this out—just a little longer.

“Nicky!” Ethan's voice breaks as his cock pulses against my tongue again, and I'm pretty sure I just forced a second orgasm out of him. I've done it before and I fully intend to do it again. From the look on his face as his body shudders with release, he's flying high. I suck him until the shivers cease.

With a smug smile, I give him one final lick before I pull away. He slumps into the sling, the gentle swaying rocks his body as his heavy breathing settles back to normal. Ethan lays there as Daddy and I get him cleaned up and released from the restraints. Daddy takes care of me too, removing the plug I'd all but forgotten from my ass and wiping my dick clean before caging me and helping me into my jock.

Once we're both steady enough to leave the room, Daddy wraps the two of us in a cozy blanket. He settles us on a couch out in the common area with water. He has a quick word with a friend to get them to tidy away our things from the private room while he snuggles us.

"Did you like that, Ethan?" I ask and I nuzzle closer to him.

"Mhm," he agrees muzzily, still floating on endorphins. "Loved it." He presses his palm to my chest, right over my ring from Daddy.

"Good. Love you. Gonna wear your ring there too, someday." I press his hand more firmly against me.

"Yeah?" Ethan asks, his voice raspy from our scene.

Damn, he sounds good like that, all floaty as he comes down from the high of being used. I snuggle closer, seeking all the contact I can get. I hook my fingers through his collar too, liking the feel of the body-warm metal, the reminder that he's agreed to stay with us and be ours.

"Yeah," I murmur into the shell of his ear. "Will you—"

"Ask him when you're not both coming down from a scene, Nicholas." Daddy interrupts before I can blurt something I really shouldn't right now.

"Okay. I will." I nod. Daddy's right. I'm going to ask properly. Soon. But not tonight.

Then I doze off in a snuggle pile with my two favorite people, safe and sated in one of my favorite places.

Chapter 23

Ethan

I spend the night at Clark and Nicky's place after the Summer Fling. And as much as I appreciate all the work Nicky did to make my house liveable, I still don't want to go back to it. Living together full time is something I've mentioned to both men, but we haven't had a chance to discuss it properly. That needs to change.

I figure the conversation will go better with full stomachs, and probably coffee. For Clark and me, at least. Nicky usually saves his caffeine intake for soda later in the day. I have to disentangle myself from the blankets and both of my men if I want to get that breakfast going.

It's tempting to linger, savor the sleepy warmth of their bodies and let their even breathing lull me back to sleep. But I want to wake up to this every day and that means we need to have an actual conversation before I lose my nerve. If I stay in bed, we'll snuggle until we're awake enough to fuck again. Lazy morning sex is tempting. But no. Breakfast and talking first.

Nicky mumbles and tries to pull me back into his arms, but I tell him I have to pee, which isn't a lie, and he lets me go. He rolls to snuggle into Daddy's side with a little sigh. I watch them for a moment, still reluctant to leave. Hopefully, I'll always have a place in their bed. That's what I'm planning on asking for.

I ease the bedroom door shut and slip into the guest room to uncover Gandalf's cage and give her fresh food and water. I'd let her hang out in the living room on the perch I brought over for her, but that will have to wait until I'm done cooking. Too much could go wrong to risk having her lose while I've got the stove on.

I hum to myself as I set the coffee to brewing and pull out everything I need to make a nice breakfast. Hash browns from the freezer and bacon go in the oven. I don't feel like waiting,

so I lay it all out on a sheet pan and throw it in while the oven is still pre-heating. English muffins go in the toaster, ready to heat when I need them.

I cheat and make the sauce from a packet as I wait for the pot of water to poach the eggs to come to temperature. Daddy and Nicky prefer theirs runny, so I cook mine first, giving them long enough for the yolks to be mostly solid. I hear the toilet flushing from the bedroom as I'm adding their eggs to the water. Good, they're awake. This is a breakfast better served hot.

I start the toaster and pour my coffee, taking a fortifying sip before I check the oven, perfect crispy bacon, and nicely browned potatoes. I pull out the tray and start arranging everything on plates. Just in time for the timer on the eggs to go off to strain them on paper towels so they don't get the bread soggy.

Clark and Nicky stumble into the kitchen just as I'm spooning the Hollandaise sauce onto their eggs Benedict.

"What are you making?" Nicky asks through a yawn and he gloms onto my back and hooks his chin over my shoulder. He sticks a finger in the sauce to taste it. "Yummy."

"Eggs Benedict. Did you want juice with yours?"

"I'll get it," Daddy offers, already opening the fridge to grab cream for his coffee. He takes out the carton of juice as well. "You boys sit and we can eat. It all looks delicious, Ethan."

"Thanks." I beam at the praise as I finish up the plating, then grab my food and coffee to sit. Nicky takes his and Daddy's plates to the table. Daddy brings over his and Nicky's drinks. Nicky goes back for a fistful of utensils for all of us. He brings over ketchup and the pot with the leftover sauce as well, shooting me a jaunty wink.

"This stuff is good; might want extra," Nicky explains.

I stifle a snort at his antics.

Daddy raises a brow at him, but doesn't chastise him. "So, what's the occasion for the lovely breakfast, Ethan?" Daddy asks once we're all settled around the table.

I shrug, fiddling with my fork. “Well, Nicky finished with the house stuff, and I figured we should talk about it?”

“What about it?” Daddy asks calmly.

“I want you guys to move in with me. It doesn’t have to be there, but I want to live together. I know it’s only been five months, but I know how I feel about you two, and that won’t change.”

“Yes.” Nicky is nodding. “Let’s do it. I want to. Daddy?”

Daddy reaches for both of our hands and he’s smiling, so I try not to let my nerves run out of control. “I already told you I like the idea too, Ethan. Nicholas, your new school is closer to Port Moody, right?”

“Yes. It wouldn’t be a bad commute from Ethan’s place. I say we move there.”

“What do you think, Ethan? Is it somewhere you can picture living?”

I consider, bite my lip, and shake my head. “Not yet. Nicky, you did an amazing job. I truly appreciate everything you put into it, but I have some money from Dad’s estate, and I’ve been thinking that if I keep the house, we should remodel. Make it ours.”

“You want us to be involved?” Daddy echoes.

“Yes.” I nod. “I want it to be our place. Not just mine. I want play space for us and a nice kitchen for you, Daddy.”

“In that case, Nicholas and I should contribute to the costs,” Daddy says, exchanging a speaking look with Nicky. Nicky nods enthusiastically.

“Oh, yes! We can fix up the basement to be our playroom. We could host parties and stuff. It would be perfect. I bet I could convince Harry to help. The winter is his slow season, and he sometimes takes on residential projects and Monty and Tate can handle the plumbing. They can put in a nice big shower in the en suite that can fit all three of us.” He gives me a lecherous glance. “I’ll make some calls next week. If you want?” Nicky bounces excitedly in his seat. “It won’t be

recognizable by the time we're done, Ethan! You'll love it. And we can all live here until the work is complete."

"That sounds good," I agree, tearing up at how happy he seems about giving me everything I want.

"Sounds like you've got it all figured out, pup," Clark says, sounding amused.

"I do." Nicky nods. "And speaking of planning our future together, Ethan, there's something I want to give you."

Nicky rises and walks into the hallway. He returns with something clutched in his fist, strides right up to me and goes to one knee in front of me.

"I know this is totally cliché, and I can't back it up with the legal paperwork, but I want you to be mine forever too." He glances at Clark, who rests a supportive hand on Nicky's shoulder and nods his approval. "Be ours, I mean. Will you wear my ring on your collar? Our rings. And I want to wear yours. Will you join our family and be our husband?" Nicky offers me the little black box.

I stare at him. And this isn't something I expected, though maybe I should have, from the hints he's dropped about rings. It's not something I wanted, not when it was so tangled up in the stereotypes that dictated so much of what made me miserable growing up.

A wave of dizziness hits me and my head spins with the juxtaposition of Nicky offering me my heart's desire in the last way I expected it to be delivered. The sheer conventionality of how he's asking for something that defies conventions so completely that we can't actually do the things he's proposing. The three of us can't legally get married. But we can commit to a lifetime of loving each other, and in the end, that's the part that truly matters.

And gazing down at Nicky with his eyes so full of love, the proposal itself doesn't matter in the least. What matters is the hope shining in his liquid honey eyes. Opening the box reveals two rings, silver and gold like my collar. I glance between the

two men watching me intently and do the only thing I can, speechless; I nod.

Nicky climbs into my lap. He hauls me into a kiss so passionate I almost want to say screw it to the delicious breakfast growing cold on the table and take him back to bed to consummate our union. But then Daddy clears his throat and brings us back to reality.

“We should probably eat the tasty breakfast you made. But I am going to make love to you later, Ethan.” Nicky flashes me a mischievous grin and licks the birthmark by my ear that he’s obsessed with. “It’s official now. I licked you; you’re mine forever. You agreed to it.”

“I suppose I did.” I smile at him.

“Can I put our rings on your collar?” he asks. I nod and Nicky carefully unclasps the chain, threads the gold band onto it and hands it to Clark. “Daddy, put your ring on it.”

Clark adds the silver one. “We can plan some sort of ceremony if you boys want. With family and friends, even if it isn’t legally binding, that’s not what counts.”

He passes the chain back to Nicky and Nicky returns the collar to my neck. He fastens the clasp and kisses my nape, sealing it with a kiss the same way Daddy did when he gave me the collar. I squeeze the two rings dangling over my chest and I get why Nicky has that habit, how reassuring it can be to remember who I belong to. That I’m part of a family again.

I love these two men with all my heart. When I reach for their hands, they both clasp me tight. I never want to let them go, and they’ve just promised me I don’t have to, till death do us part and all that. Maybe there’s something to be said for borrowing from old traditions and making them our own, even if they don’t quite fit our situation perfectly.

“Can we pick out rings for Daddy and I to wear from you?” Nicky asks, watching me clutch at mine.

I nod. “Yes. We should do that. Today.”

“After breakfast.” Daddy gestures to our plates.

“Yes, Daddy.” Nicky chuckles and goes back to his seat.

“After breakfast,” I agree.

Nicky sighs dramatically. “I suppose it can wait until we eat.”

Daddy smiles. “That’s right. There’s no rush. We’ve got the rest of our lives to love each other, boys.”

I grin, because he’s absolutely right, and I can’t wait to see what the future holds for us.

Epilogue

One year later

Nick

Summer break sneaks up on me this year. I'm emotional about my students' last day of class. Compared to a year ago, when I couldn't wait to clear out my classroom and bid adieu to pretty much everyone at my old school, it's a paradoxically pleasant change. Even if I will miss all the bright and smiling faces every morning, it's good to enjoy work again.

I trust the team here to have my back, and so far, they haven't given me reasons to doubt their sincerity or their commitment to inclusion. I'm free to discuss my family among my colleagues and mention Ethan and Clark in class if they come up in conversation. It helps that my predecessor was also polyamorous and part of a triad, so most of my coworkers are already familiar with the concept.

Still, I don't push my luck. It's one thing to talk about the two men I'm planning to share the rest of my life with; it's another to divulge details of our sex life. I don't mention to my colleagues that—unlike Emil and his lovers—my family is an open triad. I still fool around with people other than my lovers.

Sure, I spend less time on that now, but I still have sex with whoever strikes my fancy at our regular puppy moshes. I do scenes with friends at the club and have play dates with other people, like Q. I've pretty much stopped dating other people in the romantic sense though. I just don't have time for that when I've got all the romance I need between Daddy and Ethan. And I'm happy with the way things are.

Despite my end-of-the-year melancholy, I'm also excited for summer. Not the least because we're hosting a party at our place. Our first one since we finished our big remodel. The house Ethan grew up in had so many memories; it was hard for him to live with all the ghosts, so with all three of us

chipping in, it made sense to update it to better suit our needs. And to take the sharp edges off his grief.

We officially moved in together ages ago, but we've been staying in our apartment for most of that time. The remodel kicked up a lot of dust, debris, and fumes that Gandalf couldn't handle. So the bird moved back into our spare room and we've all four been living cheek to jowl as we fixed up the house.

Totally worth it. And I kind of like being in close quarters with my lovers. Admittedly, now that we're in the house, I also enjoy having more room to sprawl. Daddy has been taking better advantage of his remote work since getting a proper office set up at the house too.

My favorite part of the remodel is our basement playroom. No more angsting over my play room doubling as a guest room. We're just lucky that Clark's family knows he's kinky and never made a fuss over it. If they snooped in our drawers while staying in the room, they never said a word about it in front of me.

Still, it's a lovely luxury to have a dedicated space for our kinky gear now. It means I get to be more relaxed about putting away my toys. Well, mine and Ethan's toys now. I have no qualms about sharing with him.

Everything is tidy for the party tonight. After we have a family friendly barbeque in the backyard and the vanilla guests leave, a few of our closest friends are staying for a more X-rated experience. I'm looking forward to showing off the basement to Q and Angel, among others.

Daddy and Ethan have all the food prepped. Snacks are laid out on tables. The sides are ready to serve, and the mains are waiting to go on the grill. And I'm hanging out with Gandalf to stay out of their way until our first guests arrive.

Our bird mimics the doorbell, making me laugh. That's my cue to play host. I clip a forage toy into her cage to occupy her while we've got guests keeping her cooped up. I double check the locks.

“Gandalf is good birds,” she trills as she goes to investigate the new toy.

“Gandalf is best birds,” I agree as I cross the room to open the front door.

The first guests to arrive are Kylee and Quent with their nibling, Ira, and her parents. Ira is a smiley little baby, cute chubby cheeks, and big bright eyes that seem to take in everything as she reclines in her infant carrier.

I greet everyone, hugging Quent extra tight because I’m excited to play with them later. Jared and Logan look tired, but I figure that’s par for the course with new babies. Ira’s still an infant, around six months old. I’ve gotten to know her dads over the past few months because they helped us sort out our options for making Ethan a legal part of our family.

That turned out to be a complicated answer, but we managed most of what we wanted by doing advanced planning for if the worst happens with a series of workarounds. The important thing is that Ethan knows he belongs with our family, just as much as Clark and me. I pat the pair of rings on my collar, their presence making me grin as always.

I get everyone drinks and appetizers and more guests arrive. Some of our assorted coworkers, people from Adventures and my pup group, my folks even stop by for burgers. They’ve always been supportive of me; even if they don’t quite get the polyamory thing, it’s enough for them to know that I’m happy with my two men.

Emil and his family come as well, though they don’t stay long since they’ve got three toddlers to chase around. I can only imagine their home is utter chaos most days. Still, it’s nice to hang out with another family similar to ours.

Since he gave me the tip about my current job, we’ve gotten closer. It’s been good to have a friend with no chance of benefits to kvetch with. One who shares my passion for teaching and my romantic leanings.

Throughout the day, our home echoes with conversation and laughter and we’re surrounded by the people we care about

and tasty food. Daddy looks positively lickable as he mans the grill. I still think he should have worn my raunchy apron, but he might have a point about kids being present.

It's a wonderful day. A celebration of our family and opening up our home to the ones who matter most to us. By the time the bulk of the guests leave, I'm more than ready for puppy time. Our last few lingering kinky friends join us for the after dark part of the day, and we retreat to the playroom. I get to play with Ethan and our friends under Daddy's watchful gaze.

It's hard to believe that just over a year ago Ethan wasn't in my life as anything but a memory. I wouldn't trade having him back and making new memories together for the world. And now, here we are, hosting our nearest and dearest and getting to live our love out loud. Life doesn't get much better than being with Daddy and Ethan, surrounded by our nearest and dearest.

Thanks for reading! If you enjoyed Stud Muffin I'd appreciate it if you take the time to leave a review to help other readers find Ethan, Clark, and Nick.

www.amzn.com/B0B51XVMGX

And for a bonus deleted scenes prologue with Clark and Nicholas be sure to join my reader group at:

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/alexsalcove>

If you haven't yet, be sure to check out the rest of the Summer of Adventures series with the novella that started it all: www.amzn.com/B09D9ZTWDK

And if you want to learn more about Emil and his partners, stay tuned for Table Topped Book 6, Party of Three, coming in 2023!

<https://www.amazon.com/dp/B08R6LM6YG>

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About the Author

Alex Silver (he/them) grew up mostly in Northern Maine and is now living in Canada with one spouse, two kids, and a lovebird. Alex is a trans guy who started writing fiction as a child and never stopped. Although there were detours through assisting on a farm and being a pharmacist along the way.

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[Haunt \(M/M trans, gothic horror\)](#),

Fix the World

[Upgrade \(gay trans cyberpunk\)](#),

Summer of Adventures

Character Guide

Martin: Owner of Adventures, MC in [Dungeon Master](#) who discovers a kinky boy in the cafe where he's forced to work when his office gets flooded.

Bobby: A barista who first appears in my contemporary series, Table Topped, and finds love with a regular at the cafe where he works. Martin sweeps him off his feet with a whole new world of kink after a misunderstanding about just what sort of dungeon Martin runs draws them together in [Dungeon Master](#).

Monty: One of Connor's closest friends. Tate's best friend. A pudgy boy with ADHD who discovers that his best friend's brother is his perfect Daddy in [Knotty Boy](#).

Luke: Tate's step-brother and Monty's Daddy. He specializes in ropes and suspension bondage and gives workshops on the topic. He and Tate are also business partners. Realizes his brother's best friend is the perfect boy for him in [Knotty Boy](#).

Tate: One of Connor's closest friends. A plumber who owns his own business along with his step-brother, Luke. He is dyslexic and into age play/ABDL. Finds his Daddy after a chance encounter leads to more in [Service Call](#).

Rory: Tate's Daddy. A trans man who moves to Vancouver for his career as a voice actor and rediscovers his kinks as Tate's Daddy. Finds love after a one-night stand in [Service Call](#).

Connor: Quent's best friend. A shy, pierced, Jewish, trans boy looking for his perfect caregiver who can also be his partner. Finds love when his kinky friend with benefits grants all his wishes in [Picture Perfect](#).

Jackson: A kink photographer who offers Connor a kinky friends with benefits relationship the turns into so much more in [Picture Perfect](#).

Quent: Also goes by Q. A fun loving nonbinary pup who uses they/them pronouns. Connor's best friend. They are in a long-term relationship with their Mommy, Kylee. The pair has an ethically non-monogamous relationship that is open for sex and kink, but closed romantically. Quent and Kylee struggle to deepen their relationship when Quent offers to be a surrogate for their brother in [Puppy Love](#).

Kylee: Quent's Mommy. She is a trans woman who is a motherly figure to all of Quent's little friends, particularly Monty, Tate, and Connor. Her story is told in [Puppy Love](#).

Harry: A contractor who is kink positive. Harry met Quent when he helped with renovating Quent and Kylee's home playroom. He is Connor's friend group's DM for their regular D&D sessions. He also handles the renovations at Adventures for Martin.

Clark: A pup handler who appears in multiple books along with his partner. Niko is his pup and husband. They have an open relationship. His story is coming soon in [Stud Muffin](#).

Niko/Nicholas: Clark's pup. One of the friends pup Q enjoys playing with. He is married to his handler, Clark and dating his boyfriend, Ethan. His story is coming soon in [Stud Muffin](#).

Ethan: Nicholas's boyfriend who sometimes plays with Clark and Niko together. His story is coming soon in [Stud Muffin](#).

Hope: Angel's Domme and partner. They have a teenage daughter, Bethany.

Angel: Hope's sub and one of Luke's go-to rope models for demonstrations and workshops. They are married to Hope and Bethany's parent. The pair appears in several books as members at Adventures.