



# Cameron & Rylan

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**Description:** Cameron Hayes believed himself to be a dedicated friend and a good son but destined to be alone. Because in his twenty-one years, he'd never fallen for anyone. Dating never appealed to him when he would rather spend a night at home. Despite his friend's best intentions for Cameron to find a hookup for the night, he stayed at the bar as he nursed a beer. And that's when Cameron spotted him and everything he knew evaporated with one look. Rylan Ellis wanted one night out without complications. To forget about his overwhelming responsibilities and stress at home. He loved to lose himself in the music and ignore everyone around him. But when he happened a glance at the bar and spotted the tall, broad, and sexy-as-sin man, he felt drawn to him. Soon, Cameron and Rylan learn about each other and establish their lives together. They also have to deal with a group of well-meaning friends, loving parents, and unexpected friendships. But most of all, a dangerous threat that could tear their lives apart. Will a chance meeting turn into something more?

**Total Pages (Source):** 88

## CHAPTER ONE

### CAMERON

This wasn't his scene. Along with the loud music came the dancing bodies, sharp and piercing howls of laughter, but most of all the flirting. He'd known what the night held when his friends insisted on going out and despite his hesitation, Cameron had agreed.

He wouldn't say he was lonely since he was the one who quit the football team the year before and secluded himself using any excuse he thought of to avoid social interactions. But from time to time, he missed his friends.

The music blared from the various speakers around the crowded club, but it had a good beat as it blended from one track to another. He nodded toward the bartender as he handed him a new beer before he turned toward the crowd, scanning the dance floor.

Cameron couldn't hold in the laugh as he spotted Tim, one of his best friends, dance up to a girl with a huge smile on his face. When she rolled her eyes, he reversed the other way with a friendly wave. That was Tim. He let nothing get to him, even such an obvious rejection.

Unlike his friends, Cameron had no interest in finding a date for the night. But he watched his friends as they maneuvered around the bar amongst the gyrating bodies having a great time.

As his gaze landed on Aaron, who had a blonde wrapped around him as they swayed back and forth, a small hand landed on his chest before a compact body pressed up to his side. Cameron blinked down at the beautiful woman who smiled at him. Her eyes traveled over him, down and back up again, unable to keep her predatory gaze from his body.

Cameron sighed. She wasn't the first person who thought he was available for a good time, but she was the first to touch him without permission.

Attraction was fleeting. At this point in his life, Cameron had no desire to pursue a physical relationship with anyone. Temporary attachments made his skin crawl for a reason he never understood, and he knew as she spoke she wouldn't be more than that.

"Wanna head to my place? It's quiet and we can talk."

"No, thanks."

He supposed people thought he was a typical jock, looking to score around every corner. Although he'd been told he was attractive, he knew attraction was subjective. His six foot three height, wide shoulders, and lean muscles resulted from years of conditioning and training. His parents gifted him with great genes, his light blond-brown hair, and hazel eyes completed the package. But for him, he wanted something substantial.

"Come on, handsome. I'm an easy score and you seem well... equipped."

"I'm not interested."

This time, she huffed away and Cameron felt as though he could breathe again.

He lifted his beer to take a swig, and he paused when he spotted a gorgeous figure dancing alone. He swallowed without taking a sip of the beer hanging in his grip and watched as the man closed his eyes and let the music wash over him. Cameron noticed the small smile on his lips grew wider the longer he continued to move to the pulsing beat. He'd never witnessed pure bliss etched on a face before, but this man exuded it.

What surprised Cameron wasn't that he couldn't tear his eyes away from a man as he traced his gaze over his beautiful face, his long neck, his thin but not skinny frame, and his long legs, mesmerized.

It wasn't only that.

But the flare of attraction that hit Cameron square in the chest for the first time in his life.

Over the next few minutes, something drew Cameron's eyes back to the gorgeous blond man as he built up the courage to approach him. But each time he glanced up, there was a new man or woman who walked away when the man refused a dance.

Cameron's eyes roamed over him. He estimated the blond was shorter by four or more inches. He looked to be on the thin side, but Cameron could see the defined muscles where his shirt clung to him. And his tight jeans moulded to his perfect ass and slender legs, giving Cameron fantasies for the first time, stunning him.

He had no clue how long he stood there ignoring his beer and the rest of the people surrounding him, admiring the man who'd captivated him, until he blinked when Eric shook his shoulder. Cameron glanced down and caught Eric's smirk before he looked at Aaron, who was holding his stomach, laughing.

Although his friends were having a laugh at his expense, Cameron appreciated they

didn't mention his utter fascination with the man who had moved closer to the bar.

"Hey man, we're taking off." Tim pulled Cameron's attention away from the moving bodies.

Cameron nodded. "I'll stick around. I'll see you guys."

All three nodded and Cameron watched as they headed toward the exit before his gaze moved to find the object of his fascination.

The crowd had thinned and while he should have been able to spot the man, disappointment flooded him when he couldn't find the captivating dancer. His eyes darted around the club, but it wasn't his night, the man must have slipped out when he wasn't watching.

He turned back to the bar. Before he could snag his beer for one last sip, he felt a presence next to him. Wallowing in his sorrow at missing his chance to meet the mesmerizing man, he had heard nothing said by the new arrival.

Cameron turned his head and almost groaned aloud at the relief rushing through him when the man he'd thought left was standing next to him. For a moment, he became lost in the brilliant smile aimed at him. He forced his eyes away from his lips and caught the man's gaze.

## Page 2

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Gray eyes. Beautiful gray eyes.

Again, Cameron missed what the man had asked him and could feel his cheeks heat.

He cleared his throat once, and then again, before he could speak. “I’m sorry, I didn’t catch what you said.”

Instead of answering, the man beamed at him. Cameron’s chest tightened, and he forced himself to breathe.

“Why did you look so sad a moment ago?” the man asked.

Without filtering his thoughts, Cameron blurted out the truth. “I thought you left. What’s your name?”

“Rylan Ellis.”

He held his hand out and Cameron shook it, enjoying the feel of Rylan’s strong fingers wrapping around his own. Cameron’s body flushed when Rylan rubbed his thumb against the sensitive skin between his thumb and forefinger.

“Cameron Hayes.”

“Would you like to dance, Cameron?”

He couldn’t help his pause at the question. “I would love to, but I’ve never had a lot of rhythm and I’ll trample you.”

Rylan laughed and Cameron liked the scratchy, tinkling sound. He gifted him with something precious and rare because Cameron smiled as he realized Rylan's laugh matched his soft, masculine voice.

"Don't worry. I've got you." Rylan slid his hand into Cameron's bigger one and he allowed Rylan to pull him onto the dance floor.

As the other man led the way, Cameron's gaze roamed over Rylan's form. He loved how his hair, even when damp from the exertion of dancing, looked soft. He wanted to run his hands through it to see if it was as downy as it looked. The blond of Rylan's hair was a little darker than his own, but it brought out the color in his eyes.

Rylan's skin shimmered under the lights and Cameron had the strong urge to lean down and lick a swath along his delectable neck, tasting him. Because of his thoughts, he flushed when Rylan turned back to him and moved his hands to Cameron's hips.

"Close your eyes."

Cameron, trusting this man he'd met, complied with his request. Cut off from one of his senses, sensations thrummed through him when Rylan tapped out a beat with his fingers against his waist. He'd somehow burrowed his hand underneath Cameron's tee and Rylan moved the pads of his fingers against his bare skin.

"Are you paying attention?" Rylan laughed when Cameron's head jerked up and caught his gaze.

"I can't help it." Cameron being close to Rylan and inhaling his scent, something sharp and citrus he couldn't place, made him want to take a step closer and absorb his body heat.

“What do you mean?”

Cameron shook his head. “Your hand touched me underneath my shirt and my brain fried at the sensation.”

He laughed, the sound affecting him again, and Cameron realized then their bodies moved from side-to-side. Instead of giving him directions, Rylan pressed one hand to his right hip and then the other to his left, and he swayed without issue.

Cameron ignored what his body was doing. He hoped he didn’t look too uncoordinated and instead concentrated on Rylan’s movements. He moved with natural ease as if the music was inside him and Cameron was lucky enough to hear the rhythm and beat because he stood so close to the beautiful man.

Without thought, Cameron relaxed as they danced, his concentration on Rylan as the techno song faded into the background as the DJ mixed both old and new tracks.

“And this is for the lovers out there...”

A slow song he didn’t recognize started. He swallowed, hard, when Rylan wrapped his arms around his shoulders. They swayed back and forth and once again; he stared into the gray depths of Rylan’s eyes.

“Where did you learn to dance?”

Rylan smiled. “My mom enrolled me in dance class when she caught me in my room at five, music blaring and me jumping and dancing around. She said I had a look of pure joy on my face. I was the only boy in class, but I loved it. For a while.”

Cameron sensed there was a story behind the cryptic statement, but didn’t push. “How often do you get out and dance?”



Again, the smile from Rylan short-circuited something in his brain and he had to concentrate on his next words.

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“Twice a month, or whenever I need to let go of the stress in my life.”

“Have you ever danced with anyone?” The words were out before he thought it through.

Cameron blew out a relieved breath when Rylan shook his head.

“I like to dance alone, but I spotted you at the bar and something drew me to you.”

A million thoughts exploded in his head until Rylan stiffened in his arms. He sensed he shouldn't glance around to see what alerted Rylan, so instead he opened one hand and pressed it against the middle of Rylan's back and moved him closer. Using his size, he blocked Rylan from view.

Cameron blew out a relieved breath and closed his eyes. Rylan pressed his face against Cameron's neck and gripped his hips. Cameron kept his thoughts from the sensations of Rylan pressed against him from hip to chest because Rylan was in danger.

Rylan's breathing sped up, almost as if he were hyperventilating.

“You're okay. I won't let anyone hurt you. I promise I will protect you even if they are bigger than me.”

Along with his words, Cameron moved, swaying side-to-side, acting casual as he glanced around the room. He noticed a man, several years older than Rylan, glaring as he scanned the club looking for someone.

“Are you okay?”

Rylan must have caught sight of the man again because he shivered in Cameron’s arms. Instead of letting it overwhelm him, Rylan took a deep breath and wrapped his arms tighter around Cameron’s waist.

With his mouth still pressed against Cameron’s neck, he spoke. “The man looking so angry is my brother’s best friend.”

By itself, there was nothing alarming in that statement, but Cameron paused when Rylan continued.

“Since I’m in college and I need to save money, I live with my father, James, and my older brother, Declan. Since I’m an embarrassment to my family, I stay in the basement with a separate entrance.”

Cameron made a noise of disgust, but otherwise didn’t say a word.

“Declan’s best friend, Tristan, hates me. But I haven’t seen him in years. I didn’t know he was back in town.” Rylan sighed, as though he’d fought this battle before and lost. “But now he’s back, I’ll move out.”

Cameron, hating the defeat in his voice, wrapped both arms around Rylan and pulled him closer, resting his cheek on top of Rylan’s head. When he wrapped Rylan in his arms, Cameron felt the man relax against him. Rylan’s show of trust made all of Cameron’s protective instincts flare.

The most important thing was to get to know Rylan and see how he could help.

He didn’t want their night to be over. But more than anything, he wanted to get Rylan out of the club and to a safe place.

“Would you like to grab something to eat at the diner down the street with me?”

Rylan drew Cameron by being himself. Although he wanted to admit it aloud, he kept his feelings to himself because he had enough of a shock from the man searching for him.

He would go slow.

Rylan leaned his head back and when he met Cameron’s gaze, he gave him a dazzling smile. “I would like that.”

Cameron smiled back. He glanced around and noticed the man was talking to the bartender. The bartender pointed toward the back, where the restrooms were, and Tristan headed in the direction.

“Okay, we’re clear. Ready?”

Rylan nodded.

Without asking, Cameron tucked Rylan against his side to shield him from the view of the bar and the remaining area and headed for the exit.

Rylan smiled up at Cameron, cuddling against his side, as they walked out the door and headed north to the diner. A silence grew between them as the quiet of the night descended upon them. It wasn’t uncomfortable.

Cameron understood as the lights of the diner came into view, his life would never be the same. All because of the man at his side.

### CHAPTER TWO

#### RYLAN

Rylan shivered from the cool night air despite being pressed against Cameron. The man radiated heat. He couldn't help but smile when Cameron rubbed his hand up and down Rylan's arm, trying to warm him.

When he arrived at the club earlier, he'd wanted a night out the release the built-up tension from past few months, which had been busier than he expected. He didn't come to the club to hook up, he only wanted to lose himself in the music and dance. After, he would head home and sleep all night and most of Saturday. He had an order due soon, and he needed to finish it, but he would collapse if he continued to work over twelve hours a day, every day without a break.

The moment he stepped in the club, he could feel eyes turn to him. Rylan wasn't egotistical. He knew he received attention for his lithe, athletic body. But that was because of good genes and years of dance that kept him in shape.

He didn't bother with a drink, nor did he scan the dance floor for anyone he knew. The music swelled, and he closed his eyes and let the music take over his movements, ignoring everything but the way his muscles stretched and swayed. His body heated and before long, he was alone in his head.

Rylan danced for an hour, not stopping the way his body moved to the rhythm, but something felt different. It wasn't the men and women who wanted to dance with him, he would turn down those offers with a slight smile that wasn't encouraging and

a shake of his head.

When he blinked open his eyes, his gaze landed on a giant of a man with a curious expression on his face, leaning against the bar and staring in his direction. Rylan glanced around, wondering if he was with someone. But he stood at the bar, sipping his beer without speaking to anyone. Rylan noticed he drew gazes from many people in the club, both men and women alike.

Before he could act, disappointment flooded Rylan when a woman pressed herself against the man's side and stroked his chest.

A solid, well-muscled chest.

Rylan swallowed down the flare of emotions rushing through him and dropped his eyes from the scene. He took a few minutes to lose himself to the thump of the beat, but before long he believed he'd forgotten about the man at the bar.

Each time he lost his battle of wills, his eyes moved toward the bar, but the man faced away from him. Rylan's mouth watered at the width of his shoulders, the tapered curve of his waist, and the strong legs with thighs he believed were thicker than both of his put together.

Most men took in his delicate looks and his somewhat feminine body with no interest and while part of him believed this man would do the same, he still craved to find out what his reaction would be.

Turning away, Rylan cursed himself as he felt his cheeks heat with embarrassment. He hated when others gawked at him as he danced and guilt swamped him when he caught himself doing the same thing to the man at the bar.

But as the hour passed, he found his gaze on the gorgeous man more often than not.

He talked himself into taking a break and as he walked to the bar, a spot opened next to the man. He thanked the fates for the chance to talk to him. Even if the man ignored him, Rylan could see him up close for a few moments.

He moved closer to the open spot when a sudden wave of nervousness swamped him. Rylan didn't have a type, but something about this man called to him. The man's sandy blond hair was longer than it looked at a distance and the color matched the scruff on his face. It seemed he didn't bother to shave before he came out instead of the facial hair being a permanent choice.

"Is this seat taken?"

The man didn't answer and Rylan could see he had a look of concentration on his face. Words spewed from his mouth over the next minute, his nerves making him talk, but the words cut off when the man turned and gasped as he met Rylan's eyes.

Rylan had to admit he'd never seen such bright hazel eyes on anyone before and he couldn't help but smile when the man's eyes never strayed from staring into his own. Almost like Rylan mesmerized him, but he scoffed at the notion.

"I thought you left. What's your name?"

His eyes widened in surprise. "Rylan Ellis."

Rylan couldn't resist the sudden urge to follow his instincts.

"Would you like to dance, Cameron?"

With reluctance, Cameron, the name fit the man, nodded after Rylan shot down his excuse and moved onto the dance floor with him without a word. Rylan smiled when he loosened up after a few minutes.

Rylan lost track of time as he and Cameron danced. Each time there was an accidental brush of a hand against exposed skin or when they stepped closer together in the crowded club and their chests touched for a fleeting second, it felt like a shocking jolt. Although they were sedate under normal circumstances.

Dancing with Cameron was more sensual than some kisses he shared with other men. Not that he'd had much experience with other men.

Cameron glanced down and watched Rylan's feet and hips, to see how he moved, hesitant to join in at first. But he moved when Rylan's hands gripped him and swayed his hips. He never touched Rylan, so he reached for Cameron's hands and placed them around his waist, and noticed he relaxed once they touched.

Rylan suspected he was careful because of his size. But Cameron didn't intimidate Rylan although he steered clear of men as big as Cameron. Despite his care with Rylan, he could spot desire flashing from time to time in Cameron's eyes. And other than fleeting touches when his hands squeezed around his waist, Cameron was the perfect gentleman.

He was both flattered and disappointed.

It had been past midnight when he invited Cameron to dance. Being in Cameron's arms and feeling the flush of a true attraction for the first time in his life, Rylan didn't want the night to come to an end. But as he opened his mouth to ask Cameron to get a drink with him, he spotted Tristan and panicked.



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Rylan hadn't realized he tensed until Cameron pulled him close into an embrace. Cameron made him feel safe, which was foreign to him. He even walked them out with Cameron's huge body blocking Rylan from the other patrons of the club.

Part of him expected Tristan to rip him out of Cameron's arms as they near the front entrance, but when he felt the cool night air on his face instead, he breathed a sigh of relief. He knew there would be a confrontation, but it wouldn't be tonight.

Rylan glanced up to meet his gaze, and Cameron nodded the direction they were going. When they started down the street, Rylan smiled when Cameron took a step away, giving him space. Instead of letting him put distance between them, he held out his hand and waited.

He had a sense Cameron didn't touch others much, so when he took Rylan's hand in his, he had to swallow his gasp at the touch. Cameron tugged him closer and Rylan shivered. It wasn't because of the weather or the power that radiated off him in waves, but an awareness of the man next to him.

"Are you cold?"

Before Rylan answered, Cameron untied the hoodie from his waist and stopped Rylan in the middle of the sidewalk.

"Lift your arms up."

Rylan laughed and did as Cameron asked, raising his arms which made him feel like a kid again. Cameron slid the material down his arms and over his head. But instead

of looking up and thanking him for his hoodie, he closed his eyes and inhaled his scent. Citrus and something purely Cameron.

He glanced down and laughed when he noticed the hem of the thick material reached his knees. It swallowed him, but warmth spread through his chest at Cameron's considerate actions.

"Thank you. It's very nice of you."

Cameron's cheeks bloomed pink, and he nodded at Rylan as an embarrassed gesture. But he tilted his head and stared at Rylan for a moment before he turned, and they started toward the diner again. That's when the neon glow caught his gaze. Cameron reached for his hand, taking Rylan by surprise. But the gesture was welcome.

Cameron opened the door for Rylan. Once they walked in, the hostess seated them in the back, although the diner had a smattering of tables that were full. Rylan slid in a booth and bit his lip in disappointment when Cameron slid in the bench opposite.

They perused the menu, but curiosity more than hunger drove Rylan to glance at Cameron, wondering when he would ask questions. Instead of waiting, Ryan leaned forward and when he captured Cameron's attention, he spoke.

"Aren't you going to ask me what happened back at the club?"

Cameron looked up with a smile and Rylan's breath stuttered in his chest.

"I figured it wasn't my business to ask. If you wanted to tell me, I'd listen, but I have one question and it's not intrusive. I hope."

"Sure, go ahead."

“Are you in physical danger?” Cameron’s expression became fierce and Rylan realized he wanted to protect him.

Instead of answering right away, Rylan thought about it. Although he wanted to deny it to himself, he knew what Tristan’s arrival home meant for him. Before his thoughts could lead down the dark path he’d repressed for years, he shook off the memories of the last time he and Tristan were in a room together.

He must have not kept his face passive because Cameron reached out and squeezed his hand, bringing him back to the man who sat across from him. The one he wanted to get to know.

“I don’t want to find out.”

Rylan’s words drew a growl from Cameron and when he looked up, he realized the fierce look on his face was in defense of him, not directed toward him.

“I’ll call my friend, Issa, and I’ll crash with her and Suzy, her roommate.”

“Why do you have to leave your house?”

Rylan swallowed hard before he explained. “Declan and Tristan have been best friends since high school and if he’s back from college, he’ll be hanging around more and that’s dangerous for me.”

Cameron sat still and not a sound came from him as he stared at Rylan across the table. The concern shining from Cameron’s hazel eyes had Rylan relaxing against the booth. Instead of asking questions, Cameron continued to search Rylan’s face as the minutes of silence stretched between them. It wasn’t uncomfortable, so Rylan looked his fill.

Movement from his right drew his gaze from Cameron. He noticed the waitress had spotted them, but her eyes traced over Cameron's body as she sauntered over to him and slid onto the edge of the booth, giving him a flirty smile. Cameron's gaze didn't waver from Rylan.

"Do you know what you'd like?" Cameron raised an eyebrow at Rylan.

Without a thought, he answered. "Whatever you're getting."

Without missing a beat, Cameron spoke. "We'll have two cheeseburgers, fries, iced tea, and two vanilla malts, please." He slid the menus back into the holder against the wall before he reached over and laced Rylan's fingers with his own.

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“Thank you, Jill.” Rylan nodded at the waitress. A disappointed look flashed on her face as she rose and headed toward the kitchen.

“How did Tristan and Declan make your life hell?”

“For most of my childhood, I remember happy times with my mother. That was until my mom died when I was thirteen.”

Cameron squeezed his hand, encouraging him to continue.

Rylan swallowed. “I’ve always known I was gay, but I never spoke about it to anyone. My mom always knew. In the last few months of her life, she couldn’t sleep because of the pain and to distract her, we would talk. I confessed to her and without missing a beat, she said she’d always known. She said I would always be her baby and I should be free to be whoever I wanted to be.”

His mother was a bright beacon in his life. His father, James, was a closed-minded asshole but for a reason he would never understand, his mom loved him.

“I was never close to my father or brother, but after she died, they kept their distance and pretended I didn’t exist. It worked out for both of us.”

The conversation paused when Jill arrived with the food and although Cameron thanked Jill, his eyes never left Rylan. When she left them alone, this time Jill not bothering to flirt with Cameron, Rylan snagged a fry off his plate and chewed. The greasy, salty flavor exploded on his tongue and he almost moaned aloud. He’d forgotten to eat both lunch and dinner because of the two dresses he completed for

next Friday's appointment, and he was starving.

Rylan sipped his water before he continued. "When I was fourteen, Tristan moved to town and Declan became close to him. By that time, I learned to keep my head down and worked hard for a high grade point average. That way, I could apply for scholarships for colleges out-of-state, and the inheritance would go to my college tuition and I wouldn't have to worry about my future."

He laughed. He paused his story so they could eat. Rylan devoured his burger and fries, almost embarrassed he was so hungry, but Cameron gave him a smile whenever he took a bite, so Rylan continued eating.

As he wiped his mouth with a napkin, Cameron reached for his malt and slid it in front of him. Rylan almost complained that he was full, but vanilla wafted toward him and Rylan tried it. The creamy, sweet flavor coated his tongue and this time, he didn't hold back his moan as he closed his eyes and savored the ice cream.

"Good?"

"Yes. I don't remember the last time I had a malt." Rylan glanced up and noticed a slight blush on Cameron's cheeks and Rylan giggled, laughing harder when Cameron joined him.

When they finished their dinner, both of them leaned back against the booth. Rylan couldn't keep his eyes away from tracing Cameron's face and he noticed Cameron smile came readily as the night continued.

"So, you grew up here and didn't move away."

"It didn't matter how hard I worked. The scholarships I received didn't pay for even half of my tuition and the money I thought I would get from my inheritance is long

gone.” Rylan rubbed his chest as he thought about the loss of his mother and the overwhelming disappointment he felt when his plans disintegrated.

“What happened?”

“My father has a gambling problem and found a way through his best friend, who was also my mom’s lawyer, to steal both my and Declan’s inheritance and it disappeared soon after he received it. When I realized there was no money, I applied for every scholarship I could find and worked part-time to survive. For the longest time, I thought the scholarships I applied for didn’t pan out, but I found out that my father opened my mail and destroyed any scholarship I received.” Rylan shook his head.

“You would think they would want me to leave, but my father said he knew that would make me happy and anything he could do to ruin that, he would take. So I stayed home and applied at CSU.”

Cameron squeezed his hand. “You’re smiling.”

“I applied and received several scholarships after my freshman year. I opened a separate mailbox, and I worked, saving money while not paying rent.”

“Where do you work?”

“I’m a stylist and make-up artist for some of the richest women in Denver. I’m working on my business and fashion degree.”

“Where are most of your classes?” Cameron asked.

“Aylesworth Hall, but I have a couple in Rockwell. What’s your major?”

“Computer science.”

“I haven’t seen you before.” Rylan mumbled when he realized how close their classes were to each other.

“Yeah, I would have remembered you.” The blush on Cameron’s face made Rylan beam at him.

Rylan felt carefree and for the first time since his mom had passed, he found that he could be himself with Cameron. He demanded nothing nor did he look at him with disgust because he laughed too loudly or had chosen fashion as his major.

Although he was gay, he’d never been intimate with another man. He held himself back from others, not wanting to get involved and have the news reach his family, because almost everyone knew Declan in their small college town.



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And with thoughts of his current situation, he sighed.

“What’s wrong?” Cameron’s brows drew down in concern.

“I have a year of college left after this one, and although Issa will let me crash with her, the moment I step foot into my house to gather my things, there will be a fight.”

“Well, I could go with you when you get your things. And... I have an extra room in my house.”

Rylan blinked at Cameron, knowing that somehow he misunderstood what Cameron had said. But when a light blush appeared on Cameron’s cheeks, Rylan knew he’d heard Cameron’s statement correctly.

“You can’t... you don’t know me...”

“No, right, I don’t know you.” Cameron said.

Rylan’s heart plummeted in his chest and he held back the whimper at Cameron’s words.

“But I would like to. Very much.”

Rylan spluttered, but no words escaped.

“You need a place to stay and I have an extra bedroom that isn’t being used. So if you think about it, it’s a win-win.”

Rylan didn't think in all his years, he'd ever met someone as generous and forthcoming as Cameron. He was still trying to form a reply when he noticed that Cameron had already paid for their dinner and was signing the check.

"Next time it's my treat." Rylan said.

They both moved from their seats to stand, but before Rylan could turn toward the exit, Cameron placed his hand on Rylan's forearm, halting his movements.

"Why don't you spend the night at my place tonight? I'll give you a tour and if you feel comfortable with me and would like to live there, then we can get your stuff tomorrow and you can move in? I would never make you uncomfortable or push you for anything, I promise you that." Cameron looked at him with such hope that Rylan nodded before he could think everything through.

"Great! Did you drive?" Cameron placed a hand on the small of Rylan's back and led him outside.

"No, I usually walk."

Cameron nodded and led him toward an expensive-looking car. Rylan had no clue about cars, only caring that his old Subaru took him from one place to another safely. But now, looking at Cameron's car and realizing that he owned his own place, he couldn't help the next words that flew out of his mouth.

"May I ask you a rude question?"

Cameron laughed and nodded. "Go ahead."

"How can you, as a junior in college, afford his own house and drive a car like this?"

Cameron wrapped one arm around his waist, pulling him close, before he opened the passenger door. He stopped Rylan before he could slide inside. Rylan turned to face Cameron and when their bodies pressed together, Rylan bit his bottom lip to prevent the moan from escaping his throat. Instead, he glanced up and met Cameron's gaze as he spoke.

"My parents were born into money, and they are rich. My mom's family own several media outlets and my dad runs an investment firm with offices in both New York and North Carolina. They fell in love during their first year at Cornell University. My mom works as a speech therapist in New York and dad is an investment banker. They both inherited everything from their parents because they were both only children. Like me."

Rylan notice the softness in Cameron's voice as he spoke about his parents. "Are you close to them?"

Cameron laughed. "Yeah. Trust me, they'll pop in to meet you when I tell them about you. We talk often and I know they'll love you and spoil you rotten. Let them because they won't have it any other way."

Rylan envied hearing about the closeness of Cameron and his family. It made Rylan miss his mom acutely. But instead of dwelling on the past, he shook himself out of his thoughts.

"Another rude question, if I could?"

Cameron laughed and Rylan was becoming addicted to that sound. "I'm an open book, Ry. You don't have to worry you'll insult me. Ask me whatever you want."

"I've never had a nickname before." Rylan said.

“Doesn’t it bother you?”

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“No. I like it. To be honest, I’ve never connected with anyone as fast as I have with you. Other than Issa and Suzy, I find it hard to make connections.”

He nodded. “I understand, I’m the same way. We should head home.”

Rylan slid inside the car and after Cameron shut the door, he settled against the luscious leather seats before he glanced up and watched Cameron walk around the car. Then another thought popped into his head and he had to know. So when Cameron settled into his seat with his seat belt fastened, he asked.

“You don’t mind I’m gay?”

“It’s part of who you are and I’m starting to realize that I like you, all of you.”

Rylan smiled at him. “How do you identify?”

Cameron shrugged “I’ve dated women in the past, but I’ve never gotten close enough to sustain a relationship and I’ve never gotten physical with anyone. But the connection I’ve lacked with everyone else, I feel with you. I may be gay or bi, but at this moment, I don’t know.”

“How old are you?”

“Twenty-one.”

“Me too.”

Cameron reached for his hand. “I would never hurt you or pressure you into something you’re not ready for. But I have the room in my house and I didn’t like the anger on Tristan’s face as he searched for you in the club. I would feel better if you stay with me.”

Rylan scoffed. “That’s a laugh.”

“What part?”

“I am attracted to you. Who wouldn’t be? But you’re right, Tristan has gotten physical before and wouldn’t hesitate once he saw me. But I feel as though I’m taking advantage of you.”

“Do you cook?”

Rylan blinked at the change in conversation. “No, I never learned how and I forget to grab something when I’m busy.”

“Well, I know how and I love to cook. So, we’ll go shopping together. And I might let you help pay.” Cameron thought about that for a moment. “Okay, I won’t, but I don’t mind cooking and I’m hoping it will entice you to stay? I want to get to know you, Rylan. No ulterior motives, I promise.”

Unable to stop his heart from soaring at the thought of getting to know Cameron, he had to ask. “Are you sure?”

Cameron nodded. “As long as you’re comfortable with me. I know my size can intimidate—”

“I am... comfortable with you, I mean. You don’t scare me, Cameron. I feel safe with you.”

Cameron started the car and drove away from the diner. He reached for Rylan's hand and squeezed. "Good, I'm glad."

Rylan felt himself relax for the first time in a long time.

### CHAPTER THREE

#### CAMERON

Cameron sighed, again, as he stared at the ceiling, watching the lights from passing cars that came by every few minutes, wondering why he felt so on edge at almost four in the morning.

When they arrived at his place, Cameron was still riding the high that Rylan trusted him enough to come home with him, and he'd taken the opportunity and shown him the house. He had neglected to mention how considerable it was because he hadn't wanted to scare Rylan away when he invited him to stay. But Rylan knew, based on the car he drove, Cameron had more than an extra room.

Cameron unlocked the door and entered the six-digit alarm code, before he stepped aside and let Rylan enter. He smiled at Ry's reaction before shutting the door behind him, locking it, and rearming the alarm. He threw his keys on the side table overflowing with unopened mail and other stuff he would have to sort through and throw away sometime. Cameron took a glance around and noted half-empty glasses and coffee cups scattered around the living room and flinched. He should have cleaned up.

Rylan pulled Cameron's attention away from his lack of cleaning skills when he huffed out a breath. "Are you kidding me?"

Cameron blinked at Rylan, confused. "You don't... like it?"



Rylan reached over and slapped his arm as he shot him an incredulous look. Cameron captured his hand and linked their fingers together, sensing everything occurring tonight overwhelmed Ry.

“Well, considering how messy it is right now...” Cameron smiled at Rylan before he continued. “One bedroom is for my parents when they visit, and sometimes my friends crash here, so there are four other rooms to choose from. Three bedrooms upstairs and one down here. There’s also a sunroom in the back you can use for your projects or you can use an extra bedroom.”

Rylan chuckled. “You know you’re insane for inviting a complete stranger into your house.”

Without responding, Cameron laughed and pulled Ry upstairs. Cameron led him to his room and let go of his hand as he stepped up to his dresser. He grabbed a tee and sweats that Rylan could sleep in, and when he turned around, he found Rylan searching through his other dresser. The sight made Cameron smile, and he hoped, for the first time in his life, that he wouldn’t scare Rylan away.

“I don’t have kinky sex toys or a porn stash hidden anywhere, if that’s what you’re looking for.”

Cameron laughed at his own joke but Rylan’s brow drew down as he pulled out a wadded bunch of material that Cameron hadn’t bothered with after he’d done laundry. He noticed the look of horror on Rylan’s face as he took in the wrinkled clothing and underwear dumped across the bottom of his bed.

“Don’t you fold anything after you wash them?”

Cameron shrugged. “No. I hate to do laundry, but as long as it’s clean, I’ll wear it.”

Instead of chastising him, Rylan snatched the first pair of boxer briefs off the bed and folded them in a neat little square. He watched in awe as Rylan continued with his underwear before he moved on to the tees, folding them in a way he'd only seen in stores before. But it was Rylan's long, skinny fingers that drew his eyes more often than not, and he wondered how they would feel sliding down his chest, losing himself to his first fantasy.

Clearing his throat, Cameron noticed that Rylan had gone through his entire two dressers in ten minutes and had folded everything before putting them back in the drawers. And all his clothes were now color coded.

"Holy shit."

Rylan's face lit up and when he glanced at Cameron's face, he laughed. The sound, light and without restraint, had him smiling at the man.

"I'm a clean freak and I love everything aligned and color coded. But don't worry, I'm mostly fussy about clothes."

Cameron realized, as a blush stained his cheeks, someone had criticized Rylan for his organization skills, as though it was a bad thing.

"No. I'm embarrassed because I couldn't fold my underwear to save my life. What you did there was amazing and when I open it tomorrow, I'll mess everything up again."

Rylan beamed at him as he leaned forward and rose on his toes. He placed a kiss on Cameron's cheek that radiated sensation throughout the rest of his body. He wanted to hold his hand against his skin when Rylan pulled back, to capture the sensation for a while longer.

“I can always refold them.” Rylan yawned into his hand.

“Where would you like to sleep tonight? You can always pick another room tomorrow.”

Rylan blushed, but this time, Cameron didn’t understand if he said something wrong, but his thoughts fled when Rylan yawned again and spoke. “The closest one to you is fine.”

Cameron nodded and reached for the clothes he’d given to Rylan and pressed his hand to the small of Rylan’s back and ushered him next door.

“Each room has an en suite bathroom and there are new toothbrushes in the medicine cabinet.”

With reluctance, Cameron handed over the clothes. “I’ll be next door if you need anything.”

Rylan nodded and he could see his body sag from exhaustion. And with great reluctance, Cameron leaned toward Rylan and kissed him on his forehead. It had taken every ounce of his willpower to walk toward the door and even then he delayed at the threshold by turning back.

“Sleep well, Ry.”

Rylan graced him with another beautiful smile. “Goodnight, Cameron and thank you.”

And two hours later, Cameron lay wide awake, his thoughts on the man next door. So close, yet so far away.

Cameron had never experienced attraction to a man before. But if he were honest with himself, he hadn't been attracted to a woman either. He'd never had sex. And never thought he was missing anything, because he had never connected with anyone, much less someone he wanted to become intimate with. He'd tried dating, because it was the thing to do when your friends went out every weekend trying to score, but other than a casual kiss on the cheek, he couldn't bring himself to proceed further.

And sometimes, Cameron thought it was pathetic not to have kissed anyone properly in his life, but the alternative left him sick to his stomach. The thought of sleeping with anyone he didn't love was, well, repulsive.

Although he understood he was odd, something changed tonight. His connection with Rylan stirred something deep inside him. Cameron's thoughts were less than pure when he thought about the man who had enthralled him from the first moment he'd spotted him, and it had surprised him. He'd touched Rylan more tonight than he had anyone in his life, and he found it as natural as breathing.

Protective instincts flared, but it was more than his need to help Rylan, he wanted to know everything about the man. Only in the dead of night could he acknowledge to

himself his undeniable attraction to Rylan. Attraction he'd never experienced before. But more than that, he hoped to persuade Rylan to live with him and get to know him better. Cameron admitted to himself he would do whatever he had to to keep Rylan safe.

A sound caught his attention and pulled Cameron from his thoughts. He lifted his head off the pillow as he couldn't quite decipher what he'd heard. For the next minute, he tried to pick up the sound again. When he heard silence, he dropped his head back down and lost himself in his thoughts of the man next door for a few seconds before he heard Rylan scream.

He was out of bed in a second and almost ripped the bedroom door off the hinges as his adrenaline spiked.

Did the man follow them home? Was he attacking Rylan?

He rushed to Rylan's door and threw it open. Light from the hallway flooded into the darkness and allowed Cameron to see inside.

Cameron's heart stopped in his chest as he watched Rylan thrash around on the bed. The sheets tangled around his legs, trapping him, while his mouth opened in a silent scream.

"No! Stop, no. You're hurting me."

Rylan's words jolted Cameron into action and he approached the bed, moving his right hand to cup Rylan's face. He was unsure how to wake someone in the middle of a nightmare, but he had to try.

"Ry?" His voice quivered as he spoke and as he swallowed, the lump in his throat almost choked him.

Rylan's eyes popped open. His gaze darted from left to right, taking in the room yet unable to focus.

Cameron understood he should keep talking. "Ry. It's okay. It's me, Cameron. You're safe with me, I won't let anyone hurt you. I promise."

Before Cameron could blink, Rylan sat up and scrambled to stand on the bed before he launched himself into Cameron's arms, wrapping his arms around his shoulders as he buried his face against Cameron's neck.

He caught Rylan and held him to his chest, wrapping his arms around the skinnier body, hoping his smell and hold were a comfort. When Cameron felt Rylan shaking in his arms, he encouraged Rylan to wrap his legs around his waist as he rubbed one hand up and down his back.

Taking Rylan's full weight made something in Cameron's chest lighten at the trust this man put in him. "You're okay, Ry. You're safe with me, I promise." He kept repeating the words over and over again.

It took a long time before Rylan released the tension in his body, breathing calming down enough he could relax in Cameron's hold. And he, not wanting to ask Rylan if he was okay when he wasn't, blurted out the first ridiculous thing that came to mind.

"You're right. You need to eat more, you hardly weigh anything."

Cameron held Rylan tighter and smiled against his soft hair when Rylan chuckled at his joke. He knew then Rylan would be okay.

Without thinking his actions through, he turned and walked both of them out the door and into his bedroom. Cameron shut the bedroom door and locked it behind him before he turned toward the bed.

He maneuvered Rylan under the covers and slid in next to him, not wanting to leave him alone for too long, in case the nightmare came back. Cameron reached for Rylan at the same time Rylan scooted closer to him on the bed. He lowered his arm and encouraged Rylan to lay his head on his chest and smiled when Rylan draped his legs over Cameron's getting even closer.

Closing his eyes, he savored Ry's warmth and his scent, only admitting to himself he missed being apart from Rylan in the last few hours. He squeezed Rylan once. He hoped that Rylan trusted him enough to tell him what was on his mind, and Cameron would then do his best to show Rylan he would keep him safe.

"Do you want to talk about it?"

Rylan was silent for several long minutes and Cameron thought Rylan might not answer him. Cameron knew if he didn't want to talk about it, he would never push Rylan for an answer.

But a moment later, his arm tightened around Cameron's waist and he cleared his throat, cutting into Cameron's constant swirling thoughts about how he could help Rylan.

"I didn't tell you my entire history with Tristan."

*Source Creation Date: July 9, 2025, 7:58 am*

A feeling of dread washed over him and he knew whatever Rylan was about to tell him would either break his heart or make him murderous. Whatever it was, Cameron already hated the other man because of the way Rylan's voice quivered with fear even thinking about what happened to him. Cameron held him tighter, hoping to take the burden from Rylan's shoulders.

"He was the only one that figured out I was gay. Or at least, the only one who didn't ignore it."

He rubbed Rylan's back, encouraging him to continue his story without interrupting.

"A few months before the end of my senior year in high school, Tristan came home during spring break to visit Declan. I stayed away from both of them, knowing Tristan would start something if he spotted me."

Rylan squeezed his waist and Cameron felt the dread again.

"Late one night, I woke because I smelled alcohol. When I opened my eyes, it was Tristan hovering above me, his face so close to mine. As he realized I was awake, he dropped his weight down on top of me and pinned me to the bed. I struggled, told him to get off, screamed it even, but he didn't move. His voice was so slurred when he yelled at me I couldn't understand what he was saying."

Cameron couldn't help it, he tugged Rylan close, making sure that Rylan's body was on top of his own.

"I struggled until my muscles burned and then I beat at his chest to get him off. I even



tried to knee him, but he wouldn't budge. Then he tried to kiss me."

"What?"

Rylan's tears splashed onto his chest and he took a deep, shaky breath.

Cameron kissed his forehead. "You're safe with me, Ry. No one will ever hurt you again, I promise."

"The more I fought, the angrier he became until he snapped. He punched me twice in the face, stunning me. My arms dropped to my sides, and he took advantage and ripped the blankets off me. I had my hands up, protecting my face from his strikes, struggling against his touch. He gripped my sleep pants and yanked them down my legs before pinning my arms above my head. Before I could scream or he touched me, Declan called for him and it snapped him out of his actions."

Cameron closed his eyes as pure rage made his body shake, even more so when he pulled Rylan closer and felt the hot tears drop on his neck.

Rylan's voice almost broke Cameron. "I pulled my clothes back on as he stumbled toward the staircase, calling me a cock tease, that no one would ever want my ugly, bony ass and he was doing me a favor by even touching me. After that, I stayed away as much as I could and bought and installed a stronger lock on both doors. I haven't been in the same room with him since that night."

The growl that escaped Cameron's throat took him by surprise, but he continued aloud with his thoughts. "And you won't ever have to be. Ever again. Tomorrow, we will get your stuff. I'll text my friends to help and you won't have to deal with Tristan ever again. Do you have nightmares about that night often?"

Rylan shook his head. "No, I guess seeing him tonight brought it all back. I'm sorry

for waking you up.”

Cameron laughed, and it sounded hollow, even to his own ears. “You didn’t. I’ve been awake, staring at the ceiling.”

Rylan leaned back and looked at him. Seeing the tears on his face almost broke Cameron, but he wiped them away with gentle strokes.

“Why?”

“It’ll sound strange...”

Despite everything being brought to the forefront, Rylan leaned forward and kissed him on his chin.

“Everything feels natural between us, so no, I don’t think whatever you’re about to say will be strange at all.” Rylan placed another quick kiss to the corner of his mouth.

Cameron swallowed and blurted out the truth. “I didn’t like you were sleeping in the other room and it felt as though a piece of myself was missing.”

Rylan’s low laugh made Cameron smile, but it was the next words out of his mouth that made him realize everything between him and Rylan felt right.

“I wanted to ask you if I could sleep with you, but I didn’t want to intrude. To be honest, I have no experience with relationships and I have two close friends, but mostly, I keep to myself. But with you... I feel I am myself and I can’t help it, I like you already Cameron. And more than just friends.”

He squeezed Rylan closer to him. “I know what you mean. It’s nothing to be ashamed of, because you’re the first person I crave to touch, but more than that, I want to be

with you. For the longest time, I thought I was different because I couldn't connect to anyone and in one night, you changed everything for me.”

Rylan pressed another kiss against the corner of his mouth and lay back down with his head on Cameron's chest.

Knowing his question might cause Rylan pain, he rubbed Rylan's back through his tee and asked. “Why do you think Tristan came to the club looking for you?”

“I don't know, but it was the first time I was in the same room as him since I was seventeen.”

Rylan yawned and Cameron was getting used to the pressure in his chest whenever he looked at the man in his arms. He had known Rylan for only hours, but some part of him understood this man would be essential to his happiness.

He allowed himself to relax and cuddled Rylan closer to his side.

“Night, Rylan.”

“Goodnight, Cameron. Thank you, for everything.”

Cameron hid his smile against Rylan's soft hair and when Rylan's breathing evened out, only then did Cameron allow himself to close his own eyes and drift off to sleep.

### CHAPTER FOUR

#### RYLAN

Rylan slowly woke. He felt lightheaded, almost dizzy, as if he had gotten drunk the night before. But he knew that he hadn't had a drink, much less drank until intoxicated, in years. When his thoughts solidified, he realized there was a warm, solid weight wrapped around his waist and bare skin pressed against his back.

Images from his nightmare the night before flooded back, and he stiffened.

Had Tristan found me?

His breathing sped up, and he had to open his mouth or risk the real possibility of hyperventilating. Before he could panic, a sleep-roughened voice reached him.

"Ry, it's Cameron. I've got you and you're safe, I promise. I won't let anyone ever hurt you again."

Relief, hot and swift, rushed over him. He turned before he relaxed into Cameron's hold. Trust didn't come easily to him, but Cameron's actions as he held himself back, unsure of his movements because he worried about hurting Rylan, developed trust between them. Cameron recognized his size and the intimidation factor that came with it. And Rylan couldn't picture him hurting anyone.

"Thank you."

Rylan smiled as Cameron kissed his forehead and closed his eyes. After a few minutes, Cameron's breathing became deep and even, but his hold never wavered.

He wondered why it was so easy with Cameron when it was so hard to connect with anyone else.

He'd always closed himself off to everyone. Even Issa didn't know everything about him, always keeping his insecurities and his problems to himself, worried about burdening others. He thought no one would like who he was if they knew his secrets.

Rylan diverged from every trait his father believed a 'real man' should possess. He loved clothing and shoes, he loved color and originality. He craved creativity and embraced that side of himself as far back as he could remember. Rylan showed enthusiasm for everything he did, from creating a new outfit to learning something new, and when others recognized that he was gay, they wouldn't say anything, but Rylan could tell they were uncomfortable with him and who he was.

After their conversations the night before, Rylan relaxed enough to be himself with Cameron, able to express his own opinions without being judged and for the first time in his life, he didn't have to hide his obvious attraction to the gorgeous man who fascinated him.

Rylan was in awe of Cameron. His laid-back attitude was contagious, but it was the fierce protectiveness he wasn't afraid of showing that Rylan found sexy.

He gazed at his beautiful face, relaxed in sleep. It should have been awkward sleeping in a practical stranger's arms, but all of his instincts were telling him he trusted Cameron.

As he thought back to the night before, he realized Cameron shied away from people at the crowded bar where he stood most of the night. Once or twice, Rylan

remembered Cameron tensing or flinching whenever someone brushed up against him or touched him with intent. It was the fierce look he gave the beautiful woman that had Rylan falter after he planned to approach the bar and speak to him.

“What are you thinking about?”

“How I almost didn’t say hi to you last night. I sensed that you shied away from, well, touch of any kind. You looked uncomfortable when the woman pressed her hand to your chest.”

“Well, she... let’s not talk about that. I wasn’t interested in her, and yeah, most of the time, I don’t like to touch strangers, or have them touch me. Why were you thinking about that?”

Rylan sighed and although embarrassing for him, he didn’t want to hold anything back from Cameron. “If a beautiful woman can’t attract your attention, I’m wondering if my touch bothers you and how you... if you even are—”

“Attracted to you. Trust me, Ry, I am. I’m relaxed around you and I like it when you touch me. I can’t describe how brilliant I feel when you touch me. It does and I won’t question what feels right.”

Rylan couldn’t help the giggle that escaped. “I’m a little too... tactile, so if it bothers you, please let me know.”

Cameron pressed a kiss to his forehead and smiled at him when he pulled back. “I don’t think you have to worry about that.”

The moment Cameron stood and walked toward the dresser, the words died in Rylan’s throat and all thoughts ceased. He had known the man was beautiful the night before, but it was nothing compared to the light of day.

His gaze traveled over the wide expanse of his shoulders, over the exposed olive skin on his muscular back and the defined muscles of his arms. He bit his lip as he watched Cameron's movements, mesmerized by the easy way he walked, with confidence and determination.

Rylan couldn't pull his eyes away from him, even when Cameron dug out clothes and turned back toward Rylan perched on the bed with what must be a goofy-looking expression on his face as he took in the gorgeous man in front of him. When Cameron caught his gaze and smiled at him, his heart kicked hard in his chest.

Again, Rylan's eyes watched Cameron's form as he walked back over to the bed. Cameron held out clothing and Rylan noted they were another pair of sweats with a hoodie. He glanced down at himself and realized he must've ditched the sweats and tee he'd worn to bed sometime the night before without realizing.

Rylan slid out of bed and reached for the clothing when Cameron pulled them back out of reach. Cameron's gaze roamed down his chest, all the way to his toes, and back up again. Rylan's skin felt as though Cameron caressed him with his hands instead of with his gaze.

"My memory from last night doesn't do you justice. Beautiful doesn't even encompass how I would describe you. Gorgeous is an understatement, too."

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Rylan cheeks heated. “Th... thank you.”

Cameron’s gaze roamed over him for a few more moments before he jerked his gaze up to meet Rylan’s. He noted there is a beautiful blush on his cheeks and Rylan understood how he could fall for the man in front of him.

His heart kicked in his chest when Cameron leaned down and kissed Rylan on the forehead before handing him the clothes.

Cameron turned and rummaged through the drawer for his own clothes, and when he pulled them on, Rylan had to bite his bottom lip to prevent the disappointed sigh from escaping his throat.

Once dressed, Cameron reached for his hand and laced their fingers together as they wandered downstairs. Taking a glance at the clock, Rylan’s cheeks heated when his stomach gave a loud grumble.

“Breakfast, or lunch, will be ready soon. I haven’t slept in since high school. It felt nice.” Cameron smiled at Rylan. “Coffee?”

“Yes, please. Is there anything I can do to help?” Rylan watched Cameron as he moved around the kitchen. He set the coffeemaker to start before he skipped to the refrigerator to pull out several things, placing them on the counter near the stove.

“Nope. I’ve got it handled.”

Rylan opened his mouth to ask him if he was sure, but his words faltered when



Cameron spanned his hips with his hands and lifted him onto the island near the stove. The heat from his hands lasted a few more seconds after Cameron turned back toward the coffeemaker and Rylan shivered at the ease in which Cameron took his weight.

Cameron took another container out of the fridge and popped it open. He handed it to Rylan, who placed the cold Tupperware on his lap before he glanced down to find grapes. He almost squeaked aloud when Cameron reached for a handful and popped a few in his mouth.

“How do you take your coffee?”

“Black.”

Cameron smiled at him. “A man after my heart.”

Before Rylan could come up with a response to Cameron’s casual statement, one that made his body flush in excitement, Cameron poured a cup for both of them and handed Rylan one. No clue what he planned to say anyway, Rylan took a sip of coffee and moaned as he received his first rush of caffeine for the day.

Cameron caught his gaze as Rylan opened his eyes and the heat banked in his hazel eyes almost had Rylan setting the cup down on the counter and throwing himself at the man. Instead, they both blinked and Rylan watched as Cameron went back to cooking, maneuvering around in his kitchen with ease.

He set the oven temperature before he moved to cracking eggs. He added cream into the eggs and whisked the contents before he set the bowl in the refrigerator.

“What are you making?” He sipped his coffee, realizing he lost all train of thought as he watched Cameron.

“Breakfast quiche with a fruit salad.”

Rylan froze with a grape touching his lips. “Isn’t that difficult to make?”

“Nah, it’s easy. You dice a half an onion, mix it with the chopped cooked bacon, add shredded Swiss and parmesan cheese before laying the mixture in a frozen pie shell. You pour the egg mixture on top and then it bakes for about forty-five minutes.”

Rylan scoffed, and it made Cameron laugh. Cameron slid the bacon on a sheet pan in the oven and wandered over to Rylan, who despite feeling a little overwhelmed by his attraction to Cameron, fed him several grapes. Although it showed an intimacy he couldn’t explain, Rylan smiled when Cameron took the grapes from him without question.

“Do you cook like this for breakfast all the time?”

Cameron, who seemed happy, shook his head. “Cooking relaxes me. I cook when Tim, Aaron, and Eric stop by, but when I’m cooking only for myself, it loses its appeal fast. But now you’re living here, I can try new things.”

Popping another grape into his mouth, he chewed before he asked, “How did you meet?”

“I met the three of them the first morning of two-a-day football practice our freshman year. They were already friends from a small town in Colorado where they grew up and rented a house when they moved to Ft. Collins, but they included me from the moment I stepped on the field.”

Rylan scrunched his nose. “What’s a two-a-day?”

Cameron chopped the onions and the bacon he’d pulled from the oven and let cool.

“Two weeks before classes start, the team would meet for conditioning drills at seven in the morning and four in the afternoon, both session lasting two hours each. We would run wind sprints, up-down drills, and bear crawls, anything that would get us into shape before the season started.”

“That sounds... barbaric and tiring.”

Cameron shrugged. “You get used to it but I’m glad I don’t have to worry about it anymore.”

“Are your other friends still on the team?”

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“Yeah, it wasn’t for me. I’d rather concentrate on my degree because I never had plans to play football after college. A friend on the team had a scare when he flipped up in the air and landed on his neck. Because of the swelling from his injury, it paralyzed him for several weeks. He had a concussion that left him confused and he lost his short-term memory for a time. He recovered but after that, I quit.”

Rylan thanked the deities above Cameron quit and watched as he put the quiche in the oven and set the timer before he turned his full attention to Rylan.

Sensing the heat in Cameron’s eyes, although his face remained passive, Rylan put the container of grapes to one side and reached for him when he wandered close enough to touch. Cameron settled in between Rylan’s legs and pressed his hands flat against the counter next to his thighs while Rylan’s hands reached for the man’s hips.

“Are you okay?”

Rylan swallowed at Cameron’s concern and nodded. “Are you sure you still want me to move in?” The look of concern on Cameron’s face made his throat feel tight.

“I want you safe but more than that, I want you in my life. I still want you very much to move in with me.”

“Yes to both. I... I want that.”

Cameron’s gaze dropped to his mouth and paused for a long minute before he met Rylan’s gaze. “Can I kiss you?”

Oh, yes, please.

Unable to force the words past his throat, he nodded instead.

Rylan not knowing what to expect, couldn't prevent the shiver when Cameron cupped his face. He moaned aloud when Cameron's lips grazed over his lower one. Cameron took his time exploring, searching and yet not deepening the kiss as he passed over Rylan's lips with his own.

"Rylan," Cameron breathed.

"Please."

That one word was all it took.

"I've wanted nothing more." Cameron tilted his mouth as he pressed their lips together, causing Rylan's entire world to tilt on its axis.

Rylan gripped Cameron's hips tighter in his hold, pulling him closer, as Cameron slid his tongue over the seam of his lips, asking for permission to enter. Rylan eagerly opened, savoring the taste of peppermint and black coffee as Cameron deepened the kiss and stole Rylan's breath in the same moment.

When they broke off and dragged in deep breaths, Cameron moved his lips behind his ear before he explored Rylan's neck. Rylan tilted his head back, giving him access and drawing sensations from his untried body that left him throbbing.

Rylan never knew his neck and the area behind his ear would turn him into mush. He bit his lip to prevent a moan from escaping his throat, but Cameron bit his earlobe and spoke.

“Let me hear you.”

“You’re driving me crazy.”

“Now you know how I felt the moment I spotted you on the dance floor. For me, that’s saying something.”

Before Rylan could form a thought to reply, Cameron moved his mouth over Rylan’s and he lost himself to the sensations that shivered throughout his body. Cameron’s growl absorbed his moan as he deepened the kiss, pulling him closer to his hard body.

Rylan’s eyes fluttered closed, unable to keep his eyes on the sexy-as-sin sight of Cameron’s flushed face. The kiss turned into an inferno and Rylan could feel his cock swelling in his sweats and he knew if Cameron stepped closer, he would experience Rylan’s excitement first hand.

He opened for Cameron’s exploration and instead of the intense sensations of an aggressive kiss, Cameron’s slowed his movements as his tongue explored him until he was panting and all thoughts disappeared. There were only the sensations Cameron drew from him.

Afraid he would try to find relief against Cameron and scare him off, he slid his hips backward on the counter. But the growl erupting from Cameron’s throat had Rylan shivering. When he placed his hands on Rylan’s lower back and pulled him flush against his own body, Rylan moaned as Cameron’s impressive erection pressed against his stomach.

During this, Cameron’s mouth never left Rylan’s and Rylan knew he would soon lose himself in the desire Cameron drew from him, overwhelming his senses. Needing to be closer, Rylan draped his arms over Cameron’s impressive shoulders as Cameron’s hands slid underneath his tee and caressed the sensitive skin on his lower back.

When breathing became a necessity, Cameron pulled back and both of them drew deep breaths. But when Cameron opened his eyes, Rylan felt Cameron tense against him.

Rylan, away from Cameron's sensuous exploration, heard movement behind him. Instead of turning around and investigating, he burrowed his face against Cameron's neck as Cameron's arms wrapped around him. Rylan's body hadn't calmed down, so he bit his lip to prevent the hiss from escaping.

"Which one of you stole my house key this time?"

Rylan laughed, Cameron's words taking him by surprise and because of how put out he sounded. When his body cooled enough not to embarrass himself, he lifted his head and turned toward the back door to see three huge men standing there, gaping at them.

“Well?” Cameron asked.

Each of the men pointed at the other one, blaming each other and making Rylan laugh at their antics.

Cameron huffed. “Don’t encourage them.”

By this time, Cameron stepped back and out of his arms and without realizing it, Rylan groaned at the loss of his touch. He smiled at Rylan, causing the pressure in his chest to relax, before he glanced at his friends.

“Why are you up so early?”

Instead of answering, all three men walked around the counter and continued to stare at Rylan. His cheeks warmed at their perusal, but the blond smiled at him before he turned to Cameron.

“Because we’re hungry.”

Then the handsome brunette spoke. “It’s a coincidence we showed when you have a guest.”

“Yeah, right,” Cameron mumbled. He plucked him off the counter and pressed Rylan’s back to his chest, keeping a passive arm around Rylan’s waist as they faced his friends.

Rylan caught Cameron’s eye when he glanced back and he raised his brow in



question.

“Fine.” Cameron huffed. “Guys, this is Rylan.”

He tried to move forward to shake their hands, but Cameron’s arm held him in place. The blond stepped up and introduced himself as Tim and Rylan shook his hand. He tried to pull his hand back, but Tim held on.

“Tim, Rylan would like his hand back.”

Tim shot him a sheepish smile and let go before Aaron and Eric, the brunette, introduced themselves. Instead of stepping back after the introductions, they all stood close with expectant looks on their faces and their gazes moved back and forth between him and Cameron.

“If you stay for breakfast, can you help us move Rylan’s stuff in here after?”

All three of them looked curious as if they were holding their questions back. The timer went off and Cameron moved to take the quiche out of the oven and Rylan grabbed three more mugs and plates, setting them on the dining room table. He also grabbed the coffee when Cameron cut up the quiche and stirred the fruit salad and soon, they all settled down for breakfast.

Cameron broke the ice by asking how their off-season workouts were going and before long, voices filled up the kitchen and Rylan gave up on trying to figure out what they were talking about. He smiled when Cameron reached for his hand and a warmth rushed through him when their fingers laced together.

Rylan, heart thumping in his chest, sent out a silent thanks for giving him the courage to talk to Cameron. Cameron would grow to be important to him in ways he had yet to understand. And he didn’t have to know right now. He was getting to know this

amazing man and his friends and for the first time in a long while; he was excited about his future.

### CHAPTER FIVE

#### CAMERON

Cameron hefted one of the last boxes of Rylan's belongings into the back of Aaron's truck. He turned back toward the house Rylan lived in all his life with mixed feelings.

Earlier he'd spotted Rylan's dad, James, when they first arrived mid-afternoon, but with a disgusted look aimed toward his son, he left, slamming the front door behind him.

When all five men made their way down to the basement where Rylan stayed, Cameron was in awe of the hyper-organization on display throughout the small space. The clothing not hanging lay folded in a makeshift dresser created by using milk crates stacked one on top of another. He situated his books and movies in a cheaply made bookcase that sagged in the middle from the weight, but without hesitation Rylan packed the items into the boxes Cameron had purchased before they arrived and discarded the worn out wooden structure.

Rylan had complained about Cameron spending money on him, but it was the least he could do.

Anger and concern flared at the thought of Rylan living with two people who hated him. It was obvious by his father's reaction and it revealed why Rylan stayed away from his family. And Cameron couldn't blame him.

Rylan was unapologetic in who he was and comfortable in his own skin. While

Cameron struggled to connect to anyone other than the tight friendships he formed with the three men helping, Rylan had known he was gay and with the help of his mother, accepted it long before his father, brother, or brother's friend could taint that aspect of his life.

And every time Cameron thought about how his family rejected him, he grew excited to see Rylan's father again and wondered how he would confront the man. Maybe use his size for more than intimidation. But until he spoke to Rylan about his thoughts, he would never hurt Rylan by his actions.

Cameron walked back down the stairs that led to the basement. He surveyed the bare space and growled when Tim moved toward the last dress form left to load. It looked similar to a mannequin in a department store, and since it had curves, Tim had to get close to it.

"If you caress it one more time, Tim, I might throw up on you," Rylan mumbled.

Cameron laughed as Tim huffed, lifting the dress form in his arms and out of the room.

"Is that everything?"

Rylan nodded. "Most of my stuff, clothing and materials, along with a few toiletries and my laptop are in your SUV and we packed everything else in Aaron's truck, which was nice of him to offer."

Unable to stay away from the man, Cameron moved toward Rylan and slid an arm around his waist. Before he could bring him in to steal a kiss, they heard a door slam from upstairs.

"I think Declan is home."

Cameron turned Rylan in his arms and noted the worried look on his face. He worried Tristan was with his brother. Instead of getting into a confrontation and having them hurt Rylan, Cameron knew retreat would be better.

“Are you ready to go home?”

Rylan nodded and reached for his jacket on the stripped bed at the same time they heard two distinct sets of footsteps coming down the stairs.

Cameron covered his smile when Rylan reached for his arm and stepped closer, allowing his larger body to block his smaller frame from view.

“Let’s go. We shouldn’t give him a shot at you.”

“Yes, please.”

Cameron moved Rylan ahead of him and they walked toward the door. They were almost at the back exit when a sharp voice cut through the silence.

“Who the fuck are you?”

Cameron and Rylan turned to the voice. He noticed it was the man from the club the night before with the same look of disgust and hatred on his face, directed at Rylan. Cameron pulled Rylan close to his side as Rylan gripped his arm so hard, he could tell the man was shaking. He directed them toward the door once again, but paused at Tristan’s next words.

“Where are you going, you little faggot?”

Cameron growled aloud and noticed when Tristan’s gaze pulled away from Rylan and moved onto him. Tristan’s eyes widened as he took in Cameron’s full size and

what must have been a fierce look on his face as he glared at the man. His eyes dropped back down to his clenched fists at his side and without thinking, he took one step toward the man, feeling murderous.

When Tristan took a step back at Cameron's advance, the side of his mouth lifted in a smirk when he noted the fear in his eyes. But when Cameron felt Rylan shivering against his back, he knew he needed to get him home and away from this toxic environment.

He noticed Rylan's brother, Declan, hadn't said a thing to defend his brother. Cameron glanced at him to see his reaction to the situation. But his gaze kept moving back and forth from his best friend and his shaken brother with his brows drawn down in confusion.

So, his best friend never told him about his harassment of his brother.

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“From this moment on, Rylan is no longer your concern. Don’t look for him, and if you see him, don’t even speak to him. Because if I hear that you confronted him, I will come back for you.”

Cameron watched as his statement confused his brother, who was watching Rylan with strain obvious on his face. But when he moved his gaze over to Tristan, he watched several emotions play out. He settled on outrage.

“I could take you.”

He couldn’t hold in his laughter at the idiot’s words and felt more than heard his three best friends come up behind him and Rylan.

“You could try, if you want to. My friends won’t even intervene.”

Cameron’s voice covered Rylan’s whimper and for a moment, he’d forgotten his original plan to get Rylan and leave without words or threats. Reaching behind him, he found Rylan’s hand latched onto his shirt. He loosened his hold before he laced their fingers together and squeezed.

Cameron never took his eyes off the two men in front of him. So he noticed when he took Rylan’s hand, Tristan’s face became a dark cloud. The anger directed at him and Rylan could be because they were two men or maybe he somehow thought he had a claim on Rylan and hated to see Cameron with him. Whatever it was, he ignored it.

But Declan had a more thoughtful expression as he stared at their linked hands. He looked at Rylan for a moment, but Cameron drew his eyes when he tensed at the long

perusal. Cameron wondered if his brother would do anything to hurt Rylan, confused by his reaction. But after a minute, Cameron turned both of them toward the exit and shielded Rylan with his body as they walked out.

As they made it out to the fading afternoon light, Cameron glanced down and noticed Rylan was pale. Although outwardly, he looked composed, Cameron frowned when he noticed the slight vibrations from Rylan and pulled him close.

“Are you okay?”

The confrontation, which they could have avoided if Cameron had been quicker, had been detrimental to Rylan. He cursed under his breath at the vacant stare Rylan gave him as Cameron turned Rylan to face him. He wondered what he could do to remove that haunted look from his eyes.

With slow movements, Cameron cupped Rylan’s face in his hands and leaned down. When Rylan met his eyes, Cameron brushed a kiss against his forehead, his cheeks, the corner of his lips, and ending at his eyelids when they closed.

“You’re safe, Rylan. Now you’re out of there, you don’t have to deal with any of them.”

“I know. I mean, using logic, I know. But I can’t help remembering the moment where I felt helpless as he held me down with his weight and I couldn’t get away.”

Cameron cursed under his breath and he tucked Rylan against his chest and waited until he continued.

“But when I’m with you, I’m happy and safe.”

And thoughts about the sleeping arrangements tonight flashed in Cameron’s mind. He



wanted to ask Rylan to sleep with him again. He hoped to chase away his nightmares and if he woke in the middle of the night, Rylan would know Cameron was near. Instead, he moved them to his SUV with his arm wrapped around his waist.

“How about we head home and get you unpacked? Then, I will fire up the grill for a barbecue. Since the guys will invite themselves, why don’t you call Issa and Suzy on the way home and invite them over, too?”

Rylan nodded and burrowed closer to Cameron’s side.

“I would like everyone to get to know each other.”

“Barbecue and women. I’m in.” Tim piped up from behind them.

Aaron punched Tim in the arm. “No alienating Rylan’s friends by your outrageous flirting.”

“What about me?” Eric asked.

“That’ll be the day?” Cameron answered.

When Rylan glanced up at Cameron, confused, he explained.

“Eric’s in love with another chemistry major and although they are friends, he hasn’t told her how he feels.”

Rylan turned to glance at Eric. “Do you want to invite her over?”

Cameron beamed a smile at Rylan, who couldn’t see him because of his concern for Eric. His heart swelled, knowing Rylan felt comfortable living with Cameron, enough to think of their home as his.

“Maybe next time,” Eric said.

Without hesitation, Rylan pulled Eric into a tight hug before he spoke. “I can’t wait to meet her.”

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Eric wrapped his arms around Rylan and winked at Cameron. “Thanks, Ry.”

When Rylan stepped back, he had a huge smile on his face. “No. Thank you guys for helping with all of this. I really appreciate everything you’ve done.”

“We’re family now. And we always look out for our family.” Aaron smiled.

Cameron pulled Rylan closer and loved the happiness that now reached his eyes. He loved his friends. With ease, the guys erased the tension that racked Rylan over the confrontation and made him smile.

Rylan pulled out his phone and dialed.

“Hey, Issa? Tim, Cameron’s friend wants to know if your single?”

There was a beat and Cameron could hear the woman’s voice on the other end of the line.

“Who’s Cameron?”

“Well—”

“If it’s one of your brother’s creeptastic friends, then fuck no.” Issa growled her words.

Rylan covered the mouthpiece before he glanced at Cameron. “She’s protective.”

Cameron laughed and kissed Rylan's forehead. "It's okay, I'm protective of you, too."

"No, Issa. We met last night at the club. He invited his friends and I'm inviting you and Suzy to join us for a barbecue tonight. You can meet him yourself."

She must have sensed something because her voice lowered a little and Cameron heard her ask. "Are you okay?"

"I will be." Rylan promised.

There was a loud sigh through the line. "Text me the address and we'll be there."

"I love you, Issa. See you soon."

When the line disconnected, Rylan handed his phone over to Cameron. "Can you text her?"

Cameron nodded and quickly sent the text. He then opened Rylan's contacts and replaced his old address with his new one and listed himself as the emergency contact, before handing back the phone. He turned to the guys.

"We'll meet you there."

"Yeah, take your time. We still have your key," Tim said with a wave.

Cameron watched with a smile as two huge football players crammed themselves into Aaron's truck as Eric had to do the same in Rylan's compact car, which he offered to drive back to Cameron's. He squeezed Rylan closer and felt him chuckle at the sight. They drove away and Cameron flipped Tim off as the man grinned at him as they passed.

The quiet of the neighborhood brought back the incident in the house. Cameron watched as Rylan glanced back. “I sort of expected a confrontation when I moved out, but I didn’t expect Tristan to be here. Now it’s over, I hope he’ll leave us alone.”

“We’ll do what we need to to keep you safe. But if he’s smart, he’ll stay away.”

“Thank you, Cameron. For everything.”

Cameron kissed his forehead and led him toward the SUV, opening the door. Once Rylan was in and belted, Cameron shut the door and rounded the hood to the driver’s side. Once he strapped himself in and locked the door, he took Rylan’s hand in his.

“For you, Rylan, I don’t think there’s anything I wouldn’t do for you.”

### CHAPTER SIX

#### RYLAN

Rylan blinked when the SUV stopped and Cameron shut off the ignition. He had forgotten about the confrontation after Cameron's last declaration as they left the house. And he knew Cameron was right, he never had to worry about his so-called family or his brother's best friend ever again, so why dwell on the past.

And with those thoughts, came relief. Rylan hadn't realized how much he held himself back in order not to cause waves in his house. He tip-toed around his own space. Rylan bolted the doors whenever he was home and even listened to music with headphones on whenever he created his designs.

He'd gotten so used to the quiet, of being alone and worrying each minute of his time he spent at the house whether that day would be the day his father would kick him out. Although he'd known Tristan lived several states away while in school, Rylan still looked over his shoulder whenever he ventured outside.

But now, he was with Cameron and he didn't have to look over his shoulder or fear what the day would bring. As Cameron turned to face him, Rylan's gaze dropped to his lips and he couldn't help but stare.

Rylan thought about their first kiss often in the hours since they'd had breakfast and knew that he'd never been as affected by a kiss or a touch. And Rylan, guilty for even thinking Cameron would be standoffish from his lack of experience and wouldn't be as passionate, was never so grateful to be wrong.

His body shivered as he remembered Cameron taking control of the kiss, setting his body alight and started a craving for his touch that Rylan never thought possible. And Rylan wanted more, with Cameron.

With his thoughts on how to get another soul-scorching kiss from the man across from him, he wasn't aware of Cameron reaching over and releasing his seat belt. When he felt his hands span his waist before easily lifting him over the console and onto his lap, only then did he wake from his stupor. He blinked and his smile grew when he realized he straddled Cameron's lap.

“Are you worried—”

Rylan shook his head. “I was thinking about our kiss earlier.”

Cameron smiled, making his heart skip a beat. The man was beautiful.

“I've been thinking about it all day. Can I kiss you again?”

Rylan nodded and moved his arms around Cameron's shoulders. He shivered when Cameron opened his hand between Rylan's shoulder blades and pressed him forward.

The kiss started slowly. A brush of Cameron's lips against his, followed by a tentative lick on the corner of Rylan's lips, an area becoming an erogenous zone for Rylan whenever Cameron touched him there. But he couldn't hold back a groan when Cameron drew his bottom lip between his teeth and nibbled.

Rylan vocalized his need and without thought, pressed his hips forward and sucked in a breath as he felt the start of Cameron's impressive erection through layers of clothing.

“I never knew a simple kiss would be such a fucking turn-on.” He paused before he

gazed into Rylan's eyes. "I think it's only kissing you."

Rylan could hear and feel his breaths sawing in and out of his throat. He cupped Cameron's face. "Kiss me again."

Cameron, without hesitation, lifted his lips to meet Rylan's. The moment they touched, Cameron used his soft lips to open Rylan up for more.

A loud moan escaped Rylan's throat and he couldn't stop his movements as he pressed his hips against Cameron's full-on erection as Cameron used his tongue to delve in and taste Rylan. Rylan lost track of time and where he was, there was only Cameron beneath him and drawing from him the most pleasure he'd ever experienced. From a scorching kiss.

Neither of their hands were idle. Rylan reached underneath Cameron's tee and the other man followed suit after. He encountered hot, smooth skin and as his hands moved over the ridges of muscle on his chest and stomach. Rylan groaned louder and wiggled, unable to get enough of the man underneath him.

But it was when Cameron's hands, calloused and all-encompassing, slid over Rylan's skin, his cock twitched in his pants and it was all he could do to keep from coming because of the man's addictive touch.

They broke apart as oxygen became limited and Rylan looked into Cameron's eyes, which sparked like molten fire, for him.

"Holy shit." Rylan's body was still shaking, as if he were coming down from a high.

Cameron laughed as he moved a hand through Rylan's hair as the other moved to cup the back of his neck. As they stared at one another, all the humor disappeared as Cameron's gaze broke away and traveled down. He groaned as Rylan licked his lips,



craving Cameron's touch before he devoured him in another kiss. When Cameron moved forward, Rylan leaned closer and his breath stopped in anticipation.

Before they could touch, a loud knock came from the driver's side window. Rylan blinked and found himself seated on the other side of the SUV with Cameron's hand pressed to his chest.

Rylan smiled as Cameron's gaze moved outside where Issa stood with her hands on her hips, glancing back and forth between them. Instead of reacting, Cameron took in her midnight black hair highlighted with purple streaks, following the line of the cut that framed her face. Rylan always thought her beautiful with her milk chocolate skin and her piercing blue eyes. But it was her mischievous smile Rylan loved the best.

"Holy fuck, Rylan. Did you have your tongue down this hottie's throat? When did this happen? How do you know him? Are you lovers? Boyfriends? What the actual fuck Rylan Xavier Ellis?"

Issa's questions came rapid fire and Rylan watched Cameron's reaction. His eyes widened with each one and at the end, he threw his head back and belted out a booming laugh as Issa stopped to catch her breath and glare at Rylan.

She was angry he hadn't told her about this huge change in his life. Because he told her everything. But before he could explain, Cameron wiped his eyes and reached for the door handle. He watched as Issa stepped back before he opened the door and stepped out. Rylan followed.

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When Rylan got his footing, he pulled Issa into an embrace. As he pulled back when she didn't return his hug, he noticed that Issa hadn't taken her eyes off Cameron. She stared, slack-jawed at Cameron, before lifting her arms and patting him on the back twice.

Rylan reached for Cameron's hand and smiled when he slid their fingers together with no hesitation. He glanced up and smiled at Cameron, who smiled back.

Turning back to Issa, who was staring at their linked hands, he made introductions.

"Issa, this is Cameron."

"Well, it's Cameron William Hayes for future reference."

Rylan's heart beat hard in his chest at Cameron's easy acceptance of his friend and his willingness to get yelled at because Issa was close to him.

"And this is Issado—"

Issa's eyes narrowed as she made a sound that cut off the rest of her name from Rylan's mouth. "Issa's just fine."

Cameron nodded before he glanced around. "Where's your roommate? Suzy, right?"

A blush stained Issa's cheeks as she glanced out toward the road where she must have parked. "I sorta ditched her by the car when I saw you two kissing."

As Rylan spotted Suzy at the same time as Tim, Aaron, and Eric stepped out of the house and they all congregated on the driveway. The tiny blonde with corkscrew curls and a wide smile threw herself at Rylan and hugged him. Rylan smiled as he caught her scent, sunshine and flowers that matched her bubbly personality.

“It’s good to see you, Rylan.” Suzy pulled back and noticed Issa gaze locked on Cameron. “What’s going on?”

“I’m waiting for answers,” Issa said.

Cameron pulled Rylan against his side, an arm draped over his hip. His thumb wormed its way under Rylan’s shirt and Cameron rubbed his skin, sending shivers of desire over his body. But he became distracted when Cameron answered.

“Well, both of our tongues were in on the action, not just his. We met last night, and I asked him to move in with me because it looks like Tristan’s back in town and looking for a fight. We haven’t made love, yet. I want Rylan to be my boyfriend, but I haven’t asked him because I wanted to give him a little more time to think about it and get used to the idea.”

Rylan leaned close to Cameron and asked, “Boyfriends?”

Cameron nodded.

And Issa picked up on the one point he wanted her to forget about.

“Did you let Cameron beat him to a pulp?”

“I offered, but the chicken shit is all talk.” Cameron sounded put out by the fact.

Issa smiled at Cameron. “You’re okay with me. But promise me that if Tristan fucks

up enough he has to disappear, you'll call me first. Okay?"

Rylan made a sound of distress, but Cameron and Issa ignored it. Cameron held out his hand and Issa shook it.

"Deal," they both said.

"Well, hello, ladies." Everyone turned to look at Tim, who was wriggling his eyebrows at Suzy and Issa.

Issa rolled her eyes but Suzy giggled. The sound making Rylan smile, taking Tim by surprise.

"When I flirt, women walk away."

Cameron shook his head and changed the subject. "Why don't we move Rylan's stuff into the front room and after, we'll have dinner?"

Everyone agreed and within a matter of an hour, they had everything Rylan owned stowed away in the house. While the rest of the group grabbed beers and drinks from the refrigerator and headed toward the backyard to the grill, Rylan stayed in the kitchen to help his boyfriend.

"What can I do?"

Cameron dumped the ground beef into a bowl and seasoned it with salt, pepper, and something Rylan couldn't identify. He watched Cameron's movements and again, was in awe of how deftly he worked. Rylan's confidence came when he was sewing a dress or drawing a new design, but with everything else, he struggled.

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“Can you open the hot dogs and put them on a plate? And if it’s not too much trouble, slice the onions and tomatoes, rinse and dry the lettuce, and plate the cheese alongside the veggies?” Cameron’s words pulled Rylan out of his thoughts.

Rylan chuckled before he nodded and got to work. They both worked together in comfortable silence. Getting their friends together had been a wonderful idea and within two days, Rylan had a boyfriend and the support of his friends and Cameron’s.

“How are you doing?” Cameron broke the silence.

“I’m good. I didn’t think I could move out without my father or Tristan there to complicate things, but I didn’t expect his aggression in front of Declan.”

“Does he know your class schedule or your regular hangouts?”

Rylan shook his head. “Anything private I kept locked away and since Declan and I don’t see each other, I doubt he would know enough about me to tell Tristan.”

Cameron became lost in thought and Rylan placed the onion on the cutting board and with precise movements, cut the rings into the same quarter inch diameter slices, causing his eyes to tear up. Last came the tomatoes, and after he sliced them, he fanned out the cheese, onions, lettuce, and tomatoes on a plate an even distance apart.

Opening the refrigerator, he pulled out the hot dogs, well, what he could consider gourmet sausages instead, and blushed when his stomach growled at the thought of food. He only ate when he felt faint or he remembered, but being with Cameron had increased his appetite.

In more ways than one.

“Ready?” Cameron asked.

Rylan nodded, grabbing the two plates and followed him into the huge backyard. He hadn’t even looked outside, but the back looked like an oasis. The covered deck that spanned the entire length of the house contained the grill, three patio tables with umbrellas and an assortment of chairs, and to Rylan’s surprise, a stove, oven, and a tall stone structure with an opening in the front.

“What’s that?” Rylan pointed at the stone structure.

“Oh, that’s a pizza oven.”

“Sure it is,” Rylan mumbled under his breath.

Cameron laughed and walked straight to the grill as Rylan took in the backyard. There was a water fountain that flowed into a huge pool, surrounded by deck chairs. There was a hot tub near the pool and the yard contained an overabundance of flowers and plants that made the backyard have a tropical feel.

“It’s beautiful.”

Rylan turned his attention to Cameron when he chuckled and noticed their friends were lounging around the deck, getting to know each other.

“Do you want raw or grilled onions for your burgers?” Cameron asked.

“Grilled.” Everyone agreed.

“Hey, Ry, can you go back in a grab the buns for the hamburgers and hot dogs?”

He nodded and turned toward the house. But Cameron was quicker and pulled Rylan in for a scorching kiss that left his knees weak before giving him a quick reminder of his quest.

Before he turned, Cameron gave him a chaste kiss this time, and Rylan felt his heart speed up. He found himself not wanting to pull away.

Cameron turned back to the grill and Rylan heard the distinct click-click and a whoosh of the flames. In a daze, he walked back toward the house and he couldn't stop the smile that bloomed on his face.

The rest of the afternoon passed with lively conversation and delicious food.

Issa's eyes kept track of him throughout the day, looking for signs of a panic attack. She was the only one besides Cameron who knew the true story of what Tristan tried to do. He'd rather forget everything about Tristan and move on with his life, because Tristan was in the past. But Issa never forgot.

"When is your next appointment in Denver?" Issa asked.

"Friday."

"What appointment?" Cameron asked.

"I've made three dresses for Mrs. Buehler and her friends for an event at the Denver Country Club. I make any adjustments to the dresses and do their makeup beforehand."

"How often do you go to Denver to meet with a client?"

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“Several times a month, but I’m getting more requests for my dresses lately. I might stop doing the appointments and only sell my designs.”

Cameron seemed to be deep in thought. “Do you have a website?”

Rylan shook his head.

“I can create one for you, but in the meantime, I’ll drive you to Denver on Friday.”

“I have a reliable car and I’ve been doing this for two years with no problems.”

Even the argument sounded weak to Rylan. He wanted to spend time with Cameron, but he didn’t want to bore him when he spent hours getting the women ready for their night out.

“It’ll make me feel better.”

And Rylan could feel himself melt at Cameron’s concern. “Well, at least I’ll have someone to talk to on the drive to and from.”

Cameron leaned over and gave him a small kiss. “Thank you.”

After they agreed, Issa allowed herself to relax and enjoy herself without worrying about him. And a few hours later, the last two days caught up with Rylan and he yawned as the sky darkened.

Suzy and Issa were the first to call it a night. Issa surprised him by hugging Cameron



and the rest of the guys.

Rylan and Cameron both thanked Eric, Aaron, and Tim for helping them move. Although Rylan suspected that the group had big hearts that matched their size, he couldn't help but smile as each of the three men hugged him, causing his throat to clog with emotion.

They hugged Cameron before waving their goodbye's and leaving the two men alone.

Rylan helped Cameron with the dishes before rinsing and disposing of the used bottles and cans in the recycling bin. As Cameron washed the last dish and Rylan dried it and put it away, he could feel Cameron hesitate and Rylan tensed, waiting.

"Ry. I... well only if you're comfortable... would you like to move into the master bedroom with me?"

Without hesitation, Rylan nodded. "I would love that."

Cameron relaxed and Rylan was the first one to make a move. He stood on his toes and wrapped his arms around the bigger man's shoulders, before capturing his lips in a scorching kiss that had Rylan moaning. And in that moment, with Cameron clutching Rylan close to him, he lost a piece of his heart to the man.

"Let's go to bed."

Cameron took his hand and for the first time since his mother's passing, he had someone who understood him and cared for him.

It was a feeling he could easily get used to.

### CHAPTER SEVEN

#### CAMERON

As soon as Cameron shut the front door, the heavy beat of the song coming from upstairs made him smile.

He and Rylan had been living together for almost a week and Cameron had never been happier. They slept together every night, but despite their closeness, they limited their lovemaking to kissing and caresses. Until last night, when Rylan introduced him to frottage.

Cameron experienced nothing as fantastic as Rylan's body pressed down on his, their clothed cocks rubbing together until their orgasms overwhelmed them.

Each touch he received from Rylan made him crave more, and he became addicted to Rylan and wanted to experience anything and everything sexual with him. Rylan sparked every desire he'd never thought himself capable, as if his body and senses awakened the night they met.

And though their physical connection was growing, Cameron also loved spending time with Rylan.

Most nights they cooked dinner together and after, they would cuddle on the couch. Rylan had introduced him to the horror movie genre. Since he never enjoyed the adrenaline spike from scary movies, most of the time he found himself with Rylan on his lap and his arms banded around Rylan's chest. He hid his face against the smaller

man's neck and spared himself from whatever atrocity occurred on screen.

"You know it's fake, right? Nothing that happens on the screen is real." Rylan said.

Cameron pressed his nose against the shell of Rylan's ear, inhaling his calming scent. "I don't think my brain cares whether it's real or not. I know you left the kitchen lights on, but do you think we can turn on the living room lights, and while we're at it, check the locks and the alarm."

Rylan flipped around to straddle his lap and Cameron, feeling ridiculous, closed his eyes until Rylan cupped his face. When he glanced up, Rylan gave him a gentle smile before he tilted his head and kissed Cameron with so much intensity it left him squirming on the couch.

"Let's watch something else." Rylan suggestion had Cameron nodding before his sentence was complete.

So Cameron introduced Rylan to the greatest show on TV; The Great British Baking Show. They binged a couple episodes of the first season, but since Rylan's deadline for the dresses grew closer, most nights Cameron completed his homework as Rylan worked on his creations. He knew Rylan had talent, but seeing one of his creations come alive before him was different. It was obvious Rylan loved color and elegance in his designs. Each dress he created was breathtaking.

Cameron dropped his backpack on the bench by the front door and kicked off his shoes before he jogged up the stairs toward the new song that had less beat and more vocals than the previous one. He turned toward the corner room Rylan had chosen as his studio. His sewing machine fit under the bay window and the built in shelving and walk-in closets provided enough room to store his materials. But the best feature, according to the other man, was the wooden floors where he liked to walk around barefoot.

The room had lay unused and the day after Rylan moved in; they spent the morning cleaning it before setting up the dress forms, moving in furniture including a couch, chairs, and a table where Cameron could study, and finding places to store odds and ends.

He smiled as he walked in, spotting several pieces of material draped over chairs, on the ironing board, and fitted over each of the four dress forms in the room. Along with the infusion of color into Cameron's life, the sight made him smile because the entire space had a welcoming feel he would associate with Rylan and the happiness he brought into Cameron's life.

As he turned toward the music, he spotted Rylan with pins in his mouth while his long, thin, sexy fingers sewed around the neck area of the final dress he had to finish.

I'm in trouble if I think his fingers are sexy.

When Rylan finished, he turned down the music until it was a low hum in the room and poked the needle into the pincushion and dropped the pins from his mouth into his palm. After he stored every sharp object away, Cameron slid behind him and wrapped his arms around Rylan's waist, pulling him close until he was flush against him.

His heart swelled when Rylan leaned back without hesitation and tilted his head to the left. Obsessed with Rylan's scent, he brushed his nose against the smooth skin along his neck. Sliding his mouth from his shoulder to his ear, he buried his face against Rylan's hair and breathed him in.

"I'm thrilled the week is over. It was brilliant on both our parts to not have any classes on Friday."

Rylan chuckled, sending vibrations through Cameron's chest and the last of his stress

from the week evaporated.

“What do you think of the dress?”

With his first true glimpse at the dress, Cameron felt his eyes widen at the creation in front of him. It was a sleeveless number with a beautiful pink lace design over material that looked to him to be silk. The dress looked delicate and gorgeous.

“You’re so talented. It’s perfect.”

Rylan turned in his arms and Cameron saw a hint of pink on his cheeks.

“Still can’t accept compliments, huh? Well, you’ll get used to them and I’ll try not to push because I know how busy you’ve been this week.”

Rylan bit his lower lip and he kept glancing up into Cameron’s eyes. Before Cameron could ask, Rylan spoke up.

“I’ve been thinking. I... want to touch you... everywhere.”

He sucked in a shocked breath, thrilled with the idea. As he tried to find his voice to tell Rylan yes, his head bobbed up and down in hopes he conveyed his enthusiasm with the idea.

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“I’m game for anything. I want to touch you, too. Is that okay?”

“Yes, please.”

Cameron reached for his hand and once their fingers locked together, he hurried both of them to their bedroom, noticing when Rylan’s unoccupied hand reached for and slapped off the light as they left his workroom behind.

When Rylan entered their room, Cameron shut and locked the door, leaving their cell phones outside, along with the rest of the world. He wanted all Rylan’s attention on him.

Cameron sensed Rylan’s hesitation and when he glanced at his face, Rylan drew his lip between his teeth as his eyes darted around his face and chest. He wrapped his arms around Rylan’s waist but didn’t move closer, giving him every opportunity to put an end to them going further if he chose.

“If you’re uncomfortable, with anything at anytime, tell me to stop and I will without question. I want you to trust me.”

“I trust you, Cameron, but I know I’ll lose control once I get you naked.”

“What are you worried about?”

Rylan sighed before he stepped into Cameron’s embrace. “I’ve never felt like this and what if I push you into something you’re not ready for? When I blurted out I wanted you, I didn’t think you would take me up on the offer because we’ve only known

each other for a week.”

Without knowing how to explain how everything with Rylan was different, he cupped Rylan face and kissed him. Rylan let out a low groan before he stood on his toes and kissed Cameron back. Thoughts and sounds ceased to exist around them and all Cameron could hear was the whimpered moans escaping Rylan’s throat.

This. This exact feeling is what I’ve been missing my entire life.

Cameron pulled back and traced his eyes over Rylan’s flushed face, his half-lidded eyes, and became fascinated by Rylan’s chest as it rose and fell with deep breaths as his fists clung to Cameron’s shirt. He was the most beautiful being he’d ever seen.

“I trust you, Rylan.”

Somehow his words shed the rest of Rylan’s doubts about rushing into the physical side of their relationship. Without waiting a beat, Rylan launched himself into Cameron’s arms and pulled his head down for another scorching kiss. Cameron’s cock throbbed in his jeans, but that was nothing new. Rylan brought his body from calm to hard and aching with a simple look.

When Rylan broke off the kiss this time, Cameron groaned aloud as he took in Rylan’s flushed face, the spark of desire in his gray eyes, and most of all, his swollen pink lips he had grown addicted to after their first kiss. Rylan leaned in with his mouth close to Cameron’s ear and while his hands explored the muscles of his chest, whispered the words that threatened his sanity.

“I want to make you come apart with my mouth and tongue.”

For a long moment, Cameron didn’t recognize the sound erupting from his throat. But he did it again as Rylan smiled at him as his hands ran down his clothed chest toward

his waist. He drove Cameron crazy as he lifted his shirt up and off. His hands touched every inch of skin he exposed and nothing in his life had ever felt so right, so good before.

“You’re so sexy.”

Cameron’s words stuck in his throat as Rylan leaned forward and pressed his swollen lips against the skin on his chest. Pleasure rushed through him as Rylan moved his mouth, mapping each ridge, indent, and curve. Cameron forced his eyes to stay open as he watched Rylan become comfortable with his actions and sucked in a breath as Rylan slid his fingers down and flicked open the button of Cameron’s jeans.

“Holy fuck.”

Cameron’s breathing intensified as Rylan’s fingers unzipped his jeans in increments. Shivering with anticipation of what was to come, he groaned louder when Rylan’s beautiful, strong fingers slid into his pants and over his clothed cock.

“Rylan. I love your hands on me.”

Rylan’s half whimper, half groan had Cameron snapping back to reality. “Can I undress you?”

He nodded and sucked in a breath as Cameron made quick work of his shirt, discarding it somewhere behind him, and with more controlled movements slid his pants and boxer briefs down his legs and tapped his calf so he could kick them off.

Lifting a naked Rylan against his body, Cameron moved toward the bed but almost toppled both of them when his jeans caught around his thighs. He kicked them off and while holding onto Rylan’s waist, maneuvered himself against the pillows and headboard before lowering Rylan to sit on his stomach.



“So strong,” Rylan whimpered.

He opened his mouth to reply, but the sound cut off on a choked sigh as Rylan leaned forward and placed his mouth over his nipple. Cameron’s head dropped back against the headboard with a thud as Rylan’s tongue explored his hardening nub. His hands roamed over Rylan’s corded muscles and smooth skin along his back and thighs before they settled wrapped around his hips.

With Rylan’s skin against his with no barriers between them was better than any fantasy he’d ever had. But when Rylan sucked the nipple into his mouth, his cock jumped against Rylan and Cameron felt his moan all the way to his bones.

Rylan glanced up and without moving his mouth, captured Cameron’s gaze. Cameron’s chest was rising and falling with heavy breaths, but when he met Rylan’s beautiful eyes, Rylan chose that moment to flick his tongue against the hardened nub and Cameron cried out, clutching Rylan close to his chest.

“I don’t know if I can survive all the sensations rushing through me.”

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“You’re so responsive.” Rylan scrambled closer and kissed Cameron, taking the time to explore his mouth as his hands roamed over his skin.

Cameron’s hands weren’t idle as they opened to touch Rylan, savoring their bodies pressed together. Rylan’s mouth moved down his neck, over his chest, and pressed against the sensitive skin of his hips. He almost lost track of his sanity as he watched, mesmerized with Rylan’s every movement.

“How do you feel?”

“This is nothing I’ve ever experienced before. Your touch, your scent, everything you’re doing feels overwhelming, but I want more. It seems the only thing that makes sense in this world is touching and kissing you.”

Cameron was a little shocked by his admission, but when he glanced at Rylan, the shimmer of tears had Cameron sucking in a breath and pulling Rylan closer. Rylan buried his face against his neck and took a deep breath before he spoke.

“I hoped what I was feeling wasn’t one sided.”

He bit his lip to prevent a moan as his body recognized and reacted to Rylan’s form pressed against his own, but ignored the sensations and concentrated on what he wanted to say.

“No, you’re not the only one. With those I’m close to, I’m aware of their proximity at all times. But with you, it’s more I’m drawn to you and I crave to be near you. When we’re apart, I want to rush through whatever I have to do so I can see you again. And

although it sounds possessive, the last thing I want to do is scare you away by telling you this.”

Instead of pulling away, which Cameron figured his confession might have accomplished, Rylan cupped his face and kissed him with such intensity, all thoughts disappeared.

Cameron moaned into Rylan’s mouth.

When Rylan broke the kiss, Cameron opened his eyes, savoring the onslaught of sensations rushing through him.

The moment he blinked and looked at Rylan, he inhaled a sharp breath because his smile stole Cameron’s breath.

He’s so beautiful.

Cameron watched as Rylan blinked at him with a small smile on his face, but it was the pink that stained his cheeks that made him realize he said the words aloud.

“It’s true. You enthralled me from the first moment I spotted you but you are more than your perfect skin and kind eyes, your gorgeous body, and hell, even your toes are sexy. You are kindness, happiness, and light.”

The more Cameron spoke, the darker the flush on his cheeks became.

“Well, I’m only in this for your lovely climbable body and your car. And maybe your house.”

He knew Rylan’s words were only to dispel his embarrassment at Cameron’s words, so he threw back his head and laughed. He would convince Rylan one day how

wonderful he was.

“How much do you want me, Ry?”

“Let me show you.”

Neither of their erections had flagged since their conversation started. Not realizing it, but during that time their hands hadn't stopped caressing the other and Rylan had positioned his body pressed against Cameron's side. So when Rylan slid his hand lower and swiped his thumb over Cameron's slit, the dirty moan that escaped Cameron's throat encouraged Rylan and he wrapped his long fingers around the base of his cock and glided his hand up to the head.

As pleasure skittered up his spine, Cameron canted his hips toward Rylan's hand, chasing the feeling Rylan was drawing from him.

“I'm not going anywhere.” Rylan's voice was deep and sent another shiver over him.

With a few more strokes, Cameron couldn't keep his moans and gasps silent. “I've experienced nothing that comes close to this, even in those rare times I touched myself.”

Rylan groaned. “That's so sexy, thinking about you touching yourself.”

His hand gave him a squeeze as he stroked up, loosening his fist when his smooth skin traveled down his cock. Soon, way too soon, Cameron spine tingled and his back arched toward Rylan's touch.

His body stilled and his hand reached out to stop Rylan's movements. He groaned, “I'm too close. If you keep touching me, I'll explode. Can I taste you?”

After a moment, Rylan nodded and Cameron released a breath before he slid down the bed until only his head touched the headboard. He gripped Rylan's hips and careful not to bruise his perfect skin; he moved Rylan until he sat on his chest.

Without waiting another minute, his tongue darted out and licked the underside of Rylan's cock in one long lick. Cameron didn't know what he expected, but the salty, musky taste of Rylan's cock along with his delicious scent surrounding him combined to make Cameron desperate for more. As he reached the head of his cock, he sucked it into his mouth and Rylan's taste burst on his tongue.

"Oh, fuck. Cameron."

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He had no clue what he was doing, but he chased those sexy sounds that escaped from Rylan's throat as he explored. His tongue traced the underside of Rylan's cock, loving the weight on his tongue. With a sudden need to study his cock, he squeezed him around the base and pulled back.

It was skinny and long with a lovely pink head. He loved how it pulsed in his hand and when he glanced up to meet Rylan's gaze; he loved the flush on his cheeks and the half-lidded eyes moving from his hand to his face.

“So... beautiful.”

Unable to stay away, Cameron lifted his head and swallowed Rylan down his throat. When the head of his cock brushed the back of Cameron's throat, by instinct he swallowed, shivering at the moan running throughout Rylan's body. His hands roamed over Rylan's back and down his hips, until his hands cupped his smooth, taut ass.

Rylan threw his head back as Cameron sucked in his cheeks and pulled back, his tongue exploring as he moved. His hands moved onto Cameron's shoulders and a slew of curses and other words stuttered from his throat, one word never quite forming before it turned into another.

Cameron loved the pinch of Rylan's grip on his shoulders and savored his taste and the weight of Rylan's cock sliding in and out of his mouth. Rylan's breathing sped up and after several minutes, Cameron ignored the ache in his jaw and concentrated on Rylan's pleasure, wanting to taste his essence. He pressed him deeper into his mouth and throat and when he swallowed, Rylan threw back his head and screamed.

“Cameron. Cameron... oh, fuck, Cameron!”

Rylan’s release poured down his throat and when his thighs tightened over his torso and his fingers dug into his skin, Cameron’s orgasm struck hard and he emptied himself onto his stomach, a few drops reaching Rylan’s lower back and his fingers gripping Rylan’s ass.

Rylan pulled back, out of Cameron’s mouth. He then blinked at Cameron a split second before his body sagged forward and Cameron caught him in his arms. The only sound in the room was their harsh breathing as they clung to each other.

Cameron startled when Rylan gasped and pulled back, sitting on his haunches near Cameron’s hips. His arms wouldn’t let Rylan move far.

“What about you?”

His brows drew down in confusion.

“Let me take care of you.”

“Oh,” Cameron flushed in embarrassment. “I... well... I...”

Rylan kissed him and when he pulled back, his bottom lip stuck out and Cameron smiled when he realized the look was a pout. Rylan was pouting.

“I wanted to touch you.”

Cameron, unable to take the unhappy look on Rylan’s face, came up with a compromise. “Why don’t we shower and eat dinner. After, we can come back to bed and you’ll have as much time as you want to explore me. All night if you want to.”

Rylan nodded but Cameron could see the exhaustion on his face. There were dark circles under his eyes and he sagged against his chest.

“Did you heat the leftovers for lunch?”

Rylan blushed. “I lost track of time.”

Cameron maneuvered both of them to the edge of the bed before he stood and lifted Rylan into his arms. Cameron loved when he sagged against his bigger body and he carried Rylan with ease into the shower stall. He held him tight as he turned on the water and adjusted the temperature. Resting Rylan’s head on his shoulder, he reached for the door and shut it behind them.

He sat Rylan down on the bench and angled the shower head toward him before reaching for the shampoo. Cameron made quick work of washing his hair and conditioning it before he washed Rylan’s tired body. Then Cameron took his turn before he shut off the water and toweled both of them dry.

Wrapping Rylan in a robe and then himself, he took Rylan’s hand and started downstairs.

“Are you mad at me?” Rylan’s voice sounded so lost.

“No, angel, I’m worried about you. It’s not healthy to go all day without eating and I want to take care of you. I’m thinking a simple pasta dish and garlic bread. How does that sound?”

Rylan smiled and nodded his head. Cameron wrapped his arm around Rylan’s waist and they walked downstairs, pressed together.

As Cameron seated Rylan on the stool at the island counter, he kissed the man on his



head before he rummaged around the kitchen. When he set the water to boil on the stove and he chopped the vegetables for the pasta, he turned toward Rylan and smiled.

“What time are we leaving for Denver tomorrow?”

“Are you sure you still want to go?”

Cameron nodded and turned to pour the pasta into the pot. “I have homework and books picked out to read, so I’m all set. I’ll find a cafe nearby and if you need me, you can text me.”

Combining the rest of the ingredients and setting everything to cook, he pulled their dinner together ten minutes later and placed a large helping in front of Rylan.

“Thank you for trusting me.”

Rylan smiled and dug in, making Cameron smile back at him. “The day I met you was the absolute luckiest one in my life.”

Emotion clogged his throat and Cameron nodded as he felt the prickle of tears threatening to form.

I couldn’t agree more.

### CHAPTER EIGHT

#### RYLAN

Rylan sat on the edge of the sofa as the three women went through the door and blew out a sigh, happy he'd finished with the last of the makeup for the night. After they changed into the one-of-a kind dress he designed for them, he would make any adjustments if needed, and then he and Cameron would head home.

And that led to thoughts about Cameron.

For the longest time, Rylan had only concentrated on building his business through word of mouth all while working for his degree in design and merchandising. Until he'd met Cameron, life was work; which bolts of material he could use for his design, the next new design he sketched and created, and passing his classes while making enough money to survive.

He was in his element as he created his designs and brought them to life. And when he looked to expand his business, he used Issa and himself as test subjects when he learned how to apply makeup.

But more often than not in the past week, thoughts of Cameron snuck in, even when he was concentrating on his projects. It took a few days, but he realized only thinking about work and his designs were so much a part of his day for the past three years, he didn't know how to relax. Fear of being homeless was a great motivation, and because of that fear, Rylan had worked his ass off.

Seeing Cameron's concern when he didn't eat, or when he had a nightmare and his sleep was restless, had him rethinking his focus. He didn't need to only survive. Rylan's business, while small, succeeded in its own right. He didn't have to design and sew and create every day anymore, and Cameron was the one to show him how to have fun.

So Rylan relinquished control over to Cameron with other parts of his life.

He smiled as he remembered how much Cameron held himself back during the first few days after Rylan moved in with him. Conscious of where his hands were when he spoke and how close he stood to him.

But then Rylan checked himself if he laughed too loudly or found himself reaching for Cameron, which was all the time when they were together.

During the years after he admitted he was gay and after his mom's death, he toned down the part of his personality he believed others would find too gay.

But Cameron refused to see Rylan be anyone but his true self.

He must have been obvious whenever he stopped short of putting his hand on Cameron's muscular forearm like he wanted or when he leaned in for a kiss, only to pull back at the last moment. Cameron would wrap his arms around Rylan and pull him close, link their hands together, or kiss him breathless until Rylan let down his guard and became his true self.

For a man who had clear physical boundaries with other people, somehow those didn't apply to Rylan. He noticed at the barbecue, even with his friends, Cameron would keep a distance that would discourage a casual arm slung over his shoulder or even a pat on the arm.

Thoughts of touching Cameron led to thoughts about the night before and his cock swelled in his pants as he remembered how he drove him crazy with his mouth alone. When he told Cameron he wanted to touch every part of him, he was being honest, but he hadn't realized how exhausted he was until he'd woken up late that morning. He'd fallen asleep right after dinner and Cameron had to carry him up to bed.

When he woke, Cameron had already left for the store, leaving a note behind. And when he stumbled downstairs after his lazy morning, Cameron was putting away groceries.

"Sorry I slept so late."

Cameron kissed him before he sat him at the island like he had the night before and cooked him a big breakfast. Under his scrutiny, he ate every bite and Cameron rewarded him with a huge smile. For a reason he had yet to understand, his chest felt tight and tears burned in his eyes. Cameron, thrilled he ate a meal, wanted nothing more complicated than that, but it meant the world to Rylan he cared enough to make sure he ate and slept enough. For a long while, he forgot what it was like to have someone care for him.

They spent the rest of the day talking on the couch, Rylan's legs draped over Cameron's lap, reminiscing about their childhoods and Rylan learning about Cameron's two years as a college football player. He also taught him a little about the game and promised when football season began, they would watch together.

He settled back in Cameron's luxury car as they sped down Interstate 25 toward Denver. A wicked thought took over as they arrived at the mansion. Before he closed the door, he leaned down while balancing the dresses and his make-up kit and smiled at Cameron.

"Tonight, I'm in control and this time, I want to touch you until you come."

Rylan chuckled when he heard Cameron's groan and he shut the door and waved him off.

"Who is the lucky man who made you blush and put that look on your face?" Sophia Buehler asked.

Rylan stiffened at the question, but as he looked at the three beautiful women smiling at him, he relaxed.

In the seven months he'd known Sophia, he'd never spoken or had she asked about his personal life. He suspected she knew about his preference because of his chosen profession, but he'd been too busy to worry about their reactions. As he smiled back at the three women, he knew he no longer had to worry.

"Well," Rylan started as he stood and walked around Sophia to see how the dress fit, "his name is Cameron and we met a week ago. He's sweet, supportive, loves to cook, and makes me smile."

"He sounds wonderful, honey," Margo said.

"Yeah, and you sound smitten. Good for you." Sophia pulled him into a hug and he hugged her back.

"Thank you, ladies. And you three look beautiful."

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There came a knock on the door and Sophia's husband led the way in, followed by Margo's and then Gracie's husbands. As the group talked about their night ahead, Sophia waved them out the door before she turned back to Rylan.

Sophia reached up and squeezed Rylan's bicep. "Are you okay, Rylan? Are you in danger?"

"No, I'm safe. I live with Cameron after I moved out of my father and brother's house. Why?"

She blew out a breath. "I received a call this morning from a man named Tristan. He said he wanted to give me a heads up you were stealing from me and that tonight you planned a robbery to happen while we were at our party."

Rylan choked on his surprise. His thoughts seized and his body froze at the accusation. It wasn't until Sophia shook him he snapped out of his panic.

"I don't believe him. I know you, Rylan, and you won't even take a tip from me or my friends even though you deserve it. You needed to know so you can protect yourself. Who's Tristan?"

"He's my brother's friend, and he's always hated me."

Sophia shook her head. "It sounds like there's more to that, but if you need help, let me know and we'll get the police involved."

"Okay. I'll tell Cameron and if we feel we need to get the police involved, I will do

that.” Rylan’s voice sounded so strained, he wondered if Sophia could hear it.

Sophia smiled and pulled him in for a hug until he relaxed into her arms.

“Good, now on to better news. My friends and I want to put on a fashion show for charity and we would love to feature your creations. What do you think?”

All thoughts of Tristan scattered as he realized how big this show could be, spotlighting his designs. Without thinking about it, he nodded. “Yes, I would love to.”

Sophia laughed. “You deserve all the success your talent will bring you, sweetheart. I’ll call you next week and talk details. Tonight, I’ll show off your dress and let the compliments flow over me.”

“Thank you, for all your support and the work you’ve given me over the last several months.”

“You have an eye for design, but your career will take off because of your hard work, and I know you’ll thrive. And I get to say I discovered you first.”

Rylan chuckled. “That you do.”

Sophia waved at him when her husband cleared his throat.

After he watched them leave with a smile for the couple, Rylan went to gather his supplies. He organized his make-up, hair accessories, and packed them all away before he grabbed one last dress draped over the chair. He made his way downstairs and smiled as Maria opened the front door for him.

“I have something for you.”

Maria's eyes widened. "No, señor, I need nothing."

"Well, it's more for your granddaughter. Sophia was telling me about her quinceañera and her favorite colors and well... here you go."

The dress was a simple white lace with a princess style train, but since Lucia's favorite color was pink, he'd placed a pink flower design along the train and around the bodice of the capped sleeve dress.

"It's... too much. Beautiful," Maria said.

"I hope you and her have a wonderful time."

"How much?"

"It's my gift to her. Just take pictures. Take care, Maria."

Maria was always quick with a smile and when she found out he loved chocolate chip cookies, she always had them on hand when he arrived. Making a dress after Sophia brought it up in conversation, was the least he could do.

"Thank you," Maria breathed. She gave him a quick hug, taking him by surprise.

"You are welcome." Rylan gave her a quick smile and a nod before he headed out the door.

He inhaled a deep breath before he took off down the block to the coffee shop Cameron picked when they arrived in Denver. Rylan would have called Cameron, but he shut his phone off when he arrived at Sophia's and with the news she'd given him about Tristan, figured he needed time to process before he joined Cameron.



*Source Creation Date: July 9, 2025, 7:59 am*

Rylan didn't know how Tristan got Sophia's number, much less how he knew about his business with her. He drew his lip between his teeth and took a glance around him before he picked up his pace through the wealthy residential neighborhood until he stood in front of the welcoming window of the little cafe.

Pulling the door open with more force than necessary, he spotted Cameron in the back. He had a book balanced on his knees as he sipped from a wide-mouthed cup and Rylan smiled at the sight. But that moment Cameron glanced up and locked eyes on Rylan's face. The start of his smile faltered as his gaze roamed over him.

Cameron stood and grabbed Rylan's things, setting them down on the coffee table next to the chair and squeezed both of Rylan's hands in his own.

"What happened? They didn't like the dresses?"

Shaking his head, Rylan spoke. "No, they loved them. They're on their way to the party now, but Sophia wanted to warn me about a phone call she received."

Cameron sat down and brought Rylan to sit on his lap. "Explain, please."

He told Cameron about Sophia's warning. "I think... he either followed me or overheard me talking about it somehow."

At first, Rylan thought he shook because of his fear of Tristan and the violence he threatened Rylan with, but he noticed when Cameron tightened his hold around his torso he was the one vibrating with anger. He slid down until he cradled his head on Cameron's chest and lifted his hand to his pectoral. Rylan rubbed circles against

Cameron's chest to calm him. As he inhaled Cameron's scent, Rylan relaxed for the first time since he learned the news.

Lost in his own thoughts, Cameron buried his face against Rylan's hair. "Could Tristan get ahold of the contacts on your phone?"

"Well, my number is under my dad's cell plan. I'm sure he wouldn't hesitate to give Tristan access to his account if he asked for it."

Cameron held his hand out and Rylan placed his phone onto his palm. When he noticed it was off, he slid it into his pocket. "We'll keep your phone off. Tomorrow, we'll get you a new phone and number."

"Do you think he knows where we live?"

Cameron kissed him instead of answering, stealing Rylan's breath as his tongue swept in. When he pulled back several minutes later, he was beaming at Rylan.

"I'm glad you think of it as home. But even if he knew, once he stepped foot on the property, I would have him arrested. Or I would kick the shit out of him and then have him arrested."

Cameron paused for a long moment. "But we'll be careful in case he's planning to harm you."

They both grew quiet as they processed the new information, but after years of worrying about the man reappearing in his life, Rylan refused to spend energy on his past any longer.

Rylan dropped his voice low as he pressed his lips to Cameron's ear. "I believe you promised me access to your naked body."

Loving the look of desire shining from Cameron's eyes, he blinked once at Rylan, then again, before he scrambled to his feet with Rylan tucked against his chest and stood. He released Rylan to pack his books and grabbed Rylan's stuff, before he reached for Rylan's hand and led them out to the car.

"I hope the trip home is faster."

Cameron threw back his head and laughed before he opened the passenger door for Rylan.

"I'll do my best."

### CHAPTER NINE

#### RYLAN

Rylan always scoffed when the couple in movies burst through the front door, kissing and ripping off their clothing. The desperate attempt was to get naked and have sex, and he muttered at Issa and Suzy how unrealistic those scenes seemed. But at that moment, he sent silent apologies to the screenwriters and directors of those movies.

As soon as his car door closed behind him, Cameron wrapped his arms around Rylan's waist. Cameron lifted him and pressed them together; chest to hips. His mouth descended on Rylan's and without missing a step, he walked back toward the front door.

Rylan moaned when their mouths separated for the second it took to unlock the front door. But when Cameron gave a grunt as the door stayed closed, Rylan captured his mouth in a scorching kiss as they fumbled to turn the doorknob before they pushed their way inside.

Cameron stilled as Rylan wrapped his arms around the bigger man's shoulders and lifted himself upwards so he could wrap his legs around his waist. With an outstretched arm, Cameron shut the front door and flicked the lock, taking the time to arm the alarm before he pressed Rylan against the front door and devoured his mouth.

Breathless, they pulled back and Cameron wasted no time as he strode toward the stairs with Rylan pressed against his chest. By the time they reached the bedroom, Rylan and Cameron were both panting.

For such a big guy, Cameron deftly unbuttoned Rylan's maroon shirt before pulling it from his slate dress pants and Rylan stared, mesmerized at the determined look on the other man's face. When he opened his warm palms and slid them up his stomach and chest before caressing along his shoulders, Rylan bit his lip and prevented the moan from escaping his mouth.

As his shirt fluttered to the floor, Rylan shook his head. "It's my turn. Do you trust me?"

Without hesitation, Cameron answered. "Yes."

Rylan smiled and over the next few minutes, he tortured both of them as he removed Cameron's shirt, touching each inch of skin with his hands. His mouth watered as Cameron revealed his naked chest and his eyes traced over the smooth skin.

Rylan groaned aloud at the thought of Cameron naked and him on his knees in front of the huge man. His fingers reached for his waistband and after taking a deep breath, Rylan slid his pants down and off his body, again using his hands and fingers as he explored each inch he exposed.

By the time he stepped out of his clothes, Cameron was panting from Rylan's methodical undressing.

Rylan squeezed Cameron's hip with his hand. "Lay down on your back."

Cameron scrambled onto the mattress. He wiggled to get comfortable before he propped his head on the pillow and moved his gaze toward Rylan at the end of the bed. When Rylan had Cameron's attention, he pressed his hands to the middle of his own chest before one hand slid over his abdomen and the other went up past his pecs before he cupped his neck. He moaned aloud at the sensations.

“Fuck.” Cameron’s fists clenched at his sides.

Not wanting to smile, Rylan bit his bottom lip as his hands roamed over his naked and sensitized skin until his fingers brushed against the hem of his pants. Taking his time, he unbuttoned the top button and with excruciating slowness, slid the zipper down, stopping each time Cameron’s breath caught in his throat.

Rylan knew Cameron had a thing for his fingers, so when his thumbs dipped into the waistband of his pants and boxer briefs, he skimmed the tips over the soft skin of his hips. Rylan pushed his clothing down, stopping his progression when they reached his thighs. He caught Cameron’s hazel gaze with his own before he reached down and wrapped his cock in one hand, exaggerating the movements of his fingers as he stroked himself once, before letting go, afraid he would burst before he touched Cameron.

With deliberate movements, Rylan turned his back to Cameron and as he looked over his shoulder, he wiggled his ass as he bent down, shimmying his clothes the rest of the way off.

“Ry, you’re killing me here and you haven’t touched me yet.”

Cameron moved to climb off the bed but Rylan stopped him with a hand held out in front of him.

“Stay right there.”

Rylan watched as Cameron’s bottom lip stuck out in a pout, but he turned toward the dresser and pulled out the new bottle of lube he’d purchased several days before. As he turned back, his gaze moved over Cameron’s face, down to his chest, rising and falling with his harsh, uneven breaths. But when his stomach flexed, Rylan’s eyes moved down further until he could see his hard, pulsing cock resting against the taut

skin.

He could feel Cameron's eyes on him as he climbed onto the bed and straddled his thighs. He kept his weight on his knees and did the same with his hands as he leaned forward and brushed his lips against Cameron's.

A loud moan escaped his throat as Cameron gripped his hips. When he rubbed his hands back and forth on Rylan's sensitized skin, he sat up and pushed Cameron's hands until they were resting beside his head on the pillow.

"I need to touch you this time."

Rylan's hands rubbed over Cameron's shoulders, savoring the flex of his muscles as he slowly slid them down his chest. Unable to stay away from Cameron's mouth, he leaned into kiss him while his hands continued to explore.

Soon, he needed to taste more of Cameron and he moved his mouth away from his swollen lips and down to his corded neck. He groaned, surrounded by Cameron's scent.

As his mouth moved over Cameron's collarbone, he scraped his teeth against the skin and bone, loving when Cameron bucked up and brushed their cocks together. He licked and then suckled an area of skin on his neck, loving Cameron's taste on his tongue.

Panting, Rylan ignored the need to fit Cameron inside his body and kissed down his neck and chest, loving the growling sound that escaped his throat.

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“You’re so fucking sexy,” Rylan said.

His hands braced against Cameron’s stomach and without hesitation, he moved his mouth over Cameron’s nipple and sucked it into his mouth. Needing more after a few seconds, he pulled off with a popping sound before he licked a swath over the same nipple, loving the feel of the hardened nub against his tongue. Encouraged by Cameron’s moans, he used his teeth and scraped over the sensitized skin. The low, dirty groan escaping from Cameron’s throat had Rylan reaching for the base of his cock, squeezing hard to prevent his orgasm.

Taking several deep breaths, he released his cock and continued kissing his way down Cameron’s body before he settled in between Cameron’s outstretched legs.

“Is it okay if I touch your cock?”

“Please.”

He wasted no time reaching for Cameron and wrapping his hand around his girth, squeezing, and then sliding his hand up and off. He leaned forward and licked the entire length of the underside of his cock, memorizing the softness and the musky scent. When he reached the head, his movements continued without interruption as he sucked the head of Cameron’s cock into his mouth.

“Rylan.” Cameron bucked up.

Rylan shivered and moaned around Cameron’s cock. He’d never heard his name as a plea and coming from Cameron’s mouth drove him closer to insanity.



Savoring Cameron's taste, he ran his tongue back and forth along the leaking slit, moaning as he had his first true taste of Cameron. But Rylan pulled away when Cameron's head snapped back and he tensed.

"Holy fuck."

Running his free hand over Cameron's tense thighs and stomach, Rylan swallowed him down again, taking him in inch by glorious inch. When he was halfway down, he pulled off and smiled at Cameron's stunned expression.

"You taste wonderful."

His loud moan shivered over Rylan as he relaxed his throat and took more of Cameron. When the head of his cock reached the back of his throat, he swallowed and loved it when Cameron hummed his desire at the same time his legs dropped open.

Sliding off Cameron's cock and taking a deep breath, Rylan's fingers crawled between Cameron's legs until he cupped his hand around the soft skin of his balls and worked his mouth back down on his girth.

"Ry, touch me."

Cameron canted his hips up and Rylan's knuckle brushed against Cameron's entrance.

"Yes, there. I need you there, Ry."

Reaching for the lube he dropped when he climbed on Cameron, he soaked his fingers with the liquid before he rubbed his other hand against his hard thighs, loving the trust from Cameron when he spread his legs wider. He peered up through his

eyelashes to see his face, checking for any signs of any discomfort, and when finding none, he brushed his coated thumb against Cameron's hole. He swallowed against his cock when Cameron shouted.

"Oh, god, Rylan. More, please... I need you... please."

Again, he moved his thumb over the entrance, adding pressure when Cameron thrashed his head back and forth on the pillow. He switched his thumb with his finger and this time when he pushed, Rylan entered him an inch. Rylan pulled back to watch Cameron's reactions and sucked in a breath at the sight.

He's so beautiful.

Taking him by surprise as his thought swirled, Cameron pressed his hips down and Rylan's finger disappear inside him, leaving them both panting at the sensation. Cameron was gripping him tightly and when Rylan moved to ease out of his body, Cameron reached behind him and gripped the headboard, his hips seeking more of Rylan.

Giving him what he craved, Rylan pressed inside again and gasped when Cameron rolled his hips, driving his finger deeper inside. After a few more controlled strokes, he pulled his finger out and coated two fingers this time, needing to pleasure his man thrashing on the bed. With ease, he pushed two fingers inside Cameron, loving when he opened his mouth at the sensations and let out a rumbling groan.

"Nothing has ever felt as good as you being inside me."

The next moment proved Cameron wrong when Rylan crooked his fingers and brushed against the one spot that had Cameron bucking harder against his fingers and clenched down, leaving Rylan to close his eyes at the sensation. Rylan sucked in a breath as his hips pressed against the mattress, stimulating him at the same time

giving him relief as his cock found friction.

“Another finger. Stretch me, angel.”

As Rylan took Cameron back in his mouth, he moved his three fingers inside and loved how Cameron’s body relaxed as he pressed inside. Licking up the pre-come leaking from Cameron’s cock, he searched for his prostate again as Cameron’s moaned louder. Rylan’s touch was relentless, craving Cameron’s pleasure even more than he wanted his own release.

“So close, angel.”

Rylan bent his fingers and brushed against the spot as he gagged himself on Cameron’s cock, loving the swell inside his mouth before warmth spilled down his throat. Cameron’s shout was loud in the quiet room, but Rylan closed his eyes and savored the sweet and salty come, the essence of the man who was now panting in pleasure.

As Cameron sagged back against the bed, Rylan removed his fingers and without adding additional sensations, eased off Cameron’s spent cock. He flicked his tongue against the crown to wipe up the last of his release.

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Cameron glanced down at the same time Rylan looked up to search Cameron's face for any discomfort. But as their eyes met, Rylan shivered at his shining hazel gaze.

"Can I... get a kiss?" Cameron's eyes darted around when he asked the question.

With a huge smile on his face, Rylan moved up Cameron's body, careful not to overstimulate him. But as soon as he was within reach, Cameron gripped his arms and pulled him close, kissing him.

Rylan moaned into Cameron's mouth as his own hard cock brushed against Cameron's taut stomach, reminding Rylan he hadn't come yet.

Cameron broke the kiss and with a smirk, moved Rylan until he was sitting on his stomach with his hands running up Rylan's thighs.

"I want to jerk you until you come all over my chest."

Rylan breathed out. "Yes."

His hand wrapped around Rylan's swollen, leaking cock and brushed his thumb along his slit, spreading the copious amounts of pre-come over his hand, before he stroked upward. Rylan, already panting hard the moment he straddled Cameron's stomach, struggled with his next words.

"I'm close, so close."

"Come for me, all over me, Ry. I need it."

And with one more stroke, Rylan threw his head back and tensed as the first spurt of come burst out. Soon, he had painted Cameron's chest and dropped forward, spent. Cameron wrapped his arms around Rylan's back and held him close.

By the time Rylan recovered from his orgasm, he debated whether he should close his eyes and drift off, dealing with the remnants of their lovemaking tomorrow morning, or forcing himself to get up and shower. After Cameron kissed his head, the larger man scrambled to the edge of the bed with Rylan still in his arms and stood, walking them both toward the bathroom.

"Do your legs work?" Cameron's voice was light and teasing.

"I don't think so. But I'm so tired I could sleep on the shower floor and wouldn't care."

Cameron kissed him again. "Don't worry, Ry. I'll take care of you."

He heard the shower and savored the warm water sluicing over his body, and sucked in a breath when warm cotton wrapped around him, but his eyes remained closed through it all. It wasn't until they were under the covers and he touched Cameron's hot skin, that he noticed where he was.

Rylan snuggled against Cameron's side, smiling against his skin when Cameron wrapped an arm around his back and pressed him closer until Rylan's head rested on his shoulder and their legs tangled together.

"Time to sleep." Cameron kissed the top of his head.

With the little energy he had remaining, Rylan kissed Cameron's chest. "Goodnight."

"Night."

And Rylan drifted off to sleep.

### CHAPTER TEN

#### CAMERON

Awareness of something had Cameron wake out of his deep sleep. Cameron didn't open his eyes, but he realized something, a noise, had woken him. He heard nothing other than Rylan's deep breathing and listening; he knew it wasn't the alarm he'd set last night, but something else. In response, his arm tightened, pressing Rylan closer to him.

Then he noticed warmth on one half of his body. Without the comforter, his body felt exposed and cold. He took a deep breath and couldn't help his smile when he realized the warm side of his body was where Rylan pressed close.

They had slept naked last night, allowing Cameron to run his hand up and down Rylan's back as he listened to his even breathing as he fell asleep, exhausted from all the work he'd completed during the week and the news he received from Sophia.

The night before had been eye opening for Cameron in several ways. The more time they spent together verified Rylan was the one person in his life he drew comfort from. Comfortable was such a pedestrian word, but after five hours of sleep, he couldn't think of another. All he knew was he craved Rylan's touch and couldn't get enough of kissing him.

And after last night, he wanted Rylan inside him.

He blinked open his eyes and turned toward the clock, taking note it was on half past

seven in the morning.

What woke me?

He glanced down at Rylan and watched his face relaxed in sleep, none of his muscles tense, and there was no sign he was having another nightmare. Cameron remembered they had gone to bed in the same position last night. The only difference was Rylan wrapped the comforter and sheets around his body before laying back on top of Cameron.

Over the last week, Rylan found his way against Cameron whenever they slept. Cameron would seek him out, too, and they would find themselves in the middle of the bed, wrapped in each other's arms.

Cameron didn't think it was because of bad dreams. But with Tristan butting his way back into Rylan's life, he wondered why he came back and targeted Rylan again. Until they found the reason, Cameron needed a plan to protect Rylan.

The first thing on the list would be to get a background check on Tristan. If he didn't leave Rylan alone, they would have to think about filing a restraining order and disclose the sexual assault from the past. And later that day, they would get Rylan a new phone and number so he could let his friends know about the change.

He heard footsteps outside his door and shook off his thoughts when a familiar tap tap echoed in the bedroom. Cameron cursed under his breath as Rylan blinked up at him.

"Who's knockin?" Rylan's words slurred from sleep.

Cameron kissed Rylan's forehead before he slid out of bed. He turned back and tucked Rylan under the covers.



“Go back to sleep. You’re safe.”

Rylan blinked. “Okay.” He burrowed his face against Cameron’s pillow and soon he was asleep.

Cameron smiled at the man who stole his heart as he dressed in sweats and a tee. With one last look, he unlocked the bedroom door and walked through, shutting it behind him before he headed downstairs to see his parents.

Edward and Olivia Hayes were the epitome of a loving, happy couple. While they loved Cameron, their only child, they were happiest when they were together. His father dressed like any banker on Wall Street with his crisp suits and his knotted ties. His mother was more relaxed, bohemian and beautiful.

When he entered the kitchen, he smiled at his mom sitting cross-legged on the island while his father fed her grapes.

Cameron beamed at them as he walked to the coffeemaker, grinding the beans and starting a pot, because neither of them took the time to figure out if the device worked. When he turned to face his parents and leaned back against the counter, he noticed they were staring at him.

“What?”

His mom spluttered but no actual words escaped. She was pointing at his neck.

Cameron smiled and turned toward the maker when he heard three beeps. The coffee had finished brewing. He poured three cups and slid two across the counter before he turned to grab the cream from the fridge and snagging the sugar bowl from the corner.

He watched as his parents doctored their coffee, but he leaned back in the same spot and sipped his black. Taking a glance at the clock, he turned back to his parents.

“Why do you guys like the red-eye? There are normal times you can land, you know?”

They continued to stare at him, not answering his question and their eyes darting from his neck back to his eyes. Cameron knew Rylan had marked him last night, but instead of being embarrassed by it, he loved that Rylan claimed him. He said nothing, but he turned toward the refrigerator and pulled out the veggies, eggs, and milk for the omelets he planned to make for breakfast.

“Hungry?”

“Yes.”

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Instead of hearing his parents answer, it was Rylan. When he turned toward the doorway, he spotted Rylan stumbling over to him, rubbing his eyes. He tripped and Cameron easily caught him against his chest.

Rylan's arms wrapped around his waist and he relaxed against Cameron. He cupped the back of Rylan's neck while his other hand opened against his back and rubbed up and down. He inhaled his scent when Rylan buried his face against his neck and mumbled something he didn't catch.

“Why are you up so early?”

Rylan pulled back and blinked up at him. He rubbed his eyes with his fists before he shrugged his shoulders and moved back into Cameron's embrace, gripping his tee in one fist, lifting his face and pressing a kiss against the skin under his neck.

“I got cold when you left. I sleep better cuddled up next to you, anyway.”

Cameron chuckled before movement behind Rylan's shoulder drew his attention away from Rylan and to his parents. He noticed they sat there with blank faces, but both of their mouths opened in surprise.

His mom was the first to speak. “Hello?”

Rylan jumped in his arms and let out a cute little squeak before his gaze darted up to meet his own. His eyes were wide, darting back and forth, with a look of panic marring his beautiful face.

“Hey, it’s okay. Remember when I said my parents would pop in soon?”

Rylan nodded after he tried to choke out a response.

“Well... surprise.”

Rylan snapped out of his shock and turned to see his parents who moved from the island to stand right in front of them, close enough to touch.

“Mom, dad, this is Rylan.”

They both smiled at him.

“Rylan, this is my mother, Olivia and my father, Edward.”

Without hesitation, Rylan’s hand shot out, and he shook his mom’s hand before turning to his father.

“It’s wonderful to meet both of you. You have raised a generous, wonderful, and loving man.”

When Rylan stepped back against Cameron’s body, his parents were now beaming at Rylan.

There was a second of silence before his mom screamed and pulled Rylan into what must have been a bone-crushing hug. She squeezed him for several seconds before she leaned back, her hands gripping Rylan’s shoulders.

“Oh, my, Rylan. I never thought Cam would get close enough to someone who isn’t family or his friends, and even his friends he keeps at a distance. But here you are, walking into his arms without checking to see his mood. And instead of seeing him

flinch away from you, he wrapped you closer. You are a miracle, you know that Rylan, don't you?"

Cameron couldn't help but think Rylan was cute as he stood there, eyes blinking, as he stared at his mom without knowing how to respond.

Rylan made a small noise before Cameron explained. "Mom talks to people as if they're already in the middle of a conversation and think they know what she's talking about."

"Am I dreaming? Crap, I'm dreaming. Am I naked in this one?" Rylan glanced down and blew out a breath as he plucked at his tee. "Oh, not naked. Thank you, baby Jesus."

Cameron's dad laughed, moving both hands to brace on the counter as he tucked his head and shook from the force.

Rylan turned back to Cameron. "Your parents are here, right? Not hallucinating?"

He bent down and kissed Rylan. "I think I kept you up too late last night. I would have warned you about the visit, but I didn't know."

Cameron enjoyed the blush that stained Rylan's cheeks. He caught Rylan's hand and pressed his palm against his chest when he tried to slap him.

His mom interjected. "Ah, so that explains the hickey on your neck."

Rylan's gaze traveled over the exposed skin on his neck and groaned when he spotted what his mom had pointed out. "I didn't know I did that."

Cameron moved until his mouth was close to Rylan's ear. "I like it, your mark on me."

Maybe I should leave one on you, let others know you're taken."

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He swallowed when he spotted a flare of heat in Rylan's gaze as his eyes traveled back to his neck. Cameron cleared his throat.

"Why don't you sit and I'll make breakfast?"

Rylan nodded and Cameron halted his movements with a hand on his arm. He took the time to pour Rylan his coffee and pressed the cup into his hands, watching as he turned toward his mom and dad and smiled at them. When Rylan walked toward the table, his parents followed and sat down across from him, their shoulders touching and both staring at Cameron's boyfriend.

Rylan took a sip of his coffee and then another as his gaze moved back and forth and smiled when Edward wrapped his arm around Olivia's shoulder and pulled her against his chest. It wasn't until his third sip when the inquisition began.

Cameron busied himself with cooking and brewing another pot of coffee as he listened to Rylan speak about his classes, his business, and he mentioned the charity event coming up featuring his designs. Rylan even offered to make his mom a dress for the next function she attended, which made his mom beam at his boyfriend.

"What about your family? I'm sure your parents are very proud of you."

He knew his mom meant well, but Cameron couldn't help but stiffen at her question. "Mom."

Rylan glanced up at him. "It's okay."

“You sure?”

“Yeah.” Rylan explained about his relationship with his mom and when she died, how his relationship changed between him and his father. He didn’t mention Tristan, but Cameron would when he had a chance.

“How did you two meet?”

“Well...” Rylan relayed the story and his surprise when Cameron asked him to move in with him after they’d only just met.

“So, Rylan’s your first boyfriend, sweetie? That’s great!” His mom stood to hug him and he hugged her back.

“It seems like such a juvenile word for our connection and while we agreed to label what we are to each other as boyfriends, I feel something much deeper than that.” Rylan glanced at Cameron with a smile.

Cameron plated breakfast and after he distributed them, he waited until Rylan poured fresh cups of coffee and they sat down together. Cameron pulled Rylan close.

“It’s like we’ve known each other forever. When I met him, a huge piece of myself that I didn’t know was missing snapped into place. Plus, Rylan brings color and happiness into my life by being himself and he’s now as essential as breathing.”

Cameron’s eyes moved from his parents to land on Rylan as he finished explaining. A tear that escaped concerned him as it traveled down Rylan’s soft cheek. But Rylan was beaming at him, and the tension in his chest dissipated.

“Where do you see this going?” His dad, always the logical one, had to know.



“Rylan is the one person who is meant for me. We’re not rushing into defining who we are and our relationship. We’re enjoying every day together and we’ll see where it leads us.” Cameron paused as he squeezed Rylan’s hand. “But know this, I will protect him from the world if I have to and would never push Rylan for more than he wants.”

The last part was a warning. His parents knew better, but they liked everything defined and linear, even relationships, which was why they found him so peculiar.

Rylan turned his attention to his parents. “The same goes for me, but I’m not going anywhere. I’ll take care of Cameron, too.”

His parents sat back, satisfied by their declarations as far as he could tell. Although the last thing Cameron wanted was Rylan to feel pressured into anything he wasn’t ready for, he blew out a breath when they didn’t continue with their questions.

After they finished eating, Cameron stood and Rylan followed, both heading toward the sink with dishes in their hands, a common occurrence whenever they ate at home. Rylan enjoyed washing the dishes and since he didn’t know quite where everything was in the kitchen yet, Cameron dried and put things away.

As Rylan filled the sink, he leaned over and whispered. “Do your parents disapprove of us being together?”

Cameron shook his head and was about to speak when his mom interrupted.

“There’s something you’re not telling us.”

“How do you know?”

She shrugged and Cameron glanced at Rylan for permission. Rylan nodded and went

back to scrubbing the pan he was working on as Cameron dried his hands and turned to face his parents.

He explained the trouble they were having with Tristan. He included the assault when Rylan was seventeen, but he left out the nightmares because if he told them that, his mom would insist on therapy. Not that he was against therapy, but his mom would pressure Rylan into it whether he wanted it or not. And finally, Cameron told them of his plans for Tristan.

Without hesitation, his dad pulled out his phone. “I’m texting you a lawyer’s number. Call him on Monday and he’ll tell you the exact steps you need to take from this point forward. Whatever you do, document everything. Date, time, what he said, if he tried to get physical.”

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Cameron nodded. “Yeah, we’re going out later and getting a new cell and number for Rylan.”

Rylan dried his hands on the towel and turned toward Cameron, stepping against his side and sighing with relief when Cameron put his hand on his waist and pulled him into his body.

“I don’t want to cause trouble.”

The silence in the room was deafening as the three Hayes’s stared at Rylan.

“You’re important to Cam, which mean you are a part of this family. And we protect family.”

Rylan turned and caught Cameron’s smile, knowing the sentiment given by his friends and now his parents to the man Cameron considered his entire world meant a lot to Rylan. Rylan swallowed before he spoke. “Thank you.”

His mom reached out and grabbed Rylan’s hand. “You’ll be okay.”

The morning passed with Cameron holding Rylan close as he got to know his parents and vice versa. Before noon, they stood to leave, explaining they were running late for meetings they had scheduled in Denver over the weekend.

“But I promise we’ll be back soon.” His mother hugged Rylan.

He set the alarm for the front door after they waved his parents goodbye.

Cameron picked up Rylan, encouraging him to wrap his legs around his waist, and carried him back upstairs to take a nap before they went shopping.

“I’ll always keep you safe.”

Rylan kissed him, leaving him breathless. “Let’s put it out of our minds and have fun this weekend. I don’t have a project and we don’t have class until Tuesday.”

“Yeah, that sounds good.”

They both settled down, pulling up the covers, before Rylan snuggled his head on his chest. Within seconds, Rylan’s deep breaths puffed against Cameron’s neck and as soon as he closed his eyes, he drifted off.

### CHAPTER ELEVEN

#### RYLAN

Rylan frowned as he opened the front door and heard the alarm beep, waiting for the code to turn it off. The house was dark, which was unusual. Cameron had either met Rylan on campus before they headed home or he waited for Rylan in the living room since Rylan had the last class of the afternoon on Thursdays.

His last final must have run late.

The beeping pulled him from his thoughts and he entered the six-digit code. He rearmed it after locking the front door, having made the promise to Cameron weeks before for his safety, and watched as the lights turned red.

He dropped his backpack on the chair underneath a window and draped his final project over the back before he walked over to the couch and dropped onto it with a heavy sigh. Reaching for the remote, he clicked on the TV but turned down the volume until it was nothing but background noise and leaned his head back, closing his eyes.

Relieved their long junior year was over, he groaned when he realized he and Cameron had one final year to go. At least they had a three and a half month break before the fall semester started.

After the dresses he'd made for Sophia and her friends, he'd spent time on his final project for his fashion trends class, this one a tuxedo. The suit jacket was a light olive

green with black lapels and a dark olive pocket. A black and white pocket square made the jacket pop. The pants matched the lapels, along with a white shirt and a black bowtie that completed the ensemble. Cameron was his model for the suit and Rylan smiled as he remembered how sexy he looked in it. It was more of a turn-on because Cameron was wearing something he had made.

The week before finals, Sophia had called to tell him the details of the fashion show, scheduled for the first Friday in September, which left him three months to design ten formal dresses, three men's suits, and two girl's dresses. He already had the designs for five of the dresses, and whenever he had free time, he continued sketching more ideas and picked out color the swatches for the final product.

But these past weeks since moving in with Cameron, Rylan looked forward to coming home and spending time with his boyfriend. He was learning how to cook, thanks to Cameron being a patient teacher. And after dinner, they cuddled on the couch, talking about their day or sharing parts of their lives the other missed out on. He loved those uncomplicated moments together.

Cameron took six more credits than Rylan but managed more free time and dealt with the growing issue of Rylan's safety. Taking his dad's advice, Cameron contacted the lawyer and researched the next steps to take if Tristan crossed the line with him again, but mostly, they ignored that aspect of Rylan's past.

On the days where he was busy and Cameron wasn't, he sat in Rylan's room as he completed whatever he was working on or they talked. Rylan had never laughed or felt more carefree as he did with Cameron. They both hated the time they had to spend apart because of the end of the school year, but every night they would fall asleep wrapped up together and it was enough.

Although they didn't speak about it, Rylan missed the intimacy they had the first week they lived together. They still kissed and whenever they were together, they

slept in each other's arms, but Rylan hadn't been able to bring Cameron to an orgasm with his mouth or hands, and he'd been thinking about it with more frequency the past couple of days.

As if on cue, Rylan's cock filled as he imagined pushing Cameron back against the front door the moment he had it closed behind him and dropping to his knees. Before he could speak, Rylan would have his jeans unbuttoned and his zipper down. He would meet Cameron's eyes and his fingers would push his clothing down his thighs, not even pushing them all the way off, before he would take Cameron in his mouth and suck him until he exploded down his throat.

Rylan pressed the palm of his hand against his clothed cock as he moaned. "Fuck, yes, Cameron."

He closed his eyes, debating between dragging himself upstairs and getting naked and waiting for Cameron to look for him or see where his daydream took him until he Cameron arrived home. He knew the moment he took off his clothes, he wouldn't be able to hold back his orgasm, so he waited.

With a pained groan, Rylan took his hand away from his now hardened cock and leaned back, closing his eyes tighter, and thinking about unsexy things. Deep in thought and lulled by the drone of the TV, he missed the sound of the front door opening and the sound of the alarm. It wasn't until Cameron spoke, cutting through his failure to come up with a distraction.

"Are you sleeping or thinking about murdering someone and wondering where to bury the body?"

Without opening his eyes, he smiled at the one voice he wanted to hear.

"I was thinking about ways to seduce you when you arrived home. But all thoughts

came back to the one where I pushed you against the door after taking you by surprise and sucking you off until you came down my throat.”

Rylan heard a rustling and opened his eyes to see Cameron pulling his shirt from his jeans and lifting it over his head, throwing it behind him. He moved when Cameron released the button of his jeans, slapping his hands away before Cameron could do what he fantasized about.

“Please, let me?”

When Cameron nodded, Rylan slid the zipper down and hooked his fingers on the waistband. Not taking chances, he slid them down his long legs, tapping one calf and then the other, taking them all the way off. He stood, pulling the other man into a kiss, and before long, he became lost as he savored the taste of Cameron’s mouth and swallowed his moan as his tongue continued to explore.

Breaking the kiss, he moved his mouth to nip at his neck, taking the time to caress his chest with his hands, followed by his mouth, not leaving any area untouched. His tongue darted out and pressed down over a ridge of Cameron’s taut stomach, loving the salty taste on his tongue, before he dropped to his knees.

Rylan nuzzled his cheek against the silky skin of his hard, pulsing cock and moaned.

“I missed touching you, kissing you.”

His hands roamed up Cameron’s thighs, loving the soft hair over wiry muscles as he clenched at Rylan’s touch. All the while, he couldn’t move his eyes from his beautiful dick.

Wanting a taste, but more than that, wanting to pleasure Cameron, he reached for the base of his cock. His other hand cupped his balls and not able to wait another second,



swallowed the head into his mouth, lashing his tongue against the sensitive slit, before sliding the rest of his length into his mouth.

“Oh, fuck, Rylan.”

His moans pulsed through his eager and primed body as he considered opening his own jeans and stroking his cock to completion while he sucked off Cameron.

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Surprised, he moaned in protest when Cameron reached under his arms and pulled him up and off his beautiful cock. His large hands fumbled with Rylan's jeans and boxer briefs, shoving them down and away, before he lifted Rylan into his arms and turned them, pressing his back against the wall.

“I want to watch you come apart as I stroke both of us to completion.”

“Yes, fuck, yes.”

The sensations that pierced through him as Cameron wrapped his hand over both of their cocks overwhelmed Rylan and he dropped his head back against the wall with a distinct thump. His eyes fluttered closed, a constant stream of moans escaped his throat, because Cameron knew how to touch him to set him off.

They both moaned when Rylan's hips jerked forward as Cameron ran his thumb over the slit of his dick. Soon, Cameron rubbed their combined pre-come over his hands and when he stroked, Rylan moved his cock alongside Cameron's. The friction had them both panting hard within moments.

“Kiss me.”

Pushed closer to the edge when Cameron's tongue pressed into his mouth and devoured him.

This, I missed Cameron's kiss, his touch.

They both stiffened after a few more strokes, and Rylan moaned into Cameron's

mouth at the first splash of come on his stomach. Rylan's release struck him with a fierceness that took his breath away. His hands clutched at Cameron's shoulders as he ripped his mouth away and shouted as his body jerked and twitched in Cameron's arms.

The sound of heavy breathing in the room brought Rylan back from his haze and when he focused on Cameron's eyes and his beautiful smile, he pressed forward and kissed Cameron.

"I missed you, missed being able to touch you whenever I wanted to."

Rylan nodded. "Thank the gods we have one more year, because I'm getting sick of school."

Cameron kissed his nose. "You're only saying that because of finals week. I agree with you though."

Rylan laughed as Cameron lowered his legs until his feet touched the floor. He reached for his hand and led the way upstairs to their shower.

"Did your last final go long?"

"No, I finished a half and hour sooner than I planned. I had to run an errand after class and it took longer than it should have."

Rylan couldn't help but stare at Cameron, curious as to his errand. But Cameron started the shower and pulled him inside. He turned and cupped Rylan's face, giving him a small kiss.

"It's a surprise. A good surprise, I promise. But after our shower, I'll cook you dinner and we'll talk, because I've missed so much these last few weeks."

“That sounds wonderful.”

By the time they finished eating dinner and settled on the couch, Rylan couldn't help the swell of pride when Cameron told him about the ease of some of his classes. Like he hated the required biology class he admitted he should have taken his freshman year instead of waiting, but at least it was over.

“Do you know how Tim, Aaron, and Eric did on their finals?”

“I think we're all in the same boat. They believe they passed, but they are too tired to care about their grades at the moment. What about Issa and Suzy?”

Rylan laughed. “Suzy is the most studious person I've ever met and since she's going into sports medicine, it's a good thing. Issa remembers everything she reads and studies, so she's less stressed than we have been, so I'm sure she's fine. Otherwise, she would have called me by now.”

“I'm surprised I haven't met Suzy before. Didn't she have to intern with PT for at least a semester?”

“Yeah, she started February with the basketball team. She'll work with the football team in the fall.” Rylan paused, worrying a loose thread on the couch throw that covered both of them. “Have you talked to your parents?”

Cameron nodded. “Since my mom is off for the summer, they are planning a vacation in Europe or Asia, they haven't decided yet. They've asked about you and if there has been any word from Tristan, and I promised we would call if there were any problems and they would fly back in a heartbeat.”

“They don't have to do that. But I enjoyed getting to know your parents. Your mom and I've talked a few times and I've sent her pictures of my designs.”

Cameron had insisted Rylan get a top-of-the-line cell phone with a new number. Other than their friends, Cameron's parents, and their lawyer, no one else received his unlisted number.

“So, about the surprise? I know you've been talking about needing more bolts of fabric and materials for your designs now that your sketches are almost complete.”

Rylan nodded. “Yeah, I'll make a trip to Denver to restock soon.”

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“Well, I was thinking about a larger city, somewhere that might have a wider selection of fabrics you can use for your designs.”

Cameron kissed him and Rylan’s thoughts scattered. He groaned aloud when he lifted Rylan like he weighed nothing and lowered him onto his lap. They spent the next few minutes in a slow exploration of each other’s mouths, and Rylan felt like he could breathe again. He’d missed everything about Cameron, but the intimacy was what he missed the most.

“What do you think?”

Rylan cleared his throat, giving him time to put his thoughts in order. “I’ve never had problems finding what I need in Denver.”

And I don’t want him to spend even more money on me.

Cameron sighed and pulled Rylan close until their foreheads rested together.

“I know what you’re thinking. I spend too much money on you, which I don’t, but if you’ve forgotten, my parents are rich and if I want to take you to New York for a week and then on a proper vacation in Hawaii after, I can because being with you makes me happy. The past month, we’ve been working too hard and we deserve a break, together. But to be honest, mom suggested New York and I think we’ll enjoy the laid-back vibe of Hawaii. So what do you say?”

Instead of waiting for Rylan to answer, he kissed Rylan breathless. When he pulled back, Cameron cradled Rylan against his shoulder with his arms surrounding him,

warming him.

“Let’s get away from here where no one will interrupt us, and we can see two different places neither of us have seen.”

Rylan gasped. “You’ve never been?”

“When I was younger, I was too busy with sports, friends, and studying to travel with my parents. But now I want to go with you.”

He searched Cameron’s face and his mouth turned down into a frown when he thought Rylan would refuse.

“I still have to work on finishing a few sketches while we’re gone, but I’ll have nearly two months to create the outfits and that should be plenty of time.”

The man beamed at him as if he were doing Cameron a favor. “You want to go with me?”

“Yes.” Not a second later, he was on his back on the couch, getting the life kissed out of him.

“It’ll be fun, you and me together.”

The excitement coming from Cameron was addictive. “So, when do we leave?”

Cameron laughed. “Tomorrow at three.”

Rylan wasn’t proud of the shriek that came out of his throat, but it took Cameron by surprise and he was able to push him against the back of the couch before he slipped out from under him.

“What do I pack? There’s a lot of clothes and shoes I might need. Do I need dress clothes? What’s the weather in New York this time of year? We need to get packing.”

Firm, yet familiar lips pressed against his own, and his mental list disintegrated as he moaned into Cameron’s mouth. Soon, his mind grew fuzzy, and he relaxed into Cameron’s hold as his mouth sought more.

“You do that on purpose.” Rylan’s statement had Cameron’s eyebrow raise in question. “Kiss me. You know that I can’t think when you do that and you pull me out of whatever panic I get into with a kiss, knowing I’ll melt.”

Cameron laughed.

“Not denying it, I see.”

“Nope, and here’s the plan. Tonight, we’ll go to bed and I’ll hold you while we sleep. Tomorrow, we can pack. Whatever we forget, we can get there.”

Rylan noticed the dark circles under his eyes and felt guilty. Cameron planned a trip after studying for his finals and cooked them dinner, so without a word, he checked the locks and the alarm before he reached for Cameron’s hand and pulled him upstairs toward their bedroom.

After getting ready for bed, Rylan snuggled against Cameron, his head nestled on his shoulder and sighed when Cameron’s arms wrapped around him. In the quiet darkness, curiosity got the better of him.

“How long have you been planning this?”

“Um...”



Rylan lifted his head and looked at Cameron.

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“I had the idea two days after my parents left, but the plan solidified when I noticed the exhaustion in both of us the last few weeks. Mom got me in contact with a travel agent, and she told me about the different, isolated places we could visit on the islands. I was late today picking up our plane tickets and resort reservations.”

Tears sprang up in his eyes. While Rylan had been planning ways for them to survive finals, Cameron had been thinking past this moment.

“I’ve missed spending time with you and our conversations. I’m excited, but won’t it be expensive?”

“What good is money if you can’t spend it? This time, it’s the two of us, and no matter how much we spend it’ll be worth it. Besides, when you get discovered and your designs are the next hot thing for the next several decades, then you can take me on vacation.”

Rylan blinked at him. No one had ever believed in him, truly believed he was a talent. But Cameron’s words warmed him and he believed he could do anything.

“I looked through your sketches last night and I have to say, they are amazing. The colors you use and the designs themselves are beautiful. I can’t wait to see them on a live model. And when we’re in Hawaii, I’ll design your website so you can sell online.”

Cameron wiped a tear from his cheek. He hadn’t even realized he was crying until then. “I’ve had no one—”

“I know. And I will be here to support you in whatever you want to do. You brought happiness into my life, Ry. Before I met you, I never realized how closed off I’d become. But with you, I’m relaxed enough to be myself.”

Rylan leaned up and kissed Cameron. “We’re good for each other.”

“Yes, we are.”

They were both lost in their own thoughts and Rylan soon heard Cameron’s breathing even out and deepen, letting him know he was asleep. With a smile on his face and lying next to the one man who meant everything to him, he followed soon after.

### CHAPTER TWELVE

#### CAMERON

Cameron's nervousness swamped him as he lowered himself into the aisle seat after Rylan had settled into the middle seat and buckled himself in. Adding to his anxiety, he glanced at movement next to him and stifled a groan when he noticed the man who flirted with Rylan as they sat in the concourse waiting for their flight, take a seat one row up. He could look over his shoulder and would have a perfect view of Rylan.

And Cameron could only blame himself for being on the flight.

Successful in their shopping trips in New York City; buying close to a hundred bolts of fabric and other supplies. Cameron had gone a little overboard on pushing Rylan to buy more than he needed, sensing after a few days they were both overwhelmed by the crowded city.

Knowing they couldn't bring the supplies on the plane, Rylan shipped them to Issa's and they would pick up the boxes on their way home from the airport when they returned from Hawaii.

By Tuesday afternoon, four days since they arrived in New York, they let themselves into the hotel room and with one long look between them, they both spoke.

"How about we leave early?" Cameron asked.

"Can we cut this trip short?"

Both of them blew out relieved breaths. Rylan fell into Cameron's arms and he carried him into the walk-in shower. Running around the city and checking out different stores had drained them both, so after cleaning up, Cameron called room service for dinner as Rylan lounged on the bed, watching an action movie with the sound turned down.

As they waited for their dinner, Cameron called the airline and changed their reservation. Even if he didn't have money to burn, he still would have paid the five-hundred dollar change fee to leave the noise sooner rather than later. That done, he joined Rylan on the bed. Cameron smiled when Rylan lowered his head onto his chest and Cameron ran his fingers through Rylan's soft hair until the knock came at the door.

After sleeping in, they had taken a cab to the airport, grateful for the late morning flight. He worried about the dark circles under Rylan's eyes, but as soon as he sat down next to him near their gate, Cameron opened his arm and cuddled Rylan close, listening to his deep breathing as he fell asleep.

Cameron kept Rylan close to his side and hoped he'd made the right decision with their vacation in Hawaii. He decided not to worry about it. If Rylan didn't like the island, then they would head home and enjoy their time there together.

After Cameron adjusted his huge body in the tiny seat and buckled his belt, he lifted the armrest and his arm, waiting for Rylan to snuggle close. He couldn't help but smile as Rylan pressed his face into his chest and gripped his thigh, burrowing himself as close to Cameron as he could with his belt on.

The pilots started the engines, and they taxied, heading toward the runway. With every movement closer to takeoff, Cameron gripped the free armrest and hoped Rylan didn't notice the tension filling his body.

On top of everything, Cameron sensed the man's eyes on Rylan. He ignored it for the time being.

He took several deep breaths and forced his muscles to relax a little at a time. Fifteen minutes later, he exhaled a last ragged breath before he relaxed back into his seat. Cameron's little freak out didn't affect Rylan's peaceful sleep, grateful his chest was rising and falling with deep, even breaths.

While Cameron was traveling for the first time without a true objective, it was Rylan's first time out of the state and he wanted Rylan to relax and have a good time without the responsibility he had on his shoulders for so long. And he knew Rylan was excited to see Hawaii.

Cameron's first visit to the island and it was with the most important man in his life.

One hour melded into another, then another as Rylan slept on. Cameron watched movies on his tablet to pass the time. He'd relaxed enough with his attention focused on something other than the plane, when there was a tap on his shoulder. Confused, he glanced up and spotted the man he hoped to avoid smiling down at him.

With great reluctance, he paused the movie. "Yes?"

"How long have you two been together?"

Cameron's first thought was that he couldn't remember a time without Rylan in his life. It seemed he only moved through life with little attachment or caring until Rylan smiled at him and he realized what he'd been missing.

He didn't want to say any of this aloud to this man.

"As far back as I can remember."

Not deterred by Cameron's vague answers, he asked another question. "Do you invite others to join you?"

Cameron didn't understand what the man was asking. Instead of stumbling his way through an answer, he kept quiet. Then he heard Rylan's voice, harder than he'd ever heard it before.

"No, we're exclusive."

The man's smile grew wider. "Oh, you're awake."

Cameron growled, low in his throat, but said nothing when Rylan laced their fingers together and leaned closer to press a kiss to his neck.

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“We’d like to be alone, if you don’t mind.” Rylan’s voice came across hard and uncompromising.

The man’s smile dropped a little. “I was hoping you would change your mind. You two should give me a shot.”

Cameron was about to release his belt and pummel the guy into oblivion when the flight attendant stepped in.

“Sir, take your seat.”

By the tone of his voice, the man wouldn’t ask again. The interloper gave them one last look before he turned back and sat down.

The flight attendant, Sean, his name tag read, leaned down. “I’ll intervene if he bothers you two again. Some men won’t take no for an answer.”

“Thank you.” Both Rylan and Cameron spoke at the same time.

“No problem. You two make a beautiful couple.” With a squeeze on Cameron’s arm, he headed back toward first class.

“How do you feel?” Cameron asked.

“Better. Thank you for holding me while I slept. Were you bored?”

“Nah, I like it when you’re close, even when you’re asleep. I kept myself entertained



while you caught up on sleep. I know you're exhausted."

Rylan smiled and lifted his head to brush a kiss to the corner of Cameron's lips.

"I'm not used to that much noise all the time, but I'm looking forward to Hawaii."

Rylan paused for a moment, his gaze taking in his rigid back and his grip on his tablet. Cameron tried to loosen his grip, but he couldn't bring himself to relax.

"Are you afraid of flying? Is that why you're tense?"

"Yeah, somewhat, but I'm fine. I dislike the take-offs and landings the most. Well, that's part of the reason I distracted myself."

Rylan raised an eyebrow.

"I noticed the man staring at you in the concourse and figured he would get the hint you're with me, but he continued. It took me a few minutes to realize I was jealous. I still feel it." Cameron's chuckle sounded strained and uncomfortable. He didn't want to drive Rylan away with that admission.

Rylan's gaze drew down, and he blinked a few times before he looked up and met his eyes.

"This is a horrible place for this conversation but I need to say something."

Cameron swallowed past the lump in his throat and took a deep breath before he nodded for Rylan to continue.

"For the longest time, I wasn't comfortable with who I was. I couldn't help but think I was too gay, too thin, too gangly, too everything not normal, or whatever people

considered normal. You are the first person to see me, the real me, and I wouldn't give you or what we have together up for anything in the world.

"I don't know what the future holds for the two of us, but being with you, I'm stronger and happier than I've ever been. And if you feel a fraction of what I feel, I want to do everything I can to make this work."

As Rylan stopped talking, Cameron could only hear the roar of the engines as he stared at the most beautiful person he'd ever met. Unable to stay away, he cradled Rylan's neck with his hand as he brought his mouth down for a kiss. They didn't stop until they needed to breathe, and even then, Cameron hesitated.

"I know all these emotions are new, but I want to tell you in case there is any misunderstanding. I trust you, I don't want you to doubt that."

He waited for Rylan to nod before he continued.

"But I have these feelings of protectiveness for you. I don't want to act like a Neanderthal and will try to tone it down when it's not needed, but that doesn't mean I don't have them. And know this, too. I will always do whatever I can to keep you safe."

Rylan reached for him and cupped his cheek. "You're my first relationship and I like being yours, so that doesn't bother me. But I think as long as we talk to each other and not hold anything back, then we'll be fine."

Cameron nodded. "Why haven't you ever dated before?"

"I think I was too busy trying to figure out my future I didn't stop to think about dating. And until I met you, I never felt an attraction to anyone strong enough to snag my attention."

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“You know I feel the same way about you, right?”

“Really?”

Cameron would never get enough of Rylan smiling at him.

“Yeah. You make me happy and I find I want to share every part of my life with you.”

He paused, wondering if it was too early to talk about feelings. The kind that revealed Cameron wanted Rylan forever.

“What are you thinking about?”

Cameron bit into his bottom lip and worried it for a moment, before he blurted, “Do you believe that someone could fall in love with another within weeks of meeting them?”

The breath stuttered out of Rylan’s throat and Cameron cursed himself for bringing it up so soon after, well, both of them agreed they were boyfriends. On Rylan’s face was a look of astonishment, and maybe a little fear.

Oh, shit. Oh, shit, shit, shit, shit.

Rylan cleared his throat and Cameron halted his panic attack. He looked at Rylan and noticed his mouth tilted up in a smile as he reached down and laced their fingers together.

“I don’t think there’s a schedule when people fall in love.”

Cameron flinched and Rylan raised his eyebrow in question.

“I’ve been doing a lot of research.”

“Research on what?”

He cleared his throat. “To be honest, everything. Relationships, love, gay marriage, sex... gay sex.”

“You’ve researched sex?” Rylan sounded a little amused by that.

He shrugged. “I’m very analytical and need information about everything. So I researched because I don’t want to do anything that might hurt you or turn you off.”

Rylan leaned in and Cameron hunched down, curious. “What if I said I wanted to be inside you?”

Cameron nodded and had to force himself to stop after the fourth time. “I researched that and I’m... well, I would like you inside me.”

He’s beautiful when his cheeks stain with a flush.

And thoughts of sex with Rylan led to more thoughts of touching Rylan, tasting Rylan, and his body reacted to the visuals dancing around inside his head. He wiggled against the narrow seat, finding no relief from his limited movements, and tried to banish those thoughts until they got off the plane.

Rylan cleared his throat. “So, back to your question. Yes, I believe you call fall in love in a few weeks or even a day. You feel what you feel and there’s no need to

justify to anyone. Why do you ask?”

Cameron smiled at Rylan’s answer.

“I was reading about romantic love and the euphoric feelings of a new relationship fade after two years and only after can a couple determine if they are compatible or not.”

As Rylan settled against Cameron’s chest to think about his words, he pulled the smaller man close and combed through what he knew versus what he’d read.

His parents had met in college and although they waited to get married until dad graduated, they committed to each other during their freshman year and dated exclusively throughout that time. And they were still together and as much in love as they were back then.

Although Cameron understood that love like what his parents shared existed, he also knew it was rare. His friend’s parents all divorced when they were in high school. Aaron once told him relief was all he felt when his parents separated during seventh grade because he couldn’t stand the fights and the tension. Tim had mentioned his parents fell out of love and Eric’s dad cheated on his mom and that killed any feelings she had for the man.

“Have you researched sexuality?” Rylan asked.

Cameron looked down and nodded.

“How do you identify?”

“Just one?”

Rylan shook his head. “As many as you identify with.”

“Well, although I didn’t date much or find myself sexually attracted to anyone but you and you’re a man, I would have to say gay. But since it’s only you I have feelings for, I would also identify as demisexual. It came as a surprise and a relief to know I’m not alone.”

“So you know you’re gay and demisexual with certainty?”

Cameron nodded. “Yes. Before you, I had no clue, but yes, now I’m certain.”

“Then yes, a person can fall in love within weeks of meeting someone. Just like there’s more to sexuality than heterosexual and homosexual, there’s more to love than what others define it as. Those who tell you you can’t be in love and have a framework for how love works, well, haven’t experienced what you have and can’t judge your feelings. Especially when you feel you are in love.”

He squeezed Rylan’s hand and noticed they were descending and gripped it tighter.

“At least we don’t have to fly again until tomorrow.”

Rylan smiled and said, “Why don’t we get motion sickness pills before our flight tomorrow? They should help calm your nerves.”

Instead of waiting for Cameron to answer, Rylan leaned over and kissed Cameron,

making his mind blank as he focused on Rylan's soft lips and his touch. He became so lost in the kiss; he didn't notice the landing.

### CHAPTER THIRTEEN

#### RYLAN

The sound of waves crashing against the shore, not a hundred feet from where Rylan slept in Cameron's arms, slowly woke him. Rylan smiled at the familiar sound, already used to the ocean after two weeks living in the beach house on Ewa Beach on Oahu. He blinked his eyes open and took in his surroundings.

At first, he noticed his head rose and fell with the rhythms of Cameron's deep breathing as he continued to sleep. Sometime the night before, he must have shifted down the bed until his head lay on the man's taut stomach.

The night before, Rylan teased Cameron with his mouth and hands. His lips touched almost every inch of Cameron's golden skin over the hours of his exploration, savoring each time Cameron sucked in a breath or moaned when the sensations became too much. And taking him apart, inch by glorious inch, had his body buzzing with the heady feeling he was Cameron's first. The first to worship his body, the first to kiss him until they were panting, and the first to take Cameron's hard cock into his mouth and have him explode down his throat.

He smiled at the memories as the crescendo of the birds grew louder and the distant sound of cars invaded their little island paradise, letting Rylan know the island was coming to life and it was time for them to wake.

Although he would have loved to stay in bed all day and repeat his exploration of Cameron's body, there was more of the island to see. On their many trips exploring



the beach and the surrounding towns, they had discovered delicious food, wonderful people, and perfect weather, even when it stormed in the afternoon.

But it was Cameron who'd made him feel comfortable the moment they arrived. Rylan thought New York City was exciting, but the laid-back tempo of the island fit them more. It allowed them time to spend every day together, talking about their lives and their dreams, but also sharing their favorite books, movies, embarrassing stories, and careers their young minds had come up with as children.

"A ballerina?" Cameron seemed more intrigued by the idea.

"That was one of my childhood dreams. And don't knock it. I loved how graceful they were whenever they moved and I liked the strong men. I imagined myself being lifted in the air like that. What did you want to be?"

"What didn't I want to be? Let's see, astronaut, firefighter, professional football player, cop, at one time I even thought about driving a garbage truck. After that, there was professional chef, an airline pilot, and a video game creator. What are your others?"

"Well, I thought about being a beautician, then a make-up artist for the movies, and after a backup dancer or choreographer for rock stars." Rylan smiled as he remembered all the dreams he had when his mom was still alive. She encouraged him to do anything he wanted, and those sentiments always stuck with him.

They never ran out of anything to talk about and Rylan understood on a primal level that Cameron was the one man he wanted to spend the rest of his life with. Since the first leg of their flight from New York to San Francisco, Rylan had gone over Cameron's words in his head many, many times. He hinted at his feelings, but Rylan knew he needed to find the right words to express them before he admitted anything. And Rylan was nothing but patient.

But it hadn't stopped them from exploring their attraction. He loved when Cameron pulled Rylan close and kissed him. Sometimes their mouths explored for hours, other times the kiss was heady and devouring and they both pulled back breathing hard. He learned how much Cameron enjoyed kissing and Rylan melted into his arms every time.

They hadn't progressed to sex, but exploring Cameron's body, mapping out every indent, muscle, and scar left Rylan craving more of him. And he loved when Cameron touched him. A small brush of his knuckles against his cheek, his face burrowed into Rylan's neck as he held him close, and Cameron's mouth pressed to his skin all left him feeling loved.

Rylan never knew such pleasure existed and the more they touched, the more Rylan realized Cameron's pleasure mirrored his own as they learned different ways to drive each other wild.

The first time they made love would be mind blowing.

They were in no hurry. He sensed they hadn't because the act intertwined with an admission of their feelings for each other. Until then, as long as he had Cameron, happiness lived inside him.

"What are you thinking about down there? Come to think of it why are you so far away?" Cameron lifted Rylan and moved him on top of his body.

Rylan chuckled and crossed his arms on Cameron's chest, laying his chin down on his hands.

"Morning." Cameron leaned in and kissed him.

When they pulled back, they were both breathless and Cameron's smile made his

heart skip a beat.

“Morning.”

“I’ve been thinking.”

“About what we should do today?”

Cameron gave him a shy smile before he nodded. “It ties in, yes.”

Unashamed by his nudity, Rylan shifted upright on the bed until he sat cross-legged, giving Cameron his full attention. His heart beat a little faster when Cameron traced his naked body, and the man had expressive eyes. Whenever he turned his attention to Rylan, he almost had to pinch himself because Cameron wanted him.

But he wanted to know what the other man planned, so he reached for a pillow and plopped in on his lap, breaking Cameron’s perusal. Rylan laughed at his boyfriend’s expression. It moved from disappointed that he’d been denied the view and transformed into excited.

It was Rylan’s turn to stare as Cameron moved to mirror his position across from him and let out a disappointed sound when he reached for a pillow and covered his lap, leaving Rylan no time for his examination.

He gave Rylan a smile before he reached over and cradled his hands. Cameron scooted forward until their knees touched before he glanced up.

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Rylan sat frozen in place by his serious gaze.

Cameron swallowed before he spoke. “I want you to know that I’ve been working out my feelings since our conversation on the plane. I’ve known for almost a month, but it wouldn’t be fair to both of us if I didn’t take my time to explore my feelings while we got to know each other.”

Rylan squeezed Cameron’s right hand, the one that held both in his.

“I would never pressure you into anything, well, I’m trying not to. I want to tell you if you need more time, please, take all the time you need. But despite my desperation, I want to assure you I’m not going anywhere.

“But here’s the thing, I can’t.”

His heart stuttered before it throbbed once, hard in his chest. Then it seemed then to stop altogether. His hands felt numb, and he swayed, a little light-headed. And then all his self doubts before he’d met Cameron flooded back in that moment.

Did he realize I’m not enough?

Does he realize he’s not gay, and he’s disgusted by me?

Did he think I’m an experiment, a failed one at that?

He was so absorbed in his thoughts, by the time he heard his name aloud, he realized Cameron must have said it more than once. Rylan blinked, aware he now sat on

Cameron's lap as he rubbed his back.

Rylan cleared his throat twice before he could push the words past his throat. "Sorry, I got lost in thought."

"No, angel, I took too long to explain. You thought the worst. You turned so pale, I thought you would faint."

"Sorry—"

"No, no need for you to apologize. I'll spend the rest of our lives reminding you how much I love you and want you."

A gasp escaped Rylan's throat and his hand shot up and covered his mouth. He lowered it enough to speak. "You... you love... me?"

"Yes, angel. I love you so much."

Rylan cupped Cameron's face and kissed him until they broke away, their chests heaving and their bodies shaking with need.

"I love you, too. So much, I can't even express how much."

Cameron rested his forehead on Rylan's.

"I've wanted to tell you so many times. But I worried about telling you at home because I didn't want you to feel awkward living with me if you didn't feel the same way. And then while we've been here on the island, I came up with a plan and I wanted to make it perfect before I admitted my feelings and it took a few extra days for everything to come together. Despite my plan, I don't want you to feel as though you're forced to agree—"

Rylan interrupted by kissing Cameron until he moaned into his mouth. The vibrations shivered over Rylan and he moaned right back. When he pulled back, he cupped his face and made sure he had Cameron's attention.

"I will always tell you the truth and please, don't be afraid of asking me anything. I won't dismiss it out of hand and if I need more time to think about it, I'll tell you. I promise."

Cameron nodded, a determined look came over his face, making him look fierce and beautiful. But he gasped when Cameron lifted Rylan off his lap and sat him next to the headboard. He then stood and walked toward the closet where they stored their empty suitcases when they arrived two weeks previous.

Rylan gazed on in amazement as Cameron, in all his naked glory, strode back to him with his hands tucked behind his back.

Without knowing why, Rylan scooted forward until he sat on the edge of the bed before he uncurled his legs and placed his feet on the carpet.

Cameron stilled his movement, placing his left hand on Rylan's exposed hip and squeezed. He lowered himself onto his knees before he brushed another light kiss against his lips.

"Rylan Ellis, I know we met a short time ago, and it appears I'm rushing into a decision, but I know what I feel and now I know how you feel, I want to ask you a question."

Rylan hadn't realized his head was nodding up and down until Cameron laughed and moved his hand from around his back.

On the palm of his hand sat a black velvet box.

Rylan looked between Cameron's eyes and the closed box several times. Before Cameron could speak, Rylan's words erupted from his throat.

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“Yes, yes, I will, yes. Last week, next week, next year, the answer will always be yes,” Rylan paused, “oh, shit, I ruined your proposal, didn’t I?”

Shaking his head, Cameron cupped the back of Rylan’s neck and pulled him forward into a breathless kiss. This kiss was intense, making every nerve ending in Rylan’s body crave more of his touch.

When Cameron pulled away, he captured Rylan’s gaze. He couldn’t glance away and he smiled when noticed his hazel gaze shone with love, for him.

“No, angel, you couldn’t ruin anything. I’ll remember this morning forever.”

Rylan beamed at his fiancé. “When?”

Cameron’s face flushed and despite everything intimate and sexual they spoke about, he’d never seen him blush.

“Well, I picked up your ring yesterday. I had to special order it from the mainland, so I made the arrangements for us to get married today.”

He searched Rylan’s face with concern, but Rylan couldn’t speak for a moment as happiness, overwhelming happiness, surged through him. Not wanting any space between them, he threw himself into Cameron’s arms and held on tight.

Thinking about all they needed before the ceremony and not knowing what time they were getting married, Rylan pulled back.



“We need to get something to wear for the ceremony, and grab witnesses. And what about your ring? Do you even want a ring?”

Cameron smiled. “It’s already taken care of. I called Aaron, Tim, and Eric and they picked up Issa and Suzy on the way to the airport yesterday. Suzy wanted to pick out what we’re going to wear and Tim found a minister to marry us. The ceremony’s on the beach outside their hotel. And for my ring, it matches yours.”

He held the ring box up, showing two separate bands nestled in black. Rylan held his breath as Cameron removed one of the rings from the box. He lifted Rylan’s left hand and flipped it around to press a gentle kiss to his palm before he moved it back, taking that moment to slide a platinum band with two thin lines of black diamonds adorning both edges, onto his finger.

“I’ll wait until after our vows and then I’ll wear my ring.”

“I love you, Cameron Hayes.”

Cameron’s smile lit up the room and as he leaned forward to kiss him, he said against his lips, “And I will love you for the rest of my life and beyond, Rylan Ellis.”

### CHAPTER FOURTEEN

#### RYLAN

Rylan sat on his new husband's lap as they and their friends lounged around the fire pit outside the hotel on their own private beach. His body warmed as he pressed closer to Cameron, nuzzling his face against his neck, before he gazed out on the beach and watched as the sun set on their wedding day.

"Here, try this Rylan."

Not wanting to leave the comfortable spot, Rylan pressed his lips to Cameron's jaw and smiled when his large arms tightened around his body. Issa, insistent, pinched his ass, making him jerk. He lifted his head to glare at his friend, but her smile was infectious and he reached for the glass she was holding out.

He gazed at the drink that was reddish orange and he must have made a face because Cameron chuckled, his body shaking underneath Rylan.

"You try it first." Rylan held the straw near his mouth.

Cameron took a sip and coughed. Rylan could see Issa's evil smile as she sat in the lounge next to them.

"That is strong. Holy crap, what's in it?"

"Rum, tequila, and something else but at least it's mixed with watermelon and other

juices.”

“Yeah, Issa, you don’t taste juice in this.” Cameron’s pushed the glass back into his hand.

She threw her head back and laughed. Rylan, curious, took a sip and while the last of the fruit flavor was in the background, the rest was pure alcohol. While he didn’t cough, he almost spit it out the moment he had a taste.

Tim walked closer and Rylan put the drink in his hand. Tim shrugged and lifted the glass.

“I wouldn’t, man,” Aaron chimed in.

“Yeah, Issa only ordered it because it was the strongest drink on the menu.”

Issa’s laughter was contagious and Rylan found himself grateful for his best friend.

“Have you tried it, Suzy?” Cameron asked.

“After living with Issa for a few years, I know not to drink or eat anything without making it for myself. She loves to put chili sauce on everything.” Suzy shook her head at her roommate and friend.

Tim, instead of taking their advice, took a large drink. As soon as he swallowed, his eyes bulged, and he handed the rest to Issa. “Holy shit.”

Cameron settled back against his chair and settled Rylan’s head against his shoulder.

“Hey, angel, why don’t we order dinner?”

Rylan chuckled at Tim’s flushed face and nodded. “Yeah, sounds good.”

As Cameron called for food service, Rylan thought back on the day.

Soon after the proposal, which Rylan would remember for the rest of his days, they showered and headed toward the place Cameron booked for their friends. It thrilled him he would marry the man he loved, and as they drove closer to the hotel, the more excited he became.

But it was seeing his friends, smiling and hugging both he and Cameron, that solidified he'd made the right decision. Dreams such as living with Cameron, having him tell Rylan he loved him, seemed unattainable months ago. But one night had changed everything.

And he knew he would never take their relationship for granted.

"Okay, we'll kidnap Rylan and get him dressed in our room," Issa said.

"And we have everything in our suite for Cameron. See you in an hour on the beach?" Aaron asked.

"Yep."

Cameron moved closer and kissed Rylan. It was short, but as he blinked open his eyes, the love radiating from Cameron's smile also shone in his hazel eyes.

"I love you."

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“I love you, too, angel.”

Issa dragged him to the elevators, Suzy next to him, jumping up and down in excitement.

“I love weddings and you two, well, you are the cutest couple. Thank you for inviting me.”

Rylan reached for Suzy’s hand, giving it a squeeze, before he hugged Issa from behind. “Thank you for being here. I couldn’t get married without you two and the trio here.”

“You know Eric hates that?”

“Yeah, but he loves Cameron and I’m with Cameron so he smiles and shakes his head. He’ll get used to it. Besides, I can see the smile he tries to hide when I say it. They are always together; football, living in the same house, they even have most of their classes together.”

As Issa opened the door to their room, Rylan’s nerves flared. And that meant his mind questioned every decision and every motive behind the last few weeks. He paced the small room, wondering if he was what Cameron wanted. They were only twenty-one and despite Cameron being demi, what if he changed his mind later?

It wasn’t until Issa stopped his movements by placing her hands on his shoulders, giving him a quick shake, that he focused back on the present.

“Stop freaking out. I know you, you are thinking about things not even in the realm of logical. You know he loves you, anyone can see it every time he looks at you. Hell, he’d give you the moon if it was obtainable. Whatever doubts you have he can’t love you or will fall out of love with you, you don’t have to worry.”

Rylan cleared his throat several times before he asked, “How do you know this?”

Issa pulled him into a hug and he could feel Suzy join in. He smiled at his friends, loving them a little more at that moment.

When Issa pulled back, she captured Rylan’s gaze in hers. “Because I’ve seen you throughout the years. You work too hard and despite how limited your time is, you’ve been there for me throughout my many breakups and broken hearts with a pint of ice cream and all the gore related movies you got your hands on because you understood I needed that. You welcomed Suzy with a big hug the first time you met and whenever we need you, you don’t ask questions, you show up.

“But you don’t take care of yourself. You never think about yourself. Cameron is there making sure you eat, that you get enough sleep, and you’re happier with him. I love that you are with him.”

Rylan breathed out. “Oh, well, I was worried about that. That maybe you two thought I was rushing into this without thinking it through.”

“Oh, honey. Cameron’s feelings for you have been obvious since you two met.”

Rylan hugged both women, relaxing at Issa words. Instead of Issa getting sentimental, which wasn’t her style, she told him to strip.

“Suzy picked out your wedding outfits and I think they fit with where you’re getting married.”

Holding out a simplistic white button-down shirt and a pair of green and white print board shorts, Rylan smiled at the outfit.

“It’s perfect, Suzy, thank you.”

The next feverish minutes had Rylan changing in the bathroom as Issa and Suzy changed into their beautiful strapless white, blue, and green floral sundresses. They didn’t bother with shoes and after Suzy adjusted his collar and Issa snapped pictures on her phone; they headed downstairs to the beach where he was to get married.

When he spotted Cameron standing near the front of the aisle looking composed, a nervousness that reappeared on the walk toward the beach, settled.

Both Issa and Suzy kissed Rylan’s cheek before they took their seats.

Cameron smiled as he stood in front of Rylan, taking his hands. Rylan noticed he wore something similar to his own outfit, except his board shorts were blue and white with the same floral pattern on Rylan’s. The white of the shirt emphasized his caramel skin and his beautiful hazel eyes.

I can’t believe this lovely, sweet, and sexy-as-sin man will be mine. And I’ll be his.

“You’re so handsome,” Rylan blurted.

“So are you, angel. Are you ready to get married?”

Cameron’s face lit up with excitement as Rylan nodded.

During the ceremony, Rylan couldn’t take his eyes away from Cameron’s expressions; wavering between awe and love. His soft smile made Rylan’s heart race and his hazel eyes never left his own gaze. He felt both loved and impatient for the

end of the ceremony. Cameron centered him with a quick squeeze of his hands and as Rylan glanced up, his smile widened.

Cameron, confident in their decision to get married, waited patiently with a smile on his face. But time slowed when they spoke of love and dedication for the rest of their lives and Rylan knew they would both keep their word to love and cherish. Cameron beamed at him, a smile so bright it brought tears to Rylan's eyes as they were pronounced husband and husband.

After they signed their marriage license, Rylan turned toward Cameron.



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“I love you, Cameron Ellis-Hayes.”

“And I love you, Rylan Ellis-Hayes.”

With a quick thank you toward the smiling minister, their friends led them to a secluded outdoor restaurant on the beach for the reception.

Rylan understood, on some level, that days like their wedding day were spectacularly rare, but the happiness and the memories would be with him for a lifetime.

Pulled from his thoughts when Cameron tightened his arms around Rylan’s back, he snuggled his cheek against Cameron’s chest as he sat in his husband’s lap, all of them awed by the gorgeous sunset.

The food arrived and Cameron barreled his way in and made Rylan a plate before the trio hoarded the food. Cameron gave him a pointed look and Rylan ate, pulling apart the grilled fish with his fingers and devouring it, not realizing until that moment how hungry he was. As they finished eating, Rylan remembered who hadn’t been at their wedding.

“Why didn’t your parents come?”

“Dad scheduled a conference he couldn’t cancel, and you know mom, always by his side. Although now I understand why after all these years. Mom said she wants to take us out to dinner to celebrate when we get home. They also bought us something, as mom put it, hugely extravagant. Oh, mom said they’ll be there for the fashion show and she can’t wait.”

Rylan felt a little guilty and crawled back onto Cameron's lap. "Should we have waited for them before we got married?"

Cameron shook his head. "I don't think I could have waited. With you, well, you're my one absolute certainty and I love you're my husband."

"I know, I feel the same way. And now we have three months of no school."

Shaking his head, Cameron said, "You have to sketch your designs and I have to create your website."

"It would be nice to have control over my work and if the fashion show succeeds..."

"You will. Soon, we'll expand your studio and maybe hire an assistant for you."

Rylan looked at him, stunned. "You mean the one in the house?"

Cameron nodded. "I was thinking about moving our bedroom downstairs and using our room now as a closet of sorts for your creations and expand the two bedrooms, your studio and the smaller room next to it, into a larger space."

"How long have you been thinking about this?"

Rylan understood Cameron was a man who did nothing half-heartedly, but Rylan hadn't thought about expanding. He took things one day at a time and hoped they worked out for the best.

"Right after your appointment with Sophia and she asked you to create for the fashion show." Cameron paused and reached for Rylan's hand. When Rylan looked up and caught Cameron's gaze, he continued. "All I want to do for the rest of our lives is to make you happy."

Rylan wrapped his arms around Cameron's shoulders. Never having been in love before Cameron and knowing how much he loved his new husband, he took a moment to get his overwhelming emotions under control. And to distract himself from bursting into tears at Cameron's thoughtfulness, he leaned in until his mouth brushed against his husband's ear.

"The only thing that would make me happy would be for you to take me back to our bungalow and love me. I want you inside me, Cameron."

Rylan squeaked as Cameron stood, his arms holding Rylan close to his body.

"We're... yeah... we're turning in for the night. Thanks for being here and everything you've done for us. We love you guys."

Cameron glanced at everyone, including Issa and Suzy, who smiled wide in return.

"We love you, too, man. We'll see you two tomorrow afternoon," Aaron said.

The rest of them nodded and without hesitation, Cameron walked toward the exit and handed the valet their parking ticket.

Within a minute, their rental pulled up and Cameron belted Rylan into the front passenger seat and hurried around to drive them back to their secluded paradise.

Rylan laced their fingers together and when Cameron looked over, he could see Cameron's dilated pupils and noticed his chest was heaving up and down. With a smile of promise, Cameron pulled away from the hotel.

It was going to be one hell of a night.

### CHAPTER FIFTEEN

#### CAMERON

Cameron was sure Rylan could feel his body vibrate as he walked them over the threshold. On the way from the car toward the door of their bungalow, Cameron kept Rylan close.

As soon as they locked the door behind them, he pressed Rylan against the door and kissed his husband. He felt scorched from the promise of their kiss and what was to come.

Although he should have been, Cameron wasn't apprehensive about making love to Rylan for the first time. He hadn't been high-strung throughout the day, even after their vows. The words shared between them, and the ones from the minister that tied them together for life, only strengthened what he felt for Rylan.

"I'm the luckiest man alive."

Rylan chuckled. "I don't think I ever believed in luck, one way or the other, but after I met you, I do."

Instead of the desperate kiss they shared during their most intimate moments, once Cameron's lips met Rylan's, the kiss became exploring and sensual, leaving his breath stuck somewhere in his throat. His eyes closed, and he lifted Rylan into his arms, tilting his head and deepening the kiss.

Several breathless minutes later, Cameron shook with need. “I want you naked, in the middle of the bed as I worship every inch of your naked skin before I make love to you.”

Rylan reached for Cameron, pulling him close. “I want that, I want everything with you.”

Cameron nodded and walked them both back toward the bedroom. The only sounds in the place were the waves crashing against the shore and their harsh breathing. As soon as they reached the bed, Cameron laid Rylan on the bed on top of the light comforter and followed until their chests pressed together.

He groaned as Rylan sought his mouth.

Rylan kissed how he lived life. He was all in and every time Cameron was the focus of his attention, he couldn't help but feel special.

He could have chosen anyone. But Cameron realized, from the moment they spoke to each other at the club to this exact one with Rylan in his arms, their relationship would survive because they were essential to each other.

The next few minutes were a whirlwind of discarded garments and mouths only separating when a piece of clothing had gotten in their way. He ran his hands over every inch of skin he exposed, his mouth seeking Rylan's, heightening their desire for each other.

Cameron kept his eyes open, measuring each reaction he drew from Rylan. When they were both naked, Cameron, who found himself on the brink, sat back on his haunches as he kept their connection by rubbing Rylan's thighs.

He couldn't tear his gaze away from the man he loved. He smiled as he noticed

Rylan's half-lidded, half-focused look. Rylan's reactions to his touch had, from time to time, almost pushed him over the edge whenever a sexy sound escaped his throat or his hands reached for him, needing to touch him as much as Cameron needed Rylan. With the slight flush of his cheeks and his mouth opened as his breathing became short and choppy, Cameron thought he looked like sin incarnate.

His eyes traveled along his elegant neck and he had a sudden desire to leave his mark. Cameron moved lower, watching Rylan's smooth chest rise and fall. His light brown nipples were erect and Cameron's mouth watered at the sight. Holding back, his gaze continued down his tight stomach, over the sensual cut of his hips and down to his full, throbbing cock.

"Are you going to touch me soon?" Rylan's voice came out scratchy and deep with need.

His gaze darted up and Cameron swallowed past the lump in his throat at the sight of his husband laid out for him. He nodded and lifted Rylan's right leg and pressed a kiss to the bottom of his foot, molding his hands and rubbing them over Rylan's defined calf.

Over the next several minutes, Cameron's mouth followed the trail his hands were taking as he kissed Rylan's inner thighs, over the cut of his hips, along his taut stomach and absorbed the sounds he made. Cameron didn't stop touching Rylan.

"Cameron.More."

His cock jumped and his brain supplied the thought he should look for the lube, but he ignored his insistent body as he kissed and licked the skin around Rylan's stomach before he pressed a kiss to his belly button.

"Yes."

He slid hands up his sides and loved the little jump Rylan gave him as he stroked over a ticklish area. His lips explored while his tongue tasted Rylan's skin. He must have murmured Rylan's name over and over again, because the next moment, the sound cut off as Rylan gripped his hair in his fist and lifted his head until their gazes met.

"I need you inside me, Cameron. Please."

Cameron reached for the base of his cock and squeezed, hard. He reached Rylan's mouth at the same time Rylan lifted his head and wrapped his arms around Cameron's shoulders, slamming their mouths together in a kiss that spoke of both love and desperation.

As they broke the kiss, Cameron drew in several deep breaths. "Are you sure, angel?"

Without hesitation, reached over and opened the drawer, pulling out the bottle of lube and slapped it into Cameron's outstretched hand.

"I'll do everything I can to make this amazing for you."

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Rylan cupped Cameron's face. "Everything we do is spectacular. As long as you enjoy yourself that is more than enough to turn me on and push me over the edge."

He placed a quick kiss against Rylan's swollen lips before Cameron pulled back slightly.

"I'll open you up with my fingers. I need you too much right now to drive you crazy. But next time, it'll be with my tongue."

The moan from his husband had Cameron glance up at the same moment Rylan's cock jumped against his stomach, smearing pre-come along his beautiful skin. He leaned forward to lick his essence before sucking the head of his cock into his mouth, running his tongue along the slit.

Cameron poured lube on the fingers of his right hand and while he suckled at Rylan's cock, his thumb brushed against his hole.

"Oh, fuck. More."

They both gasped as Cameron replaced his thumb with his finger and because he used almost too much lube, his finger slid in to the first knuckle. He froze and glanced up to gauge Rylan's reaction.

"So good, please?"

Although Rylan had stretched him before, Cameron had never felt in control enough to do the same to Rylan. But he groaned as he pressed deeper inside Rylan and when



he squeezed and bucked his hips, asking for more from him, Cameron bit back a curse and prayed he wouldn't come.

To distract himself, he moved his finger inside and then out, all the while watching Rylan's reactions. His neck and chest flushed with desire, his head thrown back as his fists clenched the sheets tighter.

"You're so beautiful."

After several more strokes, he pulled his finger out and kissed Rylan's thigh when he moaned at the loss. He, again using too much lube, slicked two fingers and when he pressed against Rylan's hole, he shifted his hips down and swallowed the tips of Cameron's fingers.

"You're so hot and tight."

He brushed against something firm and the next moment, Rylan clamped down on his fingers and a shiver overtook his body as he moaned at the sensations.

"More, do that again."

The next slide inside, Cameron crooked his fingers and waited for a reaction. At first, Rylan fucked himself on his fingers, but then, as he kept brushing over his prostate, Rylan moaned and Cameron watched in rapt attention as his cock twitched, beading at the tip. Cameron leaned forward and licked Rylan, savoring his taste.

"That's it, angel, take your pleasure."

Rylan tucked his arms underneath his legs and when he exposed more of himself to Cameron's view, he lifted his husband's hips and his tongue darted out and licked between his fingers. The sounds he drew from Rylan had him squirming on the bed,

but the moment his tongue slipped inside, all thoughts of his own pleasure fell away.

For several minutes, Cameron concentrated on drawing more from Rylan, but his fingers and tongue weren't enough.

"Oh fuck, Cameron. More, love, I need more."

His tongue moved from his entrance to the sensitive skin underneath his balls and pressed against the area, loving the way Rylan's hips jerked and then stilled as he pressed three fingers inside.

For a long minute, Rylan didn't move and when Cameron looked up, his beautiful husband looked as though he was taken apart piece by glorious piece and loving every moment of his destruction.

With a few more thrusts, Cameron knew it was time to move on when Rylan's hand flew from clutching the sheet to wrapping his fingers around the base of his cock, whimpering.

With gentle movements, Cameron removed his fingers from Rylan, almost coming when Rylan's hole pulsed, seeking more. He surged forward and slammed their lips together, loving how Rylan clutched at him, his tongue tasting his own essence.

"Ready, angel?"

"Yes, yes, love, I'm ready for you."

Unable to speak, Cameron shivered as he coated his cock. Not taking any chances, he gave his cock two quick strokes and when he glanced up, Rylan's face exuded pure ecstasy and he loved he put that look on his face.

“Do you want to flip over?”

Rylan shook his head and lifted his legs to straddle Cameron’s hips and used his hands to spread himself open. “I want to see you when you come in me.”

“Angel, I won’t last if you keep talking like that. Ready?”

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Rylan nodded and Cameron watched his eyes widen as he pressed the head against his entrance. His face relaxed as Cameron pushed past the first ring of muscle and they both groaned at the sensations. Rylan lifted his head to kiss him.

The kiss left him breathless, and he groaned when Rylan wrapped his arms around his shoulders. His cock pressed deeper inside and he'd never seen such a beautiful sight as he glanced down to see Rylan's flushed face, eyes wide and his mouth open as a loud moan escaped his throat.

Soon, warm, wet heat surrounded him and he groaned aloud. Unable to stay away, he kissed Rylan, the deep kiss had tears well in his eyes. Keeping his hips as still as he could, he savored the rumbles of Rylan's moans as he kissed his husband breathless.

"Are you okay, Ry?"

Rylan moaned and squeezed around his cock. "You feel spectacular, but I need you to move."

Taking a deep breath in, he pulled his hips back before closing his eyes and the intense awareness he was inside Rylan pushed him further to the edge. He pushed back inside and his head snapped up when Rylan growled at him.

"Cameron, please? Fuck me, hard. I can take it, I won't break."

The control he had a tenuous hold on from the moment they left the hotel, snapped. He slid his arms underneath Rylan's shoulders and brushed a kiss against Rylan's mouth when his brows drew down in confusion.

With ease, he lifted Rylan until the angle of his movement caused him to gasp in pleasure. At the sound, he drove his hips up and impaled his cock inside Rylan. The next stroke, he drove Rylan down onto his cock as he thrust up, groaning as Rylan wrapped his legs around his waist, begging for more.

Unable to control himself, he watched Rylan as his movements became almost violent. But instead of being horrified by Cameron's animalistic movements, Rylan threw his head back as a loud moan slipped from his throat, his skin slicked with sweat as a lovely flush bloomed over his chest, neck, and face.

"Yes, I love this. I love you inside me."

Each drive brought them both closer to the brink and Cameron sensed Rylan needed more to push him past the edge. Not wanting to lose their connection, he spread his thighs so he could balance Rylan on his lap.

With a hand on the back of his neck, holding him close, Cameron moved his other hand to Rylan's cock and matched his strokes with the rhythm of his hips as he drove inside the man he loved.

Rylan's eyes met Cameron's, the love they shared reflected back at him without a word spoken between them. Their movements natural and their passion explosive.

Soon the sensations became overwhelming.

Cameron shouted his husband's name as he jerked his hips up, pressing Rylan down on his cock. He released inside Rylan at the same time his husband moaned his name and came on his chest.

Unable to catch his breath, Cameron pulled Rylan close as Rylan continued to squeeze his orgasm out of him. He captured his angel's mouth and swallowed the rest

of his moans.

He loosened his hand and moved it to Rylan's back, holding him against his chest, as Rylan dropped his head on Cameron's shoulder. His harsh breaths brushing against his hot skin and drawing a shudder from him.

"Was it worth the wait?" Rylan asked.

Cameron pulled back only far enough to capture Rylan's gaze.

"It was perfect because of you. I never felt I missed out because I know now I waited my entire life for you. Life has color and I'm happy. I love you, so much more than I can ever hope to express."

"I love you, too, Cameron."

With a groan, Cameron slowly pulled his softening cock out of his husband before he lifted Rylan off the bed and walked toward the bathroom.

"Let's shower before bed. Are you sore?"

Rylan stretched, trusting Cameron not to drop him as his back arched and his arms lifted above his head. Cameron leaned down and pressed a kiss to his throat, drawing a giggle from Rylan.

"No, I'm not sore. But I'm tired."

He nodded and turned on the water. Waiting for the water to heat, he turned back to Rylan and watched him blink as the day caught up with him. They had gotten married and to Cameron; it was the greatest decision he'd ever made. Rylan was his, and he was Rylan's.

Cameron kissed Rylan's forehead and stepped inside the steaming shower stall, unable to prevent a moan as the water sluiced over his muscles. He moved Rylan under the spray and reached for the loofah, lathering it until it was overflowing with white, and cleaned Rylan.

Rylan sagged against him as he stood, so he hurried through his own shower before he shut off the water. Cameron snagged a towel and dried Rylan with quick movements. He should have been more thorough, but when Rylan yawned, he figured he was thorough enough.

He lifted Rylan into his arms and walked toward the bed. Rylan's breathing evened out as Cameron pulled down the sheets and laid Rylan down on the mattress, following him down. As he pulled Rylan close, he kissed him on his forehead believing he was already asleep.

*Source Creation Date: July 9, 2025, 7:59 am*

“Today was the best day of my life.”

“Mine, too, Ry. And we still have several days before we head home.”

Rylan smiled. “Can we spend them in bed?”

“Sure.” Cameron would do anything for his husband.

Already sensing his moods, Cameron glanced down at Rylan when he felt him tense.

“What is it, angel?”

Rylan hesitated, biting his lower lip. “When we get home, we’ll... make time for each other right?”

“You are my priority, Rylan. As long as you’re happy and we’re together, we’ll be fine. But if you ever feel neglected, tell me. And I promise to tell you everything.”

“Good, I’m glad.”

“Why were you worried?”

Blinking at him, Rylan said, “I know how busy we’ll be over the next couple of months, more so when school starts again, but I don’t want to get so lost in my projects I neglect you and our relationship.”

“Even if I could stay away from you, I wouldn’t. I’ll be working in the same room



and remind you when you need to eat and sleep. It's you and me together."

Rylan cuddled into Cameron's chest and he squeezed him close.

"I love you."

"I love you, too, angel. More than anything."

Cameron knew whatever happened when they went back home, he would protect Rylan and do everything in his power to make him happy. It was a silent promise to the man he loved most in this world.

### CHAPTER SIXTEEN

#### RYLAN

Rylan laughed and squeezed Cameron's hand as their waitress, a woman with a wicked sense of humor, put their empty plates back down on the table and slid in the booth next to Rylan. Steffie put her elbows on the table and rested her chin on her hands.

"Okay, now you have my full attention. How long have you been together?"

"We are celebrating our five-week wedding anniversary but we've been living together for three months." Rylan's heart beat hard in his chest when Cameron looked at him and squeezed his hand.

"Love at first sight?"

"It was for me," both stated at the same time.

Steffie beamed at both of them. "You two are the sweetest. After working this job for a while, you can tell those couples who love each other or those going through the motions of being together, and I can tell you are the former."

Rylan was about to speak when an angry man in a blue button-down shirt appeared at the end of the booth, his khakis and haircut screamed manager.

"What are you doing?" he asked in a clipped tone.

“I asked her to sit since she was so friendly and we occupied her time. It was our fault.”

Rylan smiled at his husband. He cared about other people and would come to their rescue whether they needed help or not. Rylan jumped when the manager’s voice came out as a growl.

“I don’t care.”

Before Steffie could speak or stand to be on level ground, he added, “You’re fired.”

He turned and walked away without another look at any of them at the table. Rylan glanced around and customers sitting at surrounding tables, Cameron, and Steffie were all stunned by the viciousness coming from a man who managed people.

“What an absolute dick.” Steffie mumbled under her breath.

Cameron barked out a laugh as Rylan covered his own mouth with his hand. That broke the tension and the other diners went back to their own conversations and food.

“Well, I guess I have to search for another job I hate.”

Rylan glanced over at Cameron who had his eyebrow raised. He was thinking the same thing.

“What is the likelihood?” Cameron asked.

He shrugged. “I don’t know, but since I’ve met you, I believe anything is possible.”

“Hey, Steffie, how would you rate your organizational skills?”

She blinked at Cameron but answered. “Great, but I’m not qualified for a lot of jobs because I’m still in school and waitressing jobs pay more than most.”

“Well, we wanted to hire someone who can order supplies, schedule appointments, and keep Rylan on track with his projects. Do you think that’s something that would interest you?”

“Sure, I can do that,” she paused for a long moment, “but what do you do?”

“I’m a fashion designer. There is a charity auction coming up next month and Cameron created a website where I sell my creations online. I’m getting several orders already, but I forget the small details like what day it is. And maybe everything else when I get busy.”

Steffie’s eyes widened in surprise. “Can I see your website?”

Cameron handed over his phone, and they both watched for Steffie’s reaction, Rylan chewing his lower lip, as she scrolled through the site. Her eyes widened as she looked through the designs already up for sale.

“Wow. These are gorgeous.” Her eyes remained glued to the screen for a few more minutes before she handed the phone back to Cameron. “When would you like me to start?”

“How about next Monday? That will give us time to get projects set up for you.” Cameron gave her a figure she would make per week, and she squealed and hugged Rylan, who laughed and hugged her back.

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“Yes, that sounds perfect. I shouldn’t tell you this, but I would work for less. I get to hang out with you two and to see your designs come to life.”

Rylan smiled. “You may have to travel to Denver with us for the fashion show and occasional fittings.”

“I’d be okay with that. But I have to tell you I don’t really have a reliable car—”

“We would drive down together, you don’t have to worry.”

“Wonderful. I’ll see you next Monday.”

They exchanged numbers and Cameron texted her their address.

“Now I have to go change and hand in my uniform.” She grimaced at the green button down and khakis. “I’ll see you soon, and thank you, for this chance.”

Steffie waved as she tracked to the back of the restaurant. Rylan had a good feeling about her.

Cameron left several twenties on the table and stood, taking Rylan’s hand in his as they walked toward the exit and their car.

“I hope she’ll like the job and stay. I was worried about finding someone I liked enough to spend most of my day with, but I think she’ll be great.”

Rylan hugged Cameron and tilted his head up to kiss him as soon as they arrived at

the passenger door.

“Fate has a way of introducing you to people when you need them.”

He couldn't disagree, but all thoughts disappeared the moment Cameron swept his tongue inside his mouth and devoured him. Rylan's body reacted, and he pressed closer, shivering at the moan coming from deep in Cameron's chest. He was breathless and aching when he pulled back.

“Who am I to doubt fate? It brought you into my life.” Rylan squeezed Cameron's hand.

Cameron held the door open for Rylan before getting in the car. As he started down the street, he reached out and linked their hands together.

“Is this how you pictured married life?” Cameron asked.

Rylan shook his head.

“The only married couple I knew were my parents and by the end of my mom's life, they had a strained marriage. I asked mom before she passed what about dad make her fall for him? She was silent for a long while before she admitted it was her one chance to have kids.

“I had no expectations of marriage after that. You make me happy; when I wake up in your arms every morning, when we make love every night, and every moment in between. I think we both want the same thing. Time together and love. And I want to give you all that and more. What about you?”

Cameron thought about his question for a moment.

“To be honest, I never understood when my parents spoke about finding the perfect person you could depend on and trust, but I found that and more with you. It’s smiling whenever I think about you, and it makes me happy when you eat or when you relax with me after a long day. And I want to share everything with you.”

Rylan leaned over the console when he stopped at the red light and kissed Cameron.

“I love you. Now, take me home so I can worship your body all night long.”

Cameron slid his hand around the back of Rylan’s neck, one of the best feelings in the world, and kissed him. He only broke the kiss when someone honked behind them. Rylan sat back and noticed his hands shook from his desire after their kiss. He gripped the thighs of his jeans and pulled them down to make room for his hard cock pulsing against his zipper.

They rolled down the windows and took in the summer night air. It had rained earlier in the afternoon and the smell of earth wafted in as Cameron drove home.

Pressure increased as Cameron squeezed his hand tighter as they rolled up the driveway, drawing Rylan from his thoughts. He glanced at Cameron and noticed the intense look on his face before he turned his eyes the direction that captured his husband’s attention. He sucked in a breath at the shattered living room bay window.

“I can’t hear the alarm. Do you think there’s someone still in there?”

“We don’t have sensors on the glass. The alarm would sound only if the door or window opened. I’m not taking a chance, someone could be in there, waiting for us.”

Cameron rolled the windows up and locked the car doors before he called the police. “Yes, someone broke into our house and I don’t know if they are still here. My husband and I are waiting in the car in our driveway.”

There were sounds of agreement before Cameron hung up and released Rylan's seatbelt before pulling him onto his lap. Rylan buried his face against Cameron's neck and sighed at the scent and Cameron's rumbling words.



“We’ll be okay.”

He hadn’t realized he was shaking until Cameron tightened his hold and repeated his earlier words.

He took several deep, calming breaths until the tension lessened in his chest and shoulders. Rylan sagged against Cameron’s chest and relaxed as his scent washed over him.

But flashing lights pulled in behind their car and they were both alert until an officer knocked on the driver’s side window and Cameron rolled it down.

“We’ll go check to see if there’s anyone in the house. You two stay here.”

Cameron nodded and handed her the house key and gave her the alarm code.

They watched with wide eyes as the two officers unlocked the front door and drew their weapons before disappearing through the door and into the darkness of their house. It was quiet, the sound of the crickets and an occasional car driving by droned on in the background until the two cops emerged from the house. Both of them exited Cameron’s side of the car and they went to meet the officers at the front door.

The woman they spoke with held up a brick packed in a clear, plastic bag. “Nothing looks disturbed and there was no entry to the house. The alarm was still armed. Does anyone have a problem with either of you? Any confrontations or threats?”

Rylan’s mind blanked, and he shook his head.

“Yes.”

His head snapped up, and he stared at Cameron.

“Tristan.”

“I don’t even know if he’s still in town. And how would he know where we live?”

Cameron pulled Rylan closer and glanced at both officers. “I have surveillance cameras on the front and back entrances.”

“Good. Does the footage save?”

He nodded. “Yeah, it saves to a separate drive on my computer. Is it okay to go in the house?”

“Yeah, it’s all clear.”

The officer handed Cameron his keys, and they went inside. As the three others went to the computer, Rylan shut and locked the door behind them.

“Would you like coffee?”

“We’d love some. I’m Tanya Greg and this is my partner, Steven Corner. Please use our first names.”

“Thank you. I’m Rylan and this is my husband Cameron. I’ll go make a pot.”

Working from instinct, Rylan started a pot to brew before he moved to the back door and blew out a breath when he found it locked. He then closed the blinds and the curtains over the sink, feeling better someone couldn’t see in from the outside. When

the coffeemaker beeped, he jumped at the sound and felt his heart beating hard in his chest.

Not wanting to let Cameron out of his sight for too long, he reached for the mugs, the creamer, and the sugar, then placed the items and the thermal pot onto a tray before carrying it to the living room. He set the tray down and poured the coffee, everyone dismissing the condiments and taking their coffee black as they watched the screen.

“Who’s Tristan?”

“Tristan Scott is my older brother’s best friend. He hates me.”

Tanya stared at him for a long while. “I think there’s more to that story.”

Rylan glanced down at his feet and swallowed hard. Other than Cameron, he’d told no one of the assault and shame made his chest throb.

“If this is him, it shows he’s violent and violent people don’t stop. They only escalate until someone’s hurt or dead.”

He swallowed and thought about Cameron getting hurt because Rylan didn’t tell them the truth and that alone had Rylan blurting out his story.

“It happened four years ago.”

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Rylan waited until Tanya pulled out a notebook before continuing. Leaving out the emotion the night he told Cameron, he told the officers what happened from the time Tristan and Declan had become friends, to the night of the attempted rape, and then the incident at the club and the next day as Rylan was moving out.

During the middle of his retelling, Cameron left his seat at the computer and wrapped Rylan in his arms. His hold centered him enough to get through it.

The room was silent as he stopped speaking and he watched as Tanya and Steven shared a look. After a minute, Tanya spoke.

“I won’t lie. He’s already attacked you both physically and verbally, and if we find evidence on the surveillance it was him, I recommend you both get a restraining order against him. But the order only does so much, so be aware of your surroundings whenever you leave the house and I would recommend you don’t go out alone at night. And because he could have snuck in after he threw the brick, get sensors added to your alarm system.”

Cameron’s arms shook as he gripped Rylan tighter to his chest.

“The background check came back clean.”

“They usually do. Our advice is document everything. If he calls, if you see him watching you when you're about town, anything. We can build a case based on what happened here and any other incidents that come up.” Both Tanya and Steven pulled out their business cards and handed them over. “Call if you have questions and dial 911 immediately if you're in danger.”

Rylan and Cameron both nodded.

“We’ll check the surveillance for today and several weeks prior to see if anyone suspicious comes up and we’ll let you know. For tonight, I recommend you board up the window and get a hotel room.”

“Thank you, we will,” Rylan whispered.

Steven shook his hand and then reached for Cameron’s. “I know if someone threatened my husband, I would have the same look on my face. But don’t do anything rash. Let us take care of him and keep each other safe.”

They watched as the officers drove away. Rylan was so lost in thought he didn’t notice two cars pull into the driveway. There were several loud voices, but it wasn’t until Issa’s scent surrounded him as she hugged him, then he snapped out of it and clung to her. Suzy was rubbing his back and smiling at him and he smiled back. The trio ushered everyone inside the house before they surrounded Rylan and the two women.

As the Aaron, Suzy, and Issa kept him company, Cameron ran out to the shed with Tim and Eric. They boarded up the broken window before Cameron ran upstairs and packed a suitcase for them.

“Why do you think Tristan hates me so much?”

“Oh, honey, I don’t think he does,” Issa rubbed his back, “I think he believes you belong to him. That’s why he paid so much attention to you. I hate to say it, but he thought you were flirting with him and in his drunk mind, he attacked you because he thought you wanted him. But you moved on and Cameron protected you from him, and he’s pissed he lost the control he thought he had over you.”

Rylan scoffed. “I’ve never belonged to him. I didn’t even speak to him much, and I didn’t encourage him.”

“We know. There’s nothing you could have done, it’s all on him. He’s the aggressor. That’s what makes him so dangerous, because in his twisted mind, you do.”

Cameron growled as he heard Issa’s words. He lifted Rylan off the couch and they clung to one another as Rylan breathed him in, convincing himself they were okay.

“I hate to say this, but if his obsession hasn’t waned in the four years since he tried to rape you, he is capable of things we aren’t even considering.”

“How do you know this, Issa?”

“My sister had a stalker. We contacted police and other professionals that deal with stalkers. I even spoke to a stalker advocate in England for advice. The results in stalker cases are bleak if they already displayed violence. Stick close to Cameron, or us, or the trio. Never go out alone if you can help it.”

Aaron cleared his throat and Rylan flushed, realizing the trio didn’t know about Tristan’s attack before tonight.

“Hey, Rylan, it’s not your fault. If you ever need us, call and we’ll be here.”

Tim and Eric nodded.

“We’re all packed. I called dad, and he called a handyman he’s used over the years and he’ll be by late in the morning tomorrow to fix the window.”

Rylan nodded. Dejection rushed through him for bringing violence and problems into Cameron’s life, but his husband kissed him.

“They’re right. You aren’t responsible for whatever is going on in Tristan’s head. It’s his fault for forcing himself on you and spewing every hurtful thing he could think of when you didn’t fall for him. Don’t let him get to you?”

Cameron kissed him, leaving Rylan breathless when he pulled back.

“You are beautiful, inside and out, on top of being talented and successful. The luckiest day of my life was when we met and I will spend the rest of our lives loving you and protecting you.”

“I love you and I’ll protect you, too?”

“I know you will, angel. Let’s get to the hotel and get settled for the night.”

Rylan leaned close to Cameron’s ear and whispered. “I need you inside me. I want you to warm me up and make me shiver in a good way.”

Cameron straightened and reached for his hand. With the other, he grabbed the suitcase and corralled the rest of the group out of the house, setting the alarm and locking the front door.

Rylan smiled as Cameron moved toward the car threw the suitcase in the trunk. He hugged their friends, thanking them for their support, before joining Cameron at the car. Despite the horrible few hours after dinner, he wouldn’t spoil the rest of the night with his husband.

### CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

#### CAMERON

Cameron found himself offstage, waiting there to support Rylan when he came out to introduce himself and start the fashion show.

After their summer break, Rylan labored on making his designs come to life. Cameron felt guilty because he published Rylan's website when he finished half his creations for the show. The site was live for two days when he received e-mails inquiring where they could buy Rylan's original designs.

When he told Rylan about the e-mails, he spotted contained fear mixed with excitement sparkling in Rylan's eyes. That was when they decided to hire an assistant for Rylan. Meeting Steffie was a godsend and she fit in with ease, knowing when Rylan needed to concentrate, directing him to the projects that needed completion before the others, and ordering him to take a break whenever he felt overwhelmed or needed one.

Most of the time, Rylan wouldn't leave until Steffie texted Cameron, and he dragged his husband out to dinner or a movie to get him to relax.

But before they allowed Steffie to accept the job, they told her about their problems with Tristan. Instead of quitting on the spot, she disregarded any danger Tristan might pose to her and became protective of Rylan, much like Issa. And when the two women met, no one stood a chance. Steffie refused to quit and Issa wanted a way to destroy Tristan without it coming back to any of them.



So over the past month, Cameron stuck close to Rylan and instead of either of them feeling stifled by how much time they were spending together, they grew closer. Cameron couldn't remember a time without Rylan in his life, filling his home with color and life.

And the week before the fashion show, the head of the design and merchandising department from the college called Rylan. She told him she learned about his side business and his fledgling design company and at first Rylan thought she would kick him out of the program with under a year to go to graduate.

Rylan waved his hand at Cameron and when he noticed the frantic look on his husband's face, Cameron encouraged him to put the call on speaker.

"As I was saying, Mr. Ellis—"

"Sorry, professor, it's Ellis-Hayes now."

"Congratulations, Rylan, that's wonderful! And I'm calling to give you more good news. I've talked it over with your other professors and we agreed to allow you to graduate early. We agreed that your real-life experience translates into credits for your remaining classes and you can graduate with the class in December if you would like, or we could mail you your degree."

"Um... wow."

"Professor? This is Cameron, Rylan's husband. He's speechless but he would like his degree mailed instead of attending the ceremony in December."

After another few minutes where the Rylan thanked the professor and promised to keep in touch, he threw himself into Cameron's arms and kissed him breathless. The smile on Rylan's face made Cameron's chest swell with pride.

They celebrated with their friends and family. Mom was especially proud, drawing Rylan into a hug that had both of them wiping away tears of happiness.

And the Monday after they learned about Rylan's graduation, Cameron spoke to the dean of the computer science department and he agreed Cameron could take the rest of his six credits needed to graduate online.

The growing crowd and increased volume at the Seawell Ballroom where the fashion show was being held, drew Cameron back to the present.

Because his mom along with Sophia and her friends spreading the word about Rylan's new company, the online popularity of Rylan's designs were growing, and they had to move the show from a downtown hotel to the bigger venue.

Rylan's nerves showed during their drive down to Denver, but once they arrived and he counted all the outfits and made sure he accounted for the models, he relaxed. As he dressed the models before he added a touch of makeup to each of them, Cameron realized he was in his element.

As someone shouted from the doorway that the show would start in fifteen minutes, Cameron drew Rylan into his arms. The kiss, a simple brushing of their lips together, letting his husband know he was proud of him, soon grew out of control and they both moaned as they deepened the kiss. It wasn't until he heard giggles and some throats being cleared that he pulled back.

"I love you. I'll be out by the stage if you need me."

Rylan nodded. "I love you, too. I need to change, but I'll see you in a few."

With a stolen kiss, Cameron nodded and left Rylan and Steffie to do their thing.

As the lights dimmed, Steffie stepped up next to him as he wrung his hands together, a nervous gesture.

“Relax, you know he’ll blow them away with everything he’s designed,” Steffie said.

“Where is he?”

She smiled. “He made a special outfit he wanted to wear for you. He’s on the other side of the stage waiting to surprise you.”

Before he could ask, the microphone clicked on and Sophia walked onto the stage. The bone white business suit, one of Rylan’s most popular designs online, fit her perfectly and she looked stunning.

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“Thank you for attending our first annual charity fashion show with exclusive designs from up-and-coming fashion designer, Rylan Ellis-Hayes.”

Sophia smiled as applause and cheers broke out throughout the venue. Cameron laughed when he heard Tim’s wolf whistle and knew their friends would be there, cheering on his husband. He loved them.

“You can bid on the outfits, designed and created by Rylan himself, tonight only. And without further ado. The man of the hour, Rylan Ellis-Hayes.”

Cameron clapped louder than anyone, but the moment Rylan stepped out on the stage, he froze to the spot as his body flared with such passion for his husband; it stole his breath.

Rylan had created something that fit him to perfection. There was a white button-down with elements that sparkled under the stage lights. The shirt itself looked delicate, almost opaque. Over the shirt, he had on a fitted stripped vest that moulded to his body, emphasizing the curve of his hips and his slender waist. The gray pants sculpted to his thighs and emphasized his beautiful ass. But it was the Trilby hat, kinked to the side, that brought the entire outfit together.

“I would like to thank everyone for coming tonight.”

Rylan waited for the applause to fade.

“This year, Sophia and the other planners of this event have graciously offered to donate to several charities close to our hearts and you will find information about

them from the wonderful volunteers sitting at the tables along the south wall.

“And without further ado, I’ll hand it over to our MC. Please welcome Mrs. Elizabeth Reyes.”

Rylan smiled and waved to the crowd as he came to join Cameron and Steffie. When Rylan spotted him, Cameron’s breath caught in his throat.

This beautiful man, this wonderful and talented man, loves me.

Cameron’s gaze continued to move over Rylan as he walked closer. There was pride in the way he displayed himself and his creation, and Cameron loved the swell of pride that filled him. When Rylan stepped close, Cameron realized there was a light dusting of blush and foundation, but it was the gloss on his lips that had him shaking with desire.

“You have on makeup.”

Rylan’s smile fell. “You don’t like it.”

Cameron opened and closed his mouth a few times, shaking his head as he tried to reassure his beautiful angel he was perfect, before he gave up on speech and reached for Rylan’s hand. Rylan’s brows drew down in confusion, but Cameron continued his movements until Rylan’s hand palmed his hard and throbbing cock.

Rylan’s loud moan pulled Cameron from his shock at the perfection that was his husband.

Clearing his throat, Cameron found his voice. “Angel, I’ve never been so wrecked by how hard I am for you. But I’m a little scared to touch you. You are perfection and I don’t want to do anything that might muss you.”

His husband's smile turned into a laugh and without hesitation, he threw himself into Cameron's arms. Their lips met and this time, the kiss was full of affection while scorching all of his nerve endings, leaving him a shaking and needy mess.

"And here comes Allison. She is wearing a beautiful mini-dress with matching jacket..."

Cameron turned them toward the stage where a model wore Rylan's creation that reminded him of the ocean outside their bungalow, a mix of blue and greens, and he could almost smell the briny ocean.

Each outfit designed by his husband stunned the crowd, and Cameron watched on, mesmerized. "Wow. I knew they looked gorgeous on your dress forms, but on a model, your creations come to life. They're exquisite. I think this one is my favorite."

With each of the fifteen outfits, Cameron kept changing his mind, thinking out loud that each of Rylan's designs were his favorite. Rylan squeezed his hand, but Cameron's total concentration was on the stage.

"You are so talented." As the last model stepped behind the curtain to a loud round of applause, he turned to Rylan and placed the barest of kisses on his lips. "You'll be so famous."

"While I love designing and seeing the finished product, I was thinking about finding a fashion house that would create them while allowing me to sketch and design what I want."

Cameron nodded. "Even with Steffie, Issa, and Suzy's help, this show ran you ragged."

Rylan opened his mouth to speak, but Sophia called him to the stage for the finale.

Leaning in close, Cameron said, “After the show, I have a surprise for you.”

Rylan kissed him, giving him a happy smile, before he walked onstage to a roar of applause.

“Again, thank you all for coming out. The bidding will start in an hour. In the atrium, they are serving drinks and snacks,” Rylan paused and looked over at Cameron, holding his hand out. “And my special thanks goes to the love of my life and my husband, Cameron Ellis-Hayes.”

He walked out to meet his husband, surprised by the declaration, and reached for Rylan’s hand before he leaned down to press a kiss to his cheek.

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“If it wasn’t for my Cameron’s unwavering support and his unending love, tonight wouldn’t have happened.” Rylan glanced at Cameron and gave him a private smile. “I wish you all a wonderful rest of your night. Thank you.”

Cameron sensed Rylan had enough of being in the spotlight and wrapped his arm around his waist and led him off the stage. Issa, Suzy, and Steffie pulled Rylan into a group hug. When Aaron, Tim, and Eric arrived, Rylan smiled at the trio and accepted their congratulations and hugs.

“Rylan?”

They turned to see his parents. Rylan fell into his mom’s arms and squeezed her while she beamed a smile at Cameron, letting him know how proud she was of Rylan.

When he pulled back from the hug, Rylan spotted someone in the background and froze. Without waiting to see who Rylan might have spotted, he stepped in between the threat and Rylan. But when he blinked, there was a tiny woman who leaned around Cameron and smiled at Rylan.

“Excuse me, Mr. Ellis-Hayes, I’m Ruby Summers, a fashion buyer from New York.”

Cameron turned to see Rylan blinking at the new addition almost as if he didn’t understand her words. He knew Rylan did that every time someone stunned him speechless, such as the morning Cameron proposed.

Not wanting Rylan to lose his chance to have everything he wanted, Cameron wrapped his arm around Rylan’s waist and they walked toward Ruby.



“Hello, Ms. Summers, this talented man is Rylan.”

“Please, call me Ruby. I was here for a quick visit with my family when I heard about this event. I’m very impressed by your work, Rylan. I know you’re busy on your big night, but I wanted to catch you before I had to leave for the airport. I’m coming back to Denver in a few weeks and I was wondering if I could talk to you about signing you to an exclusive deal.”

Rylan squeaked but Cameron was sure only he could hear his excitement coming through. Cameron squeezed Rylan.

“Thank you. I would like that.”

Ruby smiled at both of them. “Wonderful. Here’s my business card. Drop me an email on Monday and we’ll coordinate our schedules.”

“I will. Thanks so much for coming.”

Ruby waved goodbye and swept out of the room, but Cameron concentrated his attention on Rylan. Soon, there were bodies pressing in on them as their friends congratulated Rylan, and Rylan looked up at Cameron and smiled at him. They all jumped up and down as they celebrated Rylan’s successful night.

“I’m married to a soon-to-be famous and insanely popular fashion designer.” Cameron couldn’t keep the pride out of his voice.

“Let’s go to dinner to celebrate,” his father suggested.

Cameron nodded.

“How about Panzano’s at the Hotel Monaco?”

Rylan spotted the place after a night out and hinted he wanted to try it and Cameron wanted him to have everything he wanted. They agreed to meet at the restaurant and before they left, he and Rylan dropped by to see Sophia.

“I heard you were speaking to a fashion designer,” Sophia stated.

“You know everything,” Rylan murmured.

Sophia laughed and pulled Rylan into a hug. “I knew you would make it. You made tonight successful.”

“Thank you for the opportunity.”

“I’ll let you know how much we bring in and send you a percentage.”

Rylan looked horrified by that prospect and Cameron nodded as soon as Rylan glanced over at him.

“No, Sophia, I want all the money to go to charity. It thrilled me you asked.”

Her eyes filled with tears and she hugged both of them.

“And let me know if you want to do this again next year.”

“Thank you, Rylan. For everything.”

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Rylan squeezed her hand and gave her a smile. Sophia's attention moved toward the stage and with one last smile, she moved to the podium to start on the auction. Cameron walked them backstage and toward the parking lot. Knowing his husband, Cameron waited until they were driving toward their destination before he spoke.

“You deserve all the praise and all the happiness your hard work brings you. I will tell you, every day for the rest of our lives, how beautiful and talented and loved you are. Not because you believe you don't deserve it, but only because I'm amazed and awed that you love me. I see, every day, how much you give of yourself because of how unselfish you are, and I'm a lucky man.”

Rylan cleared his throat and Cameron reached for his hand and squeezed it in support.

“Ever since we met, it's like I've been living in a dream.”

“I think only now you're seeing your success from all of your hard work. You're the only one brilliant enough to know what you needed to succeed and the talent to do so. You started a business and taught yourself what you needed to know on top of being a full-time student.

“But I became the lucky one the night you approached me at the bar. I'm stronger because of you, and I want to work harder, and be a better man who can support you in whatever you want to do. I want to see you thrive and as long as I'm next to you while you do so, I will be a happy man.”

Rylan squeezed Cameron's hand, but didn't say or do anything until Cameron parked

the car. Then, he removed his seat belt and threw himself onto Cameron's lap. Rylan kissed him until he absorbed his husband's moan and gave one of his own.

"Let's go eat dinner and then I'll show you your surprise."

He nodded. "I love you, Cameron."

Leaning forward, he pressed a kiss to Rylan's forehead. "I love you, too, angel."

Cameron took Rylan's hand after they exited the car and when they opened the door to the hotel, they spotted everyone gathered near the restaurant and he smiled. Their family and friends accepted them and loved them. But tonight was about Rylan's success and they would celebrate with dinner before Cameron would show Rylan how much he needed him.

### CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

#### RYLAN

Rylan had enjoyed the night, but throughout dinner and in front of his parents and their friends, Cameron drove him insane with need. It all started the moment they sat down.

“Rylan, your designs are unique and beautiful. We’re so proud of you,” Olivia said.

“And we can brag he’s our son-in-law,” Edward joked.

The hum around the surrounding tables lowered to a buzz as Cameron’s fingers trailed up and down his arm.

The barest of touches that sent his pulse racing.

As they caught up during dinner, Cameron’s touch moved up his arm to his collar. The heat radiated through the tips of his fingers and into his neck, warming him and sending tingles straight through him. But the heat roared to life when Cameron pressed his thigh against Rylan’s, distracting him so when his socked foot slid across Rylan’s calf, he bit his lip to prevent the moan from escaping.

“You are so sexy. I want to take you home and devour you.”

When he glanced at Cameron, his passive face gave nothing away, but his eyes softened whenever Rylan looked his way.

Rylan, relieved the show had gone off without a hitch, loved Cameron's reactions to his designs and the huge, genuine smile as Rylan introduced him made his heart swell with love for his husband. It was something he would never forget.

There was a pride in seeing his creations on real women and men, showing them off. After the models walked out on stage, his gaze searched Cameron's face as he watched and enthused about every one of his designs.

Rylan loved what he did, and although he hadn't expected Cameron to be so hands on with Rylan's career, he was thrilled to have his unending support. Cameron designed a beautiful website for him, worked with Steffie to not only make his business a success, but made sure he ate and slept and took care of himself. When Cameron told him about his plans to finish college online, Rylan knew no matter what the future held for them, they would be together.

"Ready to leave?" Cameron asked.

Rylan nodded. He looked around the table and smiled at his family.

"Thank you for coming out tonight and for your support. I love all of you."

There was a flurry of movement and with huge smiles and a few tears, Rylan hugged them as they returned his sentiments. Before long, Cameron growled and reached for Rylan's hand, leading him outside toward the car.

"We'll see you soon." They walked out, surprised to find the car already at the curb.

"Did you have fun tonight?" Cameron asked after pulled out into traffic.

"It was exciting and scary but I enjoyed every moment. I can't believe you were making me pant by the end of dinner. If we didn't finish when we did, despite our

audience, I was going to straddle your lap and devour you.”

Cameron threw his head back and laughed, reaching out to hold his hand.

After a few blocks, the car pulled into the valet spot of a fancy hotel. Cameron walked around the car, opened the door for Rylan, and slid his hand around his waist before he walked them into the opulent lobby.

Rylan glanced up to see the ornate chandelier before his gaze turned toward the marble, gold, and silver lobby filled with a smattering of chaise lounges and high-backed chairs. His eyes found Cameron as they bypassed the reception desk and headed for the elevators.

“We don’t have to check in?”

Cameron shook his head. “I packed a suitcase and had my parents check in and drop off our stuff in the room before the show. They gave me the keycard after dinner.”

“You love planning surprises, don’t you?” Rylan beamed at his husband.

They walked into the elevator and as the doors closed, Rylan turned into Cameron’s arms and wrapped himself around his husband, tightening his hold. He pressed his face against Cameron’s chest, inhaling his familiar scent.

“I do, but only for you. I love watching your expressive face whenever I do.”

“Someday, you’re gonna stop spoiling me.”

Cameron scoffed and bent down to capture Rylan’s lips in a chaste kiss.

*Source Creation Date: July 9, 2025, 7:59 am*

“That will never happen. Just wait for our anniversary.” His smile was both reverent and playful.

The elevator binged, letting them know they arrived on their floor. Rylan, with great effort, stepped back and reached for Cameron’s hand.

Cameron led them down the hall toward a room with a double door, and Rylan glanced at him in confusion.

“It’s the penthouse.”

Laughing at Rylan’s expression, Cameron opened the door. Without waiting another second, he pressed Rylan against the door as it closed and kissed him breathless.

Rylan arms draped over Cameron’s shoulders and savored the kiss. His body relaxed and as he tilted his head up to deepen the kiss, but moaned when Cameron’s hands reached under his ass and lifted Rylan until his feet were off the ground and he rested against a solid chest.

As they broke off, gasping for breath, Rylan laid his head down on Cameron’s chest.

“I’m thrilled not to have to worry about deadlines.”

The vibrations of Cameron’s chuckle rumbled through him and he pressed a kiss to his chest before he caught Cameron’s gaze.

“Yeah, we’ve had a busy couple of months. We met, fell in love, got married, and



you've been working non-stop. It's nice to see you so relaxed."

Rylan lifted his head and Cameron's heated gaze moved from his eyes and down to his lips. Cameron's tongue darted out and swiped along his bottom one.

A moan escaped from his throat as Cameron's thumb rubbed against his collarbone and up to his chin.

"I want to strip you from this sexy-as-sin outfit that made me hard the moment I spotted you on stage, before I worship you with my mouth and hands until you're begging me for more."

Rylan shivered at the deep sound rumbling through him, but before he could speak, Cameron ravaged his mouth. Whenever Cameron turned his attention to him, Rylan's emotions surged and most of the time he couldn't believe this man loved him. But through action alone, Cameron showed him every day how true three simple words could be.

Gasping for breath, Rylan blinked open his eyes and an embarrassing squeak escaped his throat as he took in the suite in front of him. The lights of the surrounding downtown buildings blinked around the floor-to-ceiling windows surrounding them, distracting him for a moment.

His eyes fluttered closed as Cameron pressed his mouth against Rylan's neck. Teeth scraped against his collarbone and Rylan moaned, forgetting about everything but Cameron.

"I love the way you touch me."

Rylan tightened his legs around his waist. Cameron's fingers slid through his hair, which had grown long after he'd neglected to cut it when he'd been working, and

held his head still before he sipped at Rylan's mouth.

I've missed this.

Guilt swamped him because he hadn't given his all to Cameron. It was the reason he wanted to concentrate on selling his designs, so he could spend more time with his husband with less stress.

Without waiting for Cameron to move past kissing, Rylan pulled Cameron's dress shirt from the waistband of his slacks and touched the hot, smooth skin of his back. He let out a whimper when Cameron broke the kiss. But that whimper turned into a moan when he lowered Rylan's legs down until his feet touched the floor.

Using one of his hands, Cameron wrapped his fingers around both wrists and lifted his arms, keeping them above his head.

"Tonight is all about giving you pleasure," Cameron said.

Rylan moaned. "You touching me gives me pleasure. Please, Cameron, more."

His husband smiled and Rylan's heart swooped when he lifted him into his arms. Cameron gifted him with his beautiful smile before he held Rylan to his chest as he walked them both toward what he assumed was the bedroom.

"Lay back and relax."

Rylan gazed up at Cameron as he spread out on the soft bed and blinked the sudden flood of tears that filled his eyes at the soft look on Cameron's face.

"I was so proud of you tonight and when you introduced me as your husband, I thought again how lucky I am to have met you. You make me smile without effort

and I want to spend all my time with you. And when I wake up in the morning with you snuggled against my chest, I thank fate or the gods or whoever brought us together.”

The tears slipped from his eyes. “I feel the same way, love.”

“Then let me love you.”

Rylan breathed, “Yes.”

The smile had Rylan’s breath caught in his throat as Cameron wiped his tears away. Once Cameron kissed him, Rylan relaxed and allowed his husband full control.

He kept his hands against his side, but he bucked his hips up when Cameron moved his mouth over his neck, biting at his collarbone and drawing a deep moan from him. He threw his head back, exposing more of his neck while begging for more.

The jolt of pleasure that speared through him when Cameron sucked on the skin near his ear sent another shaft of need through him and he panted. With deft fingers, Cameron opened the first button on his dress shirt and moved to kiss the skin he exposed. But when he dragged his tongue over the spot, Rylan’s hands shot up and clenched Cameron’s shirt.

Fingers flicked open the buttons on his shirt in quick succession, Rylan grateful Cameron’s movements sped up. When Cameron nudged his shirt open to expose his chest, his eyes flashed with emotion and Rylan’s breath caught in his throat.

“You are the sexiest man I’ve ever seen.”

“And yours... all yours, love.”

Rylan’s breath hitched when Cameron moved his mouth over his neck and down his chest, not missing an inch as he explored Rylan’s collarbone and moving down to his pecs. A shout erupted from his throat when Cameron sucked a nipple into his mouth which turned into a moan as his hands slid over the hot skin at his sides and stomach.

By the time Cameron's mouth and fingers teased the button on Rylan's slacks, his body was taut with need and his cock throbbed under the restraint of his pants. He moaned in approval when Cameron flicked open the button and slid down the zipper. With one hand, he moved them and his tight black boxer briefs down a few inches.

Cameron's tongue moved along the cut of his hips and Rylan's fingers slid into his hair as he begged for more. Unable to keep his body prone on the bed, his hips shot up as Cameron scraped his teeth over his hipbones, sending delicious shivers down his spine.

"You like that, do you?"

"I like everything with you."

Cameron surged up on his knees and moved his mouth over Rylan's, capturing his lips. Rylan moaned into his mouth as he lowered his hard body over Rylan's and he could feel his husband's desire pressed against his stomach.

"Please, love. Fuck me, I need you inside me."

"I wanted to taste you first." The pout almost pulled Rylan from the depth of his desire for the man.

"I don't think I'll last if you put your mouth anywhere on my cock."

Rylan blinked at Cameron when he shook his head.

"Not, I want to loosen your body with my tongue."

He couldn't help it, his mouth dropped open, and he gaped at his husband as his cock jumped against his stomach. "Fuck."

“Is that okay?”

Rylan gripped the sheets harder in his fists and nodded.

Cameron’s hands maneuvered along his thighs, sending tingles throughout. “On your hands and knees, please, angel.”

His cock, loving the idea and the request coming from his husband’s lips, beaded with pre-come that leaked from the head. “I might need help.”

Laughing, Cameron moved to the side of the bed. “Let me get my clothes off first.”

Rylan’s eyes never left Cameron’s until he crawled back onto the bed and flipped Rylan over with ease. Moaning at the press of his lips on the back of his neck.

“I love you, angel.”

Without waiting for a response, Cameron wasted no time in positioning himself so his heavy breaths brushed against his hole. His hands roamed over Rylan’s flanks, over the curve of his ass, leaving him feeling primed and ready.

“Love... you...”

Words turned into a hissing sound as Cameron’s hands pulled him apart and his tongue flattened against the sensitive skin underneath his balls, licking up from his taint and past his hole.

“Let me know if any of this makes you uncomfortable and I’ll stop.”

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Some mumbled words, maybe not even words, erupted from Rylan's throat as his hands clenched the sheets underneath him and his head dropped onto his forearms.

Unprepared for how wonderful Cameron's tongue would feel, his hips jerked when Cameron licked the same path as the first, once and then again, before the tip of his tongue pressed inside Rylan. His entire body quivered with pure pleasure as sounds unrecognizable to his own ears filtered out of his mouth.

Another rush of breath brushed against his wet hole and his skin fluttered in anticipation when Cameron's hands kept moving over his sensitized skin. All thoughts scattered as Cameron pressed his tongue harder against his entrance and his cock jumped in pleasure so overwhelming, his hand reached for the base and squeezed, staving off his impending orgasm.

"More."

As if waiting for that exact direction, Cameron's tongue entered him, making him see stars. The dirtiest moan he'd ever heard slid from his throat and when Cameron moaned against his skin, the sound added to the desire growing out of control.

Rylan kept a tight squeeze on his cock as Cameron fucked him with his hard, wet tongue, driving him out of his mind. He was relentless and his moans amplified the pleasure Rylan was feeling. Cameron's hands, his tongue, and moans of pleasure had Rylan's cock leaking onto the sheets below him. Everything faded away until there was only Cameron's touch and the sexy noises escaping his throat.

"Could you come like this?" Cameron asked.

Another pulse from his husband's deep voice had him moaning aloud. Instead of continuing his unrelenting movements, he pulled away and Rylan glanced back over his shoulder, confused. He watched Cameron's chest rise and fall with harsh breaths. His eyes were half closed in pleasure, his skin flushed, and his lips wet with his saliva.

"Scratch that. I want to fuck you now."

Rylan whimpered and nodded. He dropped his head down, ready for Cameron's cock piercing him, bringing him unbelievable pleasure, but squeaked when Cameron lifted him in his arms and laid down on his back, sitting Rylan on his stomach.

"I want to see you and kiss you when we make love."

Rylan nodded, his eyes filling, slick with tears that threatened to fall. Cameron looked at him with such love it was shining from his beautiful hazel eyes.

They moved closer, their lips pressing together and his head tilting, getting lost in the kiss. When Cameron suckled Rylan's bottom lip into his mouth and nibbled on it, Rylan let go of the moan he held and gripped Cameron's shoulders tighter.

Sensing his need for more, Cameron pressed a slicked finger against his entrance and slid inside. Wanting more of Cameron inside him, Rylan wiggled his hips, taking his finger deeper.

"I love that look on your face, the one when I deny you pleasure for a short time."

He opened his mouth to beg for more, but as Cameron pressed inside, the words turned into a moan at the sensation of two fingers, one that brushed against his prostate. Rylan's eyes fluttered closed, and he moved his hips back and forth, fucking himself. At this point in their relationship, his need for a stretch wasn't as important



as it had been in the beginning, but Cameron always savored this part of their lovemaking.

“Are you ready, angel?”

Rylan nodded and slid his hands over Cameron’s chest, encouraging him to take him.

“I have an idea.”

“As long as you’re inside me soon...”

Cameron scrambled backward, pressing his back against the headboard, before he lifted Rylan onto his lap, but turned Rylan to face away from Cameron.

“Um...”

“This way, I can touch you all over while you ride me.”

Rylan leaned back, laying his head onto Cameron’s shoulder and kissed him. His hips moved, and he gasped when Cameron’s throbbing cock slid against his hole. He slathered his cock with lube, so when Rylan moved back, the head of Cameron’s cock snagged Rylan’s entrance and with slow, deliberate movements, he lowered himself down onto Cameron.

Inch by glorious inch sank into him and both of them were moaning at the sensations. He loved the pinch of Cameron’s grip on his hips and the harsh breaths hitting his neck as he held back from driving into Rylan.

Once he seated himself with Cameron deep inside, he couldn’t hold back. “Oh, fuck, love. I love you inside me.”

While Rylan concentrated on moving the thick cock up and down, stimulating him in ways that sent his senses into overdrive, Cameron's hands moved over him. Not an inch of skin went untouched, starting with his chest, tweaking his nipples and causing Rylan to gasp and drop straight onto his cock. His sides were ticklish, but the pleasure overrode everything else. Cameron teased his stomach, his hips, before he splayed his hands on Rylan's thighs.

Soon, as Rylan's rhythm faltered, Cameron spread Rylan's thighs wide enough to straddle his legs. Then, Cameron planted his feet on the bed and in one swift movement, thrust up and nailed his prostate, leaving Rylan keening for more.

"Yes, fuck me. More."

The last word cut off when Cameron pulled almost all the way out before he snapped his hips up, fucking deep into Rylan. His hole squeezed and with Cameron's hands gripping his hips, his breaths coming out in pants as he fucked up into Rylan, pushed them both closer to the edge.

*Source Creation Date: July 9, 2025, 7:59 am*

Rylan sat up and tucked his knees behind him before he glanced back at Cameron. The man was beautiful and his, but the need of his body overrode his sentimental thoughts, and when Cameron's gaze zeroed in on the exact spot they became one, Rylan moved.

He lifted himself off before dropping onto Cameron's cock, over and over again, until his legs burned with exertion. Breathing hard, he settled onto Cameron's hips and moved his ass back and forth.

"Oh, fuck, love. That feels so fucking good."

"Yes. You look so fucking beautiful rolling your hips like that, driving me deeper inside you."

He lit up with every pass of Cameron's cock against his prostate, but it was the words coming from his husband that drove him closer and closer.

"I loved your beautiful, rounded ass before but watching you like this, taking your pleasure from me, it's perfect."

Hands on his waist tightened and Rylan leaned forward, gripping Cameron's thighs, giving him more room to rock himself on his cock. The rhythm built to a crescendo and both of them shouted, their orgasms overcoming them at the same time.

Cameron surged up and wrapped his arms around Rylan's chest, burying his face against Rylan's neck as Rylan leaned back, allowing his husband to ground him. When his body stopped pulsing with his release, he sagged, breathing hard.

Somehow, he found his head on the pillow with Cameron rubbing a warm washrag along his sensitized skin before he tucked them both under the covers and pulled Rylan so he rested over most of Cameron's body. It was how he liked to sleep.

"This is the best surprise. I love you, Cameron."

Cameron kissed the top of his head. "No, angel. This wasn't your surprise."

Rylan lifted his head to look at his husband. "You should stop spoiling me."

"I love spoiling you. You know you deserve everything you've worked for, but when it's just you and me, I enjoy making you feel loved."

Rylan hummed.

"And I enjoy seeing you relaxed. When your career takes off, I want to be with you every step of the way."

"I've neglected you for the last few weeks."

"You haven't. Plus, you know now you want to concentrate on design and you helped with several great causes. And speaking of your surprise."

Rylan rolled off Cameron and watched as Cameron moved toward their suitcase and grabbed a rectangular, bulky item. Cameron set the box on the bed and they both moved to sit cross-legged on the bed.

"I'm horrible at wrapping, as you'll see this Christmas, so I put your gifts in the box instead."

Cameron opened the lid and nodded.

Rylan reached in and pulled out brilliant looking sketch pencils he knew would feel perfect in his hand, a fashionary planner that looked expensive, a new laptop along with a digital sketchpad and an artist stylus. Then he noticed more pencils, paper sketchpads, and a smart notebook.

Rylan threw himself into Cameron's arms and whispered, "Thank you, thank you so much. I love everything."

"There's one more thing." Cameron blushed.

He handed over what looked like plane tickets. Rylan glanced down and noticed the destination: Paris, France.

"When the professor called, I talked to her for a few minutes and asked her about the industry. She told me that everyone needs to go to Paris Fashion Week at least once in the career."

His mouth opened, but no sound escaped. This life, his life with Cameron, was a fairy tale no one could have predicted, even himself in his most desperate times.

"I love you," Rylan said.

"I love you, too, Ry. I'm proud of you and I know you'll be successful as a designer, but no matter what happens, I'll be there for you. If you're happy, I'm happy."

Unable to speak through his throat clogging with emotion, Rylan pushed Cameron to lie down before he followed, cuddling up to his husband and loving the feel of his strong arms around him.

As long as I have Cameron, I have everything.

### CHAPTER NINETEEN

#### RYLAN

Rylan sat across from Ruby in the busy downtown Denver restaurant and they had been speaking for hours about Rylan's designs.

"So how did you meet your husband?" Ruby asked.

Cameron.

Rylan didn't hide his smile as he told Ruby how they'd met, fallen in love, and had gotten married almost three months previous. Surprise was clear on her face as Rylan explained his whirlwind, yet essential relationship he had with Cameron, but she gave his hand a squeeze and a soft smile by the end.

He watched as Ruby flipped through his third portfolio. It was the most updated one with the newest designs from the fashion show. Smiling, he remembered how Sophia called him a week after the event to learn how much of a success it had been.

And while he contributed his success to his hard work, his happiness came from both his work and having Cameron in his life.

While he had Issa and Suzy, he also had the trio and his and Cameron's friendship with them have moved beyond friendship into almost a family.

They were there during their most important moments.

Along with his in-laws, he'd never felt so complete in who he was as a person and the happiness from knowing people loved him.

As Ruby surveyed his portfolio, asking him questions about why he chose one color over another or why he'd designed an outfit the way he had, Rylan took a moment to glance around the restaurant.

The dark wood paneling, matching booths with high backs, all displayed a place where power lunches took place without the worry of disruption. Although he could hear the drone of voices around him, he couldn't hear the exact words of those conversations. Next to him, there was a tinted window that showed a view of the 16th Street Mall and the people milling about, allowing enough sunlight in to make the room feel warm.

Downtown Denver reminded him of New York City. The hustle and bustle of people all coming from somewhere, crowding the street and the sidewalk, enough to make Rylan feel anxious. He knew Cameron was somewhere nearby, but when the meeting ran longer than he expected and Cameron being out of sight, his anxiety rose.

"Why did you prefer the cream over the white?" Ruby asked.

Rylan opened his mouth to answer but paused when someone slid into the booth next to him. An arm landed behind him, not quite touching, but threatening. He didn't spare a glance to his side. Instead, he moved his eyes to Ruby and noticed her brows draw down and her mouth pinched as she stared at their uninvited visitor.

With a slight movement, he looked next to him and a wave of unease washed over him.

Tristan.

Tristan smirked at him, catching his quick glance, and moved his arm down. The moment Tristan touched him, Rylan scrambled closer to the window and away from Tristan's disgusting touch. He moved his feet onto the bench, keeping his distance from Tristan any way he could.

Although every instinct in his being wanted to look away from the one person in the world that scared the shit out of him, he refused. Tristan sneered at him, ignoring Ruby across the table and the restaurant packed with patrons despite it being closer to the end of the workday.

"You're a hard man to find," Tristan growled, "where's your guard dog? Did he leave you so soon, realizing your much more trouble than you're worth?"

Rylan didn't respond. No matter what he said, Tristan wouldn't see reason. He should have known not to drop his guard. Deep down inside, he knew Tristan wouldn't give up after the brick through their front window, but he allowed himself to believe it for a few weeks.

Unable to keep the fear from making his hands shake, he glanced down at his phone and texted Cameron.

Tristan is here. HELP!

His stalker didn't notice as his fingers moved over his phone, happy he turned off the click of the keyboard the moment he setup his phone because that would have given him away as he alerted his husband.

"So, what's going on here. I didn't think you swung this way, Rylan. You going for pussy now?"

Rylan flinched at the insult to Ruby, but again said nothing. He didn't glance at Ruby,



not wanting to give Tristan more information about the situation than he'd already assumed. He noticed Ruby hadn't said a word and relief swelled in his chest.

Tristan reached for his glass filled with iced tea and took a long pull from it. He wiped his mouth with the back of his hand before he turned his gaze on Rylan.

“You think you can ruin my life and move on like its nothing. There are consequences for leading me on and ignoring me like you did.”

Rylan froze.

*Source Creation Date: July 9, 2025, 7:59 am*

Ever since the attempted rape, Rylan knew that if Declan hadn't interrupted, Tristan wouldn't have stopped. He wanted nothing to do with Tristan. And after, he figured the man would forget about him and chalk it up to a drunken mistake. But now, knowing that Tristan believed Rylan had been the one who flirted with him, who lured him into his bed, made bile rise in his throat.

“Nothing. I’ve done nothing to you. I’ve avoided you from the beginning and will continue to do that. I would like you to leave. Now.”

Tristan scoffed and leaned back in the booth, looking as though he would stay awhile.

Rylan glanced up when Ruby shifted in her seat. His eyes must have conveyed his fear because without bringing attention to herself, Ruby signaled the waiter.

Already sensing the tension at the table, the waiter arrived at their table within seconds along with a man who looked to be the manager of the restaurant. Rylan tried to stand, unable to get far because of the booth, so knelt on the seat instead.

“Is there a problem?”

“Yes, could you please show this man another table—”

Although he expected it, with quick movements, Tristan knocked his legs off the bench. When Rylan dropped his hands onto the table, preventing him from falling off, Tristan took advantage and the elbow that struck his ribs knocked the wind out of him.

A loud, collective gasp went around the restaurant and Rylan noticed they had amassed quite a crowd of onlookers.

“Sir, please leave.” The manager’s voice was firm.

Tristan smiled a fierce smile at the man. “I’m not going anywhere without this little faggot.”

Without waiting for a reaction, Tristan’s hand shot out and wrapped around Rylan’s throat, squeezing tight, before Rylan threw up his forearm and broke his hold. Ignoring the gasps and shouts of displeasure, Tristan hauled back and punched Rylan in the chest.

The sharp, hard strike had Rylan reach for his sternum as the area throbbed underneath his touch.

“I called the police and I’m telling you to stop and leavenow.”

“I might as well make the most of this if I go to jail.”

His words had Rylan throwing his arms up to block the punch aimed at his face. It was a matter of time before his punches landed, but Rylan tried to deflect as many as he could. Rylan sat on his ass and kicked out his feet, trying to push Tristan away from him, but as he let down his guard for a split second, Tristan punched out again and this time his fist grazed Rylan’s cheek.

Rylan kicked harder, trying to get Tristan away from him, not paying attention to what was happening around him. Tristan reached for his wrists and forced them down, so when he swung again, the punch landed just below his right eye and pain exploded over his cheek.

A sound, a scream mixed with a shriek exploded from his throat and he kicked harder at Tristan, pulling his arms away from his hold. Tristan grunted when his foot landed on his side, but unable to stop the need to get Tristan away from him, he continued kicking.

Tristan threw another punch, and this one landed on his shoulder, blocked by Rylan pushing his fist away when he spotted it heading his way. And at this throw, Rylan felt rage simmering throughout his body and he clenched his teeth before he spoke.

“How did I ruin your life, you narcissistic piece of shit! I wanted nothing from you other than distance, but more so after you tried to rape me when I was asleep in my bed when I was seventeen. But you tracked me down at the club, then threw a brick through our front window. We have you on surveillance and it’s why the cop slapped you with a restraining order. For four years, I had to deal with you but no more. You violated your restraining order and assaulted me in front of witnesses.”

“You were asking for it and freaked when I tried to undress you,” Tristan scoffed.

“No, I was asleep. You dropped on top of me and tried to rip off my clothes.”

“You should count yourself lucky. I wanted to see what it was like to fuck a little twink like you.”

Not able to continue this farce of a conversation, Rylan moved to push his way past Tristan. He wanted Cameron, and he wanted to leave. But as he pushed, an inhuman scream erupted from Tristan’s throat and he lunged forward and wrapped both hands around Rylan’s throat. Before he could break the hold again, Tristan slammed his head back against the thick glass where his back had been moments before and a sickening thump echoed in his ears.

Rylan groaned as the pain erupted from the back of his head and a sudden bout of

dizziness had him closing his eyes, afraid he would throw up. He felt more than heard Tristan moving away from him and his stomach roiled when he heard flesh hitting flesh with a sickening thud... thud... thud.

“Rylan, sweetheart, can you hear me?” Ruby’s soft voice asked in his ear, “what do you need?”

“Cameron. I need Cameron.”

“I’m right here, angel.”

His senses were skewed and realized at that moment he had his eyes closed and silence surrounded him. Cameron pulled him into his arms with gentle movements, and Rylan cried when he caught his husband’s scent as he pressed his nose into Cameron’s neck.

“I’m... I feel like I’m gonna throw up.” Rylan tried to open his eyes, but a blinding light seared into them and he shut them again, groaning at the action. When he tried again, he had a hard time focusing, but when he looked at his husband’s face, the terror reflected in his eyes had tears pouring down his cheeks.

*Source Creation Date: July 9, 2025, 7:59 am*

The sound of sirens broke the silence of the place and murmurs started. When Rylan heard the doors open, he peeked to see the crowd pointing at someone on the floor. Glancing down to the designated area, Rylan spotted a bloodied and bruised face, swollen and almost unrecognizable. Almost.

“I have a video recorded of the entire incident,” Ruby said.

Knowing he would have to explain everything, Rylan relayed the entire interaction to Cameron and the police, using Tristan’s exact words and telling them how many times Tristan touched or struck him. Despite his throbbing headache and roiling stomach.

“And then I remember it was over and my husband holding me.”

There was a screech coming from the floor, but the sound made Rylan sick to his stomach and he slammed his eyes shut.

“Husband,husband! I’m going to fucking kill you, you hear me, Rylan. I’m going to fuckingkillyou!”

The police lifted a screaming Tristan off the floor and after hearing heavy footsteps retreat away from the booth, his voice soon cut off.

Cameron pulled Rylan close and wrapped his arms around his back, protecting him from the world. The soothing rumble of his words had Rylan’s stomach calming as Cameron explained to the responding officers about their temporary restraining order. A cop handed Cameron their card, and Cameron promised to have the Fort Collins

police and his lawyer contact him.

Rylan's dizziness grew worse and this time when he tried to open his eyes, he noticed the edge of his vision became black.

"Cameron, love," Rylan whimpered.

"Oh, fuck. You're bleeding."

The tears flowing down Cameron's face was the last thing he saw before the darkness overwhelmed him.

### CHAPTER TWENTY

#### CAMERON

Cameron sat there among the beeps and a slow, steady sound coming from Rylan as he lay on the hospital bed, still and unmoving except for the barely perceptible proof of his breaths being drawn in and out of his lungs.

Guilt of not being there in time to stop Rylan from getting hurt assailed him as he glanced at Rylan. Tristan shouldn't have been near Rylan. Cameron wanted to protect him, but he failed.

He swallowed as he traced over Rylan's battered face. His eyes resembled a color palette of purples, blues, and oranges that looked so unnatural. He'd gotten a lot of bruises when he played football, but none of them had ever swollen like Rylan's eye.

But it was the bruises around his throat with visible finger marks and knowing that seventeen stitches closed the wound on Rylan's scalp that made Cameron want to curl up into a ball and cry until the rage would overtake his emotions. Then, he would devise ways of killing Tristan that made him regret not doing so at the restaurant.

The moment Rylan blacked out and fell into his arms, Cameron thought his heart stopped.

Ruby had pulled him out of his silent panic. "His breathing is deep and even."

Cameron was grateful for Ruby's presence in the ambulance and her fierce



protectiveness as she stayed with him in the waiting room after the ER doctor shoed him out of the examination room. She also held his hand when the Dr. Evans told him Rylan's diagnosis.

“The most serious injury he sustained is the severe concussion when he hit his head on the reinforced glass. While the wound bled a lot, the cut itself isn't serious. Also, the blood vessels in his neck are intact, it's just bruising from the rough treatment. When the paramedics arrived, I suspected a broken orbital bone, but his X-rays came back clear. And because of his concussion, we will determine how long he will have to stay as his condition improves. Every two hours, we'll wake him and check for signs of his condition worsening.”

He thanked Dr. Evans through clenched teeth and held out his hand. She cupped his hand in both of hers before adding.

“He will be fine, I promise you that.”

Cameron nodded, worried if he spoke, he wouldn't be able to stop.

“Is there anyone you want me to call?” Ruby asked.

“Oh, shit. I'll call them. Thank you for all you've done for him.”

Ruby hugged him. “It's not your fault or his. It's Tristan's. He doesn't understand that Rylan doesn't want him and some people can't take no for an answer. And you would be proud of your husband. He stood up to the bully and even tried to fight back. When you have time can you tell him I'm excited to work with him and I'll send over the contract details as soon as I hear from him?”

“I will. Wow, I'm so proud of him. Thank you, Ruby.”

With a final nod, she walked out into the hallway; the door shutting behind her and cutting off the noises from the rest of the hospital. He reached for Rylan's hand and gazed over his injuries, biting his lip and holding back his tears. To distract himself, he reached for the phone.

"Mom..." His voice broke.

Sweetie, what's going on?

"Tristan found Rylan during his meeting with Ruby and before I stopped him, he punched Rylan several times and he tried to strangle him. The doctor thought he might have broken the bone around his eye, but the X-rays proved otherwise. He passed out at the restaurant and hasn't woken up since, it's been five hours—"

Okay, we're on our way, text us the hospital information. Do you want me to tell the others?

"Yeah." Cameron wiped at the tears that escaped.

And your dad will call the lawyer and get him involved. Don't worry about anything other than Rylan, we'll take care of everything else.

"Thanks."

We love you both and we'll be there soon. Bye, sweetheart.

Without bothering with a reply, he pocketed his phone. He looked at his beautiful husband and rage pulsed in the back of his head. Cameron had allowed Tristan to touch his husband out of anger. He clenched his fist and the skin that had healed over split open again; the pain grounding his intense hatred of the man who had hurt his Rylan, his angel.

And a thought filled his head.

We could do it, we could do whatever we want to.

His text notification pulled him from his thoughts.

*Source Creation Date: July 9, 2025, 7:59 am*

The trio, Issa, and Suzy know. The police scheduled an interview late tomorrow afternoon and your lawyer will be there. See you soon.

Rylan shifted on the bed and Cameron moved close, cupping his cheek as Rylan blinked his eyes open. The beautiful gray orbs seemed hazy, and he had to blink a few times before he focused on Cameron. When he did, he gave him a smile that stole his breath.

“Hey, angel. Do you have a headache?”

For several hours after the doctor left, he’d watched the nurses wake him and check his pupils before they took his vitals and accessed the serious nature of his concussion. They murmured as they wrote on Rylan’s chart, but it was the smile from the two nurses that checked on him so far that allowed Cameron to relax.

Rylan moved his head from side to side and winced.

“I don’t have a headache but the back of my head feels weird and my neck hurts.”

Cameron nodded but stiffened when a gasp escaped from Rylan’s mouth. He was about to press the button for the nurse when he noticed Rylan’s gaze locked on his hands.

“You’re bleeding.”

“It’s a reminder of how stupid I was to let my guard down. You’re hurt because of me.”

Rylan aimed a fierce scowl his way and squeezed their linked hands. “No, this isn’t your fault and it sure as fuck isn’t mine. Tristan caused this because no one has ever said no to him and he can’t accept he can’t get what he thinks he wants.”

“You... you’re what he wants.”

“No, he doesn’t want me, he needs to control me. Someone under his thumb, to control and humiliate, because it makes him a bigger man. I thwarted his plans, over and over again, and he can’t stand that loss of control. He does the same thing with Declan. But Declan doesn’t fight back, he goes with whatever Tristan says.”

Cameron shivered. “How about we move out of state, somewhere he can’t find us?”

His husband’s face relaxed, and he smiled at Cameron, pulling him close and pressing a soft kiss to his lips.

“Love, Fort Collins is our home. We built a life together in our house, we have wonderful and supportive friends, a close family, and the town is small enough we feel comfortable there. I’m will not let Tristan ruin our lives. I’ll testify against him and send him to jail, but I refuse to have us change our lives for that piece of shit.”

Pride warred with fear as Cameron glanced at all the injuries Rylan received during a ten-minute confrontation.

“What if,” he chokes, squeezing Rylan’s hand before continuing, “he comes after you with a knife next time? Or worse, a gun?”

“This may sound weird, but I don’t fear him any longer. But I promise you I will be careful. I refuse to let him into our lives. He can go to jail and rot and I won’t feel any guilt because he deserves everything he gets.”

Cameron smiled and kissed Rylan. “You realize I won’t be leaving you alone for a moment since we’re staying.”

The beaming smile Rylan gave him alone made his statement worth it, but when he moved his hand and grazed over his swollen eye, his smile fell.

“He did a number on me, didn’t he?”

Repeating everything Dr. Evans told him, Cameron worried about the thoughts running through Rylan’s head.

“You’ll heal, angel. I’ll take care of you.”

“What... what happened after you pulled him off me?” Rylan asked.

Cameron cleared his throat. “I’m sure I broke his nose and maybe something else in his face, I heard a snap when I twisted his arm around his back to get him on the ground, and I dropped onto his nuts to hold him down, so maybe some internal bleeding. I don’t give a shit, but I hope it hurt.”

“So, when do we talk to the police?”

“I got a text from Mom before you woke up. All set for tomorrow.”

“What time is it?”

“It’s ten.”

“Have you been here the whole time?”

*Source Creation Date: July 9, 2025, 7:59 am*

Cameron nodded, again choked up with emotion and afraid to speak. There was nowhere he'd rather be than at Rylan's side. He knew he would feel like that throughout their lives together.

"Why didn't you crawl in with me?"

"I don't want to hurt you or cause the concussion to worsen."

He melted when Rylan's lower lip jutted out in a pout. "I need you to hold me."

"I would do anything for you, Ry, anything." Slowly, as not to jostle him too much, he slid underneath the sheets Rylan held up for him. He sighed aloud when Rylan snuggled against his side, relieved because he was holding the one man he loved more than anyone in the world.

"I should have figured out how much my rejection drove him to become violent," Rylan whispered.

"He could have stopped being obsessed. He went across the country to go to college, so you couldn't have known he would escalate his behavior."

"Yeah, you're right. Is Ruby okay, he didn't strike out at her, did he?"

"No, she kept me from losing my mind. She rode in the ambulance with me and she wants to offer you a contract. What do you think? Do you think you'll enjoy working with Ruby?"

“It’s a great opportunity and I can stay in the background while doing what I love, so yeah, I think it’ll be great. What about you?”

“Ruby is a great person and if it’s what you want out of a business relationship, I think it’s great. I’m proud of you, angel.”

“Thank you,” Rylan slurred his words.

Cameron eased his hand up and down on Rylan’s back and listened for the moment his breathing deepened, letting him know he’d fallen asleep. With his arms around Rylan and holding him close, only then did Cameron allow himself to relax, and he fell asleep soon after.

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Cameron sensed there was someone else in the room with them and tightened his hold on Rylan as he blinked open his eyes. He relaxed when he spotted the badge hanging from the front pocket of a suit jacket belonging to a female detective. His eyes moved to the two others in the room. One, most likely the detective’s partner and their lawyer, Thomas Sanchez.

“Mr. Ellis-Hayes?”

“Yes, this is my husband Rylan and I’m Cameron.”

Cameron looked over to see Rylan’s eyes, well his left eye, blink open. Tears welled at the sight of the damage.

“Oh, god, Ry. Are you okay?”

“I hurt.”



Gently, Cameron moved off the bed despite Rylan's whimper of protest and pressed the button to call the nurse. After he did, he tucked the blanket around Rylan and kissed his forehead.

"I'm not going anywhere."

Over the next few minutes, he watched as the nurse checked his concussion symptoms again before providing painkillers.

"While your bruises look bad this morning, your concussion symptoms have abated. Dr. Evan's will be in later to clear you to go home, but things look good."

"Thank you," Cameron said as the nurse headed for the door.

"I'm Detective Callan and this is Detective Arnold. We've talked to the Fort Collins police about the other incidents regarding Tristan Scott. Is it okay if we record this conversation?"

"Yes," Cameron and Rylan said at the same time.

They watched as she clicked two buttons on the recorder she pulled from her jacket.

"Saturday, September twenty-first, time fourteen hundred hours. Statement with Rylan Ellis-Hayes and Cameron Ellis-Hayes by Detective Elizabeth Callan and Detective Tim Arnold. Rylan, can you tell us in your own words what happened..."

Cameron listened as Rylan recounted his assault at the hands of Tristan and flinched whenever Rylan spoke about Tristan touching him, or hitting him, but he felt the tears flood his eyes as Rylan told them how Tristan had both of his hands around his throat and the look of hatred in his eyes.

*Source Creation Date: July 9, 2025, 7:59 am*

“Well, we received several cell phone videos, the best one from Ruby Summers who recorded the entire incident. Based on Mr. Scott’s words and his physical actions, they’ll charge him with first degree assault and possibly a hate crime resulting in bodily harm, but that’s up to the D.A. There might be other miscellaneous charges based on him breaking his restraining order.

“I have to tell you he wants to press charges against you, Cameron, but since you were defending Rylan and he swung at you before you hit him, you have a self-defense case. I don’t think it will come to that. Once whoever represents Mr. Scott gets a look at the videos of the incident, they’ll see you were protecting your husband. If you have any questions, please call. Thank you for speaking with us today, we hope you get better soon,” Detective Callan said.

Both Detectives left their cards and told them to expect a call from the Denver District Attorney if the case goes to trial. They took a series of pictures, capturing Rylan’s injuries and with one final goodbye, left them alone.

“Does it look bad?”

Rylan’s question caught Cameron off guard when he gestured to his face.

He swallowed hard and not wanting to lie to Rylan, nodded.

Rylan moved to get up and Cameron helped him to his feet, tucking him against his side, and Cameron breathed easy for the first time since Rylan woke up. He watched Rylan, looking for signs of any dizziness like he had the day before, and huffed a sigh when Rylan took a step and then another, seeming to be steady on his feet. They

walked the rest of the way in silence toward the restroom.

Rylan brushed his teeth and without the use of a shower, washed his face and turned to smile at Cameron. "I'm glad to be up and about."

As Rylan probed the bruise around his eye, tears threatened again to spill from Cameron's. While the damage to Rylan's face was horrific and sent a surge of rage every time he thought about the bastard who hurt his husband, Rylan gasped at the finger marks around his throat. Cameron watched as he tilted his head back and slid his fingers over the marks that had turned a dark purple in the light of day.

Cameron once again opened his mouth to apologize when Rylan glanced at him without turning his head and interrupted.

"Not your fault. We'll both be careful from now on, since he knows we're married and you are more of a target now."

"Yeah, he seemed more upset by that than anything else."

Rylan sighed. "He didn't even flinch when the manager said they called the cops. Even when the cops pulled you off him, he wanted to hurt me. I think he left me alone because he found out from Declan that all I did was go to school and work. He spotted us together the night we met, and we confirmed our relationship to him the day I moved out. He doesn't want me happy."

"What if he is struggling with the fact he's attracted to you and might be gay, but doesn't want to admit to himself, much less to anyone else?" Cameron asked.

He watched Rylan as he turned back toward the mirror, but he noticed it wasn't the reflection in the mirror that had him concerned. He waited for a moment and Rylan then turned to him.

“I have a surprise waiting for you at home.”

“What for?”

The side of Rylan’s mouth quirked up and his eyes lit with emotion as they stared at each other.

“Because of all the support you’ve given me since we’ve met. But it’s something we can share.”

He smiled and kissed Rylan on his mouth, the only spot not affected by the violence. “I don’t think we can have sex until the doctor clears you.”

Rylan pouted but Cameron directed him back to the bed as they waited for the all clear to head home.

“Don’t you want to know what I bought?”

Cameron growled and said, “If it has anything to do with me being inside you, I would like to remind you we have no privacy in this room.”

He shivered when Rylan moved his mouth near his ear.

“Did you know they sell vibrating butt-plugs?”

Burying his face into Rylan’s neck, his cock swelled in his pants and pressed against the zipper, leaving Cameron feeling light-headed.

“Would it surprise you if I wanted you to buy one and pleasure myself with it until I couldn’t take it anymore and begged you to fuck me?” Cameron asked.

Rylan's gasp brought a smile to his face.

"The feel of your long, skinny fingers inside me, stretching me has been on my mind a lot."

"I'm supposed to be driving you wild enough for you to forget about my injuries and take me on his uncomfortable hospital bed."

*Source Creation Date: July 9, 2025, 8:00 am*

Cameron shook his head. “I would never hurt you. But despite my words, I want to take you here, fuck, I really do.”

They didn’t notice the door opening and when the doctor cleared her throat, they both jumped.

“You two okay? You look a little flushed.” Her eyes were sparkling with humor.

Rylan smirked at Cameron before answering. “Yeah, we’re fine. Eager to head home.”

She nodded. “I’ll discharge you, but because your concussion symptoms might come back, no strenuous exercise for a week and that includes sex.”

As Cameron listened to the instructions, his heart squeezed in his chest as he watched Rylan pout. Grateful for all the time they had together, he would never take Rylan for granted.

Sensing their need to escape and making both men promise to call her if any of the symptoms returned, the doctor nodded and made her way out the room.

Rylan hopped out of bed and dressed, ready to go home, and when they walked toward the exit, Cameron leaned in.

“She said no sex, but there are other ways I can give you pleasure, angel.”

Reaching to grab Cameron’s hand, he rushed them both toward the car. But once they

were on the interstate heading home, Rylan leaned against Cameron and fell asleep.

He glanced down at the man he loved and vowed no one would hurt Rylan ever again.

### CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

#### RYLAN

Rylan pressed end on his cell and darted toward the door and out of his workroom, giggling as he ran down the stairs to find Cameron. The call had been a nurse at the local hospital who had given him the all clear on his concussion symptoms and there was one thing he wanted to do now he was able.

Cameron had left Rylan upstairs earlier to sketch ideas while he went to his office to work on the new laptop Rylan had purchased for him a week earlier as a surprise before Tristan caught up to him in Denver. For weeks, Rylan had researched and gotten opinions about the best state-of-the-art laptop and Cameron had loved it.

He was relieved he could give his husband a surprise for once.

Scheduled to be cleared of his concussion symptoms after Rylan followed the strict advice of the doctors, he'd taken a shower and laid out the toys and lube near their bed, knowing Cameron wouldn't come upstairs.

More often than not, he stayed in a different part of the house during the day because despite him feeling fine, Rylan would tempt him to break the doctor's no sex rule and Cameron didn't want to do anything that might hurt him.

The nights were easier because Cameron would suck him off or finger his prostate until he came, every night, without consideration to his own desires. Cameron would encourage him to hold his body and head still, but he was there when his orgasm



struck, covering Rylan with his large body and holding him tight, whenever Rylan became lost in the pleasure.

But today, it was his turn.

Rylan locked the front door before he set the alarm. He also hid their phones in one of the kitchen cabinets. They needed privacy and his actions ensured that.

Cameron was typing away when Rylan entered the bright room, barely glancing over. When he registered what he was seeing, his hands froze over the keyboard, and he turned his head, giving Rylan his full attention.

“Please tell me you’re naked underneath my tee?”

Rylan shook his head. “No, but I think you’ll like what I have on even more.”

He took slow, steady steps from the door, holding Cameron’s gaze the entire way. During his planning of this moment, Rylan went back and forth many times deciding whether he wanted black, white, or another bright color like red. He decided on black because it looked better against his skin tone and hoped Cameron felt the same.

“What... what are you wearing?”

“Well... they’re silk and cool against my skin, but most of all, I feel sexy in them.”

Cameron’s eyes never left him as he sauntered over to the desk, and he shivered in anticipation as his hazel gaze moved over his body. Cameron audibly gulped when Rylan turned and leaned against the edge of his desk, planting his hands flat against the surface.

Their eyes met and with deliberate movements, Rylan lifted himself up and sat

himself on the corner of the desk. He crossed his legs, playing with the hem of Cameron's tee. His sensitized skin broke out in goosebumps as the material slid along the skin of his upper thighs.

Cameron leaned back in his chair and tried to peek underneath the shirt, grunting his displeasure as he failed.

"Can I see what you have on?"

Rylan pinched the hem of the shirt and smiled at Cameron.

"Wait. Were you cleared?"

"Yes, the nurse called after my shower. Ready?"

Cameron nodded before his eyes darted from Rylan's face and down to his legs, going back and forth, holding his breath in anticipation. Rylan watched as Cameron's cock filled, tenting his sweatpants, as he pulled up the material inch by inch.

Cameron spotted lace and as his eyes widened at the sight, his hands clenched on his lap. Rylan, feeling emboldened by his husband's reaction, lifted the shirt halfway up his chest and watched as Cameron zeroed in on the edge of his laced panties.

Opening and closing his mouth several times, he cleared his throat before he spoke. "Stand, please?"

The loud groan echoed throughout the office when Rylan uncrossed his legs and wriggled toward the edge of the desk. With a graceful movement, he pushed off the desk and stood. Deciding to put on a little show, he rocked his hips back and forth and he turned in a slow circle.

Rylan looked over his shoulder and watched Cameron's many expressions as he reached out and touched the lace edging of the black panties. He traced the curve of his ass, moved his fingers over the slender curve of his waist before he gripped Rylan's hips with both of his hands.

Cameron's thumbs moved over him and Rylan shivered at the warmth pressed against the cool material. Unable to wait another moment, Rylan ripped the shirt over his head and threw it toward the chair in the corner. He moaned as Cameron pulled Rylan closer to him and he could feel the heat of his mouth as he pressed a kiss to his skin.

"You leave me breathless every time I lay my eyes on you and I can't believe I'm the lucky man who's allowed to touch you."

*Source Creation Date: July 9, 2025, 8:00 am*

As much as the lace panties made him feel sexy, he wanted Cameron to rip them off when his lips explored his lower back and his hands slid against his legs and stomach. Cameron stood, his lips never moving away from Rylan's skin, until he buried his face against Rylan's neck. Rylan's cock jumped when Cameron's teeth grazed against the sensitive skin below his ear.

"I wanted you to fuck me, but now, I want to be inside you. I want to take you apart until you're screaming my name and clenching around my cock as I empty inside you."

"Yes. Fuck, Cameron, love, I want that."

This kiss was unlike the others they shared in the past week. Cameron captured his lips in a scorching kiss and all thoughts scattered until there was the vibration of pleasure throughout his body. When they pulled back, Cameron groaned and Rylan followed his gaze to see his cock peeking up through the top of his panties.

"The image of you, like this, I will remember for the rest of our days," Cameron said.

Rylan's hips bucked when Cameron slid his thumb along the slit and gathered the leaking liquid on his digit. He caught and held Rylan's gaze when he lifted his thumb and sucked it into his mouth, tasting him.

"Cameron, please, I need you. I can't wait another minute."

Cameron lifted Rylan in his strong arms and cradled him against his chest as Cameron rushed upstairs. He was careful not to jolt Rylan as he laid him in the

middle of the bed. Cameron's gaze heated Rylan's body, turning it into an inferno.

Cameron noticed something out of the corner of his eye and when he glanced over, he gasped at the assortment of items Rylan had laid out. He took in the dildos, cock rings, flavored lubes Rylan was desperate to try, moving over to the vibrators. Cameron blinked twice, and then turned his gaze back to Rylan.

"They seemed like a good idea but they can wait. I can't, we can use those when I'm not so close to the edge. Please, love. Take me."

"Thank the gods because I want nothing between us, even these sexy-as-fuck panties," Cameron growled.

Hooking his fingers under the waistband, he looked up and captured Rylan's gaze. "May I?"

Rylan nodded, loving how one look from Cameron turned him into a puddle of need. He raised his hips and gasped as Cameron guided the panties over his slim hips and his rounded ass with slow torturous movements. When his cock slapped against his stomach, he groaned because the barrier existed between them, cupping his balls. Still, Cameron took his time, sliding the silk over each inch of skin from his thighs to his calves, until he discarded them over his shoulder.

With quick motions, Cameron undressed himself in record time.

"Did you buy them for the bedroom or to wear every day?"

Rylan shrugged as he savored Cameron's naked body, his cock hard and leaking. He licked his lips, thinking about sucking Cameron into his mouth, something Cameron refused him during the past week.

“What if I wore them from time to time?”

“As long as you like to wear them, I say go for it. I think you’re sexy, whatever you’re wearing, or not wearing to be honest.”

Cameron gripped the base of his cock and stroked up toward the head. When his finger and thumb squeezed the head and liquid beaded on the tip, Rylan begged for him.

“I love you, Cameron. Please.”

Rylan glanced at Cameron as he moved behind him, turning his body to face away, but keeping him on his side. Cameron’s body molded against Rylan’s. He moved his right arm underneath Rylan’s neck and pulled him until most of his body draped over Cameron. Needing to be closer, Rylan lifted his leg and sprawled it over Cameron’s hip, exposing himself.

Cameron’s hands never stopped moving; over his hips, his thighs, his stomach, and tweaking his nipples. He tilted his hips forward and brushed his cock against the cleft of his ass, making Rylan gasp at the sensations of Cameron so close to where he needed him.

“Please, don’t tease. I need you hard and fast.”

Cameron captured Rylan’s mouth, plunging his tongue inside, swallowing Rylan’s moans. Rylan’s breathing fluttered when Cameron circled his hole with the pad of his thumb and pressed inside. His thick digit slipped inside and his low moans turned into mumbled words, words Rylan hoped were audible to Cameron.

“Soon, angel.”

He removed his thumb and before Rylan whimpered at the loss, there was a click of a lid being opened and two of Cameron's slicked fingers pressed inside him. Rylan clenched a hand on Cameron's thigh as a low, dirty moan escaped from his mouth. He rocked himself back and forth on his fingers.

"You feel so good." Cameron's mouth moved over Rylan's neck.

In the next few fevered minutes, Rylan and Cameron found a rhythm that had them both moaning and clutching each other in desperation. But he was getting close. Way too close.

"I don't want to come without you inside me."

Rylan bit his lip when Cameron pulled all three fingers from his body. Breathless, Rylan draped his back against Cameron's chest and moaned when Cameron tilted his hips forward as Rylan pressed his ass back, moaning when Cameron slid inside him.

*Source Creation Date: July 9, 2025, 8:00 am*

“Fuck, love, I need more of your cock.”

Another moan escaped when Cameron gripped his hip with one hand and the other, splayed open over Rylan’s chest. As he breathed Rylan’s name, his hips shot forward, and he buried himself deep inside Rylan.

“Yes.”

“I missed this, being inside you, being so close to you.”

“Missed... you, too.”

Cameron reduced him to moans and whimpers as he gave him what he wanted. He pounded into him, leaving Rylan’s body shivering from head to toe. Rylan loved when he held him close, pressing his back against his sweaty and hard chest as his breaths brushed against his neck, adding to the devastating sensations of being loved.

He whimpered when Cameron’s cock brushed against his prostate. His body clamped down, keeping Cameron deep inside him, as he threw his head back and closed his eyes. Rylan’s own cock leaked, pooling on the bed.

Cameron moaned in his ear and picked up his pace, driving Rylan back onto his cock as he drove forward.

“Come for me, angel.”

Rylan needed one more thrust and Cameron’s rough, sex-laden voice in his ear before



he threw his head back on his husband's shoulder and shouted his release. Hearing Cameron cry out his own release, his cock pulsing deep inside, extended Rylan's own orgasm and he whimpered when Cameron filled him.

Arms banded around him and Rylan's hand gripped Cameron's thigh, hoping to keep him close for as long as possible. After a few minutes, the one distinct sound in their quiet bedroom was their staggered breathing.

Rylan lost track of time, not knowing how long they lay there, but when Cameron pulled up the sheet to cover them, he turned in Cameron's arms to face him. He brushed a kiss against Cameron's lips, savoring the gentle touches and being in his husband's arms after they'd come down from their high.

"We shouldn't go so long without sex again. It'll kill me if we have to wait seven days ever again."

Cameron squeezed him. "Don't even joke about that, I can't handle it."

The intensity of his words brought a tear to his eye, and he wiggled his arms from his sides to cup Cameron's cheeks. He caught and held his eyes, his breath catching in his throat when he noticed the pain reflected in his hazel gaze.

"I'm sorry I scared you."

"It wasn't your fault. I'm... I'm scared of losing you."

"I will never put myself in danger, if I can help it. I should've seen him before he sat next to me, but I couldn't have figured he would confront me in a public place, much less in Downtown Denver. And then what he said, I... I couldn't keep my opinions to myself."

“You had every right to speak your mind. There is something wrong with that fucker and if he ever comes near you again, I won’t stop at breaking his face.”

“Let’s not think about him any longer.”

“How are you feeling? Is your head still tender?”

Rylan kissed him, happy to be in Cameron’s arms and not worried about his health.

“I’m good. No headaches and since I couldn’t do much, well, we’ve gotten plenty of sleep. And now there are no restrictions to our sex lives, even better.”

Cameron laughed and Rylan relaxed in his arms, laying his head on Cameron’s chest.

“I’ve already changed our flight to Paris for next year’s fashion week, but is there anywhere else you would like to go?”

Rylan shook his head. “No, I enjoy being home with you, but maybe we can have everyone over for dinner. I know they wanted to come to the hospital to visit, so a get-together would show them I’m fine without them having to see the damage.”

The night was a warm one for the end of September in Colorado, so the cool sheet felt nice over their heated bodies. For the first time since the afternoon in Denver, Rylan lived without the ache around his throat or the throbbing in his head that sometimes came about when he did too much.

“When does Ruby expect your first sketches?”

“The spring collection’s almost finished, but she needs the final half dozen by the end of November. I sketched the outlines, but I need to add color and a bit of flare.”

Cameron sighed. “You’re an overachiever, even when you’re supposed to be resting.”

“I needed to stop over thinking, especially after my nightmares, so sketching drove all that from my mind and I concentrated on creation instead of destruction. And then you denied me from even giving you a blowjob, so I couldn’t exhaust myself before going to bed.”

“Give me a couple hours and then I’m all yours.”

Rylan yawned and smiled when Cameron followed suit. “Deal.”

Blinking his eyes closed, he heard Cameron’s soft breathing and the feel of his hand rubbing up and down his back, before sleep claimed him.

### CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

#### CAMERON

Cameron hated suits. The starched suit jacket fit snug over his shoulders and his tie threatened to strangle him as he sat in a comfortable leather chair.

He hadn't even worn one to get married.

But today, the day of Tristan's preliminary hearing, he'd expected both of them to be summoned to testify. Instead, Cameron held Rylan's hand in his as they sat in their lawyer's office.

Rylan sat back and glanced around the room, calm and collected. When he caught Cameron's curious gaze, Rylan smiled at him. "Everything will be fine."

On some level, Cameron knew that.

Since the incident, the private investigator, Dean Trevor, who worked for their lawyer had interviewed all of their friends and the witnesses from the restaurant. They'd gotten the videos and pictures of the incident along with Ruby's, and the witnesses agreed to testify against Tristan if they went to trial.

Cameron had watched the video Ruby had recorded and although he wanted to rage at Tristan for every harsh word, punch, and finally the horror of his hands wrapped around Rylan's throat, it was the defiance in Rylan's face as he tried to fight back that made Cameron proud.

Remembering how he looked the morning after the assault, he glanced over at Rylan's unmarred face and noted he looked relaxed and ready to hear whatever the lawyer came back to tell them. He leaned over and kissed Rylan's cheek.

"What was that for?"

"I can kiss my brave and brilliant husband whenever I want."

Rylan wrapped his arms around his shoulders and smiled. "Have I told you how much I love you today?"

Lowering his forehead to meet Rylan's, he said, "I see it every time you look at me."

Before Rylan could reply, he dropped his arms and sat back in his seat when they both heard voices outside the office. They were silent and looked straight ahead as the door opened, but when the lawyer sat down behind his desk, they glanced at each other for a lingering moment.

Cameron turned back to Thomas Sanchez and tried to read his expression but failed. After Thomas glanced at both of them, he steepled his fingers on the desk and sighed.

"The defense has offered a plea."

"Do you know why?" Rylan asked.

"The district attorney presented the evidence, including the eyewitness statements and the damaging videos. And although I don't want to downplay the assault, it was the hate speech that was the most damning."

Rylan nodded as if he understood, but Cameron didn't. But he waited to hear the rest.

“What would he plea to?”

“The D.A. offered five years in jail with two years’ probation once he’s released. The restraining order would be a permanent lifetime one.”

Cameron growled. “Is this a good deal for him or Rylan?”

“Despite having evidence on video of Mr. Scott confirming your previous assault and your new assault on display for all to see, if the D.A. presented the case to a jury, they might be lenient because this was his first charged offense or he might get more time than what is being offered. But the unknown here is what a jury will decide. And if you go to trial, you, Rylan, and the witnesses will all have to testify and although he has a right to a speedy trial, the defense might drag this out for as long as possible. But the decision is yours. I have to go back in a half an hour with your decision to the D.A.”

“I would like to agree to the plea,” Rylan said, his voice clear and concise.

Shock surged through Cameron and he turned to Rylan. “Why?”

The question came out harsher than he meant it to and he flinched when Rylan turned to look at him with his face pinched and hurt reflected in his eyes. Instead of answering him, Rylan turned back to Thomas.

“It’s my decision, right?”

“Yes.”

Cameron scoffed. “Don’t you think we should discuss this?”

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“No, it’s my decision and I have my own reasons for agreeing to this.”

Rylan reached for his hand and for the first time since they’d met, Cameron pulled his hand out of reach. He flinched at the flash of hurt reappearing on Rylan’s face, but there was determination there as well and Cameron knew he wouldn’t change his mind.

With reluctance, Cameron reached for Rylan’s hand and squeezed.

Rylan’s stiff posture relaxed, and he turned toward Thomas. “I agree to the plea deal.”

The lawyer gave Rylan details of what would happen once the defense accepted the plea, but Cameron tuned him out.

Cameron wondered if he knew Rylan as well as he thought he did. They’d always discussed huge decisions, well at least he thought he did. But then he remembered their trip to New York and Hawaii as a surprise. He proposed to Rylan and until that point, they’d never discussed marriage. And he’d run over Rylan’s opinions when he’d first asked him to move in. So Rylan’s decision on his own assault should be his own. He could be there for support, but Rylan was right, it was his decision alone.

It wasn’t until Rylan stood and shook Thomas’s hand that Cameron shook off his thoughts. Cameron offered his own hand before he turned to Rylan, giving him a small smile when Rylan reached for him and they wandered out the door. They were both silent as they headed down the elevator toward the parking structure.

Cameron knew it was dangerous that he'd driven them home without conscious thought, but by the time they parked and headed inside, he had shaken off most of his surprise at Rylan's decision.

Rylan slipped his arms around his waist as soon as the front door shut behind them and placed his head on Cameron's chest. The rest of his tension abated.

"Why were you so angry about the plea?"

"I... I don't know. I was thinking he would get more time, but on the drive home I thought about a jury letting him out with no time served, and I knew it would be worse. And then I thought since it was a major decision, we would make it together. But that would be rather hypocritical of me, especially after realizing I've made many decisions under the mindset of surprising you, but I should have asked what you wanted each time, and I didn't."

Rylan shook his head, his hair brushing against his chin. "If I didn't want all those experiences with you, I am strong enough to say no. But I love being with you, talking to you, and I wouldn't change a moment."

"I wouldn't either. But from now on, I'll ask you before any decision. I understand this was yours to make on your own and despite my initial reaction, I understand that now."

"I took the plea for several reasons and maybe if you hear them, you'll understand."

Cameron nodded and Rylan stepped back, taking the time to remove his tie and suit jacket before he unbuttoned the top button of his white dress shirt. Cameron mirrored his movements before Rylan took his hand and moved them to the couch.

He sat with his back against the arm, Rylan moving his feet to Cameron's lap. He



reached for a foot before he massaged, pressing his thumbs in a circular motion around his heel and arch and watched as Rylan relaxed.

“Well, with this plea, he goes to jail right away and our friends don’t have to disrupt their lives to testify. He has to plead guilty to all the charges and they are on record, including the hate crime charge. But most of all, the sooner Tristan is out of our lives, the better.

“The maximum time he could get for the assault with extenuating circumstances and it being a first offense, isn’t very many years past the five offered. So this way, he’s guaranteed to serve the entire sentence of five years without a chance at parole.”

“But what after he has five years to think about getting revenge, he comes after you then?”

Rylan gave him a small smile.

“Soon after leaving the hospital, I asked Thomas to get you added to the restraining order since we’re married. And because of the plea, the permanent restraining order includes both of us for a lifetime. I did this to protect everyone in our lives and save all of us the aggravation and the possibility he could walk.

“Nothing is perfect. And if he’s stupid enough to come after us when he’s released from prison, well, we’ll deal with it. But I refuse to live in fear of him. I have had enough time doing that, I won’t let him influence me any longer.”

Panicking, he blurted, “What if he has a gun next time or sends someone to kill you?”

Rylan scrambled closer and straddled Cameron’s lap, cupping his face in his hands. He did that whenever he had a point to make and wanted Cameron to understand him. Before he could speak, Cameron released all of his worries with a rush of words.

“I’ve never felt fear until I spotted Tristan’s hands around your neck. I keep seeing his face when he threatened to kill you and the hatred mirrored in his eyes. His hatred for you.”

Rylan kissed him. It wasn’t sensual, but it brought tears to his eyes and he clutched Rylan to his chest, holding him close.

“I can’t lose you, Rylan. I can’t live without you.” Cameron’s voice broke on the last word.

“I’m not going anywhere, love. You won’t lose me, I promise. I know you weren’t listening, but Thomas explained the reason they were pushing the plea is that he will get mental health counseling. If he gets the help he needs, he’ll stay away from us. And the plea came within a week of him being arrested. The Tristan I know would never admit guilt, and now he’s willing to do five years. I’m sure he’ll never want to repeat the experience again.”

Cameron nodded. Yeah, the reality of his situation must have set in, because Cameron would have sworn he would make good on his threats.

“And trust me, love, I love you and our life together. I won’t put myself in danger.”

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Nodding, Cameron then pressed his forehead against Rylan's. "I'm sorry for hurting you. I trust you and I don't want you to think I don't."

"Love, I know. I would feel the same way if you were hurt."

Cameron kissed Rylan, unable to stay away. When Rylan moaned into his mouth, Cameron tilted his head to deepen the kiss. But before they could lose themselves in desire, there was a loud pounding on the front door.

"Do you think it's the police?"

Cameron shook his head and stood. Directing Rylan behind him but keeping him close with a hand on his lower back, he moved to the door. He spotted two men, the younger one seemed familiar, but Cameron couldn't place where he'd seen him. Then it clicked.

"I think your brother is here."

Rylan glanced out the window and groaned. "And my dad."

"Well, now we know that fucker told others where we lived. After their visit, we'll send the video to the police if they threaten you. How do you want to handle this?"

Rylan nodded toward the corner behind the door. "Can you stand there and I'll see what they want?"

Cameron nodded.

“Great, this day just keeps getting better and better.”

“After this, we can spend the rest of the day sitting in front of the TV and I’ll make your favorite dinner. And tonight, I’ll worship every inch of your glorious body?”

Rylan shook his head. “I think it’s my turn to worship yours.”

“Well, whichever way, let’s get rid of them.”

Rylan chuckled as he watched Cameron step to the side and nod.

As Cameron looked on with trepidation clearly etched on his face, Rylan unlocked the door. He stood ready, knowing Cameron would destroy anyone, including Rylan’s family, if they laid a finger on him.

I want to be alone with my husband. Is that too much to ask?

With a nod from Cameron, Rylan straightened, ready for the confrontation.

### CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

#### RYLAN

Rylan took a deep breath and snatched open the door before they could pound on it again. He stood taller as he took in his dad in front of him, anger radiating from the older man. His fists clenched at his sides and there were unhealthy red splotches dotted along his face and neck.

Wondering if this was two against one, he chanced a glance at his brother, who stood there with his hands in his pockets, looking sheepish. When he realized his brother wasn't angry, he turned back to his father and raised an eyebrow, waiting for him to speak.

Cameron, in a show of support, ran his finger along the back of his hand, letting him know he was close. He let out a breath; he wasn't alone any longer.

After several months of being away from the toxic environment that was his childhood home, Rylan realized he hadn't thought about his family once since he'd packed up and left.

He never understood what his mother saw in the man she married. But now being married Cameron and happy with his life, he couldn't fault her. His father might have been a different person than the one standing in front of him when his mother met him.

His dad broke the silence.

“So it’s true. You shacked up with some rich guy. Do you put out for his money?”

Rylan sensed without looking at his husband that he bristled at the asinine statement from his father. He remained silent, not even bothering to react to the absurd question.

In his silence, his father shifted from one foot to the other, running an agitated hand through his closely cropped hair. It was obvious he wanted something, so Rylan sped up the conversation.

“So, Tristan called you and told you where I lived and now you’re here. For what?”

“Tristan was good to us, a good friend to your brother. So why would you have him arrested?”

“Well, father. Tristan tried to rape me when I was seventeen. He left me alone for a while, but I suspect it was because he wanted to finish college before he moved back. Then he found I lived here, he threw a brick through our window and we served him with a restraining order. Despite that, he found me during a business meeting in Denver and tried to choke me to death in front of the entire restaurant. All that while yelling gay slurs at me and promising to kill me. So why do you think I had him arrested?”

Rylan noticed that while he spoke, Declan grew paler until he shook.

His father pulled his attention away from his brother by growling, “Don’t fucking speak like that, I won’t fucking have it.”

He stood straighter.

“You’ve never been a father. You chose not to give a shit about me. I found out about

the money mom left both of Declan and me, and you gambled it away. Then I found out you applied and received parent student loans for both of us while we were in college and used that money for the same thing. Why do you think I lived in the basement? You took the money I was planning on using for my education and acted as if I wasn't worth your time or attention and now you think I should treat you with respect. Fuck that.

"I will repeat my question so I can move on with my day. What do you fucking want?" Rylan could feel his body shake with rage.

"What do you think I want? You're fucking a rich guy and I want what's due."

"Nothing... is... due... to... you!"

"Do you want me to kick your little snide ass right now and take what I want?"

Rylan opened his mouth to reply, but Cameron squeezed his fingers. Rylan turned his head and smiled before he stepped to one side, which allowed Cameron to reveal himself.

This will be fun.

"I don't think you've met my husband. This is Cameron, the guy you think I shacked up with for his money."

Cameron wrapped his arm around Rylan's waist and pulled him against his side. He stood tall, all of his six foot three inch muscular frame on display, his left hand clenched into a fist at his side leaving his biceps bulging. Rylan admired the fierce scowl on his face.

"I've heard everything you've said about my husband and I know none of it is true.

When I married Rylan, he became my family and you have no claim on anything he has or earns. Rylan owes you nothing and if you don't get off our property, I will make you."

Rylan smiled at the fear reflected in his father's eyes. But despite that, he wouldn't budge.

"I'm not leaving empty-handed."

"You have no leverage here. We could sue you for what you've already stolen from your two children. And trust me, I have the money, the lawyers, and plenty of time to drag you through the court system and make sure we smear your name because of it. And you will still end up with nothing. The decision is yours to make."



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The older man paled and Rylan knew Cameron hit the nail on the head. He made one desperate plea to Rylan.

“We’re losing the house,” he said in a defeated tone, “I need the money to pay off the loan.”

Rylan scoffed at the obvious lie. “I know mom paid off the house months before she died. She told me. But if you’ve taken out another mortgage on the house, that’s your problem.”

“Or you can do what Rylan has been doing for years. Get a job and pay off your debts. He doesn’t owe you a thing,” Cameron said.

“You... you’ll leave me and Declan homeless?”

Rylan glanced at Declan, who shook his head and gave him a small smile, letting him know everything his father said was a lie.

“Yes.”

His father reared back as if Rylan had hit him and looked as though he would retaliate, but Cameron’s growl had him falter.

“Touch one hair on his head and I will fucking end you.”

“Fuck off, both of you.” And with that, his father stalked off.

There was a long pause and Rylan sagged against Cameron, his body shaking from the confrontation he never wanted.

“Man, you’re fucking scary when you glare like that,” Declan said.

Rylan smiled at his brother and it widened when Cameron relaxed next to him. Although Declan had never hurt him and deflected his dad’s attention away from him when he was at home, he’d never attempted to get to know him. Rylan was always his annoying younger brother. But now he had distance and hindsight, Rylan never made the effort either.

“How are you doing?” Declan asked.

“I’m okay. How did you find out about it?”

“Tristan called and asked me to be a character witness. When I asked him why, he told me you and he had a run in and after you tried to strike him, he beat you up. Then I remembered his anger when you moved out and it made little sense. I contacted the Denver police, and they showed me the video of the entire incident. Rylan, I didn’t know of Tristan’s obsession with you. If I did, I would have never stayed friends with him,” Declan said.

“I know, Declan. I know you wouldn’t, and I didn’t tell you how bad it had gotten.”

“What did you tell his lawyer?” Cameron asked.

“I told him to fuck off and hung up on him when he wanted to put Tristan on the phone.”

A lightbulb went off in Rylan’s head. “That’s why he wanted the plea.”

“I believe so. Yeah, when Tristan couldn’t get a hold of me, he called the house. He gave dad a bullshit story and gave him your address. I followed him here after he called and told me he wanted to confront you. I couldn’t stop him and I planned to step in if you needed it, but you handled him well, little brother.”

“Thanks. Is Dad losing the house?”

Declan scoffed. “He’s close to it. He re-mortgaged the house several years ago. I found a letter from the bank in his desk stating he owes back payments. He told me he lost his job a couple months back and stopped making payments.”

“What about you? What are you going to do if dad loses the house?”

“I moved out a couple weeks after you. I live with my girlfriend near campus and work construction. I make a great living.”

“You don’t—”

“No, I stopped believing his bullshit a while ago. While I didn’t know about him taking out loans in our names or our inheritance, I knew about his gambling problem and after asking me over and over again for a loan, I’m done with him.”

Rylan nodded, surprised by the hardness in Declan’s voice as he spoke of their father.

“I would like another chance to know you again, if you can forgive me for being such a shitty brother?”

Without thinking about it, Rylan stepped forward and hugged Declan, heaving out a sigh when Declan hugged him back. When he stepped back, Cameron introduced himself.

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“We’re having our friends over for drinks and dinner tomorrow afternoon. Why don’t you come by and bring your girlfriend? We’d love to meet her.”

“I would like that. Yeah, we’ll be here. Thanks for forgiving me.”

“We’re family. I want another chance, too.”

With a promise to bring Anna tomorrow, Declan left with a wave.

Rylan, tired of the roller-coaster of emotions the day had brought, jumped into Cameron’s arms as soon as the front door was closed and locked. He brought their lips together in a scorching kiss.

Cameron moaned into his mouth and Rylan took advantage of his position and moved his fingers to Cameron’s belt. Before he worked to loosen it, Cameron pulled back.

“I think we need a shower.”

Rylan groaned as he pictured Cameron, naked with slicked skin, as he dropped to his knees and sucked Cameron into his mouth.

“You have a very expressive face, Ry. What are you thinking about?”

Without answering, Rylan stepped back and unbuttoned the top button of his dress shirt. He trailed his fingers down to the next one and the next one until his shirt hung open with his chest exposed. As Cameron watched, he moved to the cuffs, flicking them open with ease before he shrugged off his shirt to pool at his feet.

Rylan's flushed as Cameron's heated gaze roamed over his exposed chest.

Forcing himself to move, he started toward the stairs while his fingers closed over the button on his dress pants, drawing a gasp when he hooked his thumbs under the waistband of his pants and boxer briefs underneath and shimmied them down his hips, stopping his movement at his thighs.

He glanced over his shoulder and held Cameron's gaze as he slid the rest of his clothing all the way off.

"Fuck."

Cameron charged forward and lifted Rylan into his arms. He kissed his face as he carried him up the rest of the stairs, through their bedroom, and into the attached bathroom. Cameron sat him on the counter before he stripped and flipped on the shower, adjusting the temperature. When he moved in between Rylan's thighs and cupped his ass, Rylan gasped.

Rylan's body lifted from the counter and Cameron carried him into the shower. Instead of stepping under the spray, he pressed Rylan against the cool tile and drove his hips forward. Their cocks lined up perfectly and the pressure from Cameron's cock against his own drew a moan from both of them.

"More love."

"I want to give you everything, to make you feel as good as I do from a simple touch."

"I need you, only you."

Rylan saw a flash in Cameron's gaze before he cupped his cheek and kissed him. It

was gentle and full of love, only breaking the kiss when breathing became essential.

Pressing his mouth against Cameron's neck, one of his favorite places on his husband to touch. "Can I taste you?"

Cameron nodded and after pressing a short kiss to his lips, Rylan moved his lips down his husband's chest and stomach, until he found himself on his knees. For a long moment, he stared at Cameron's beautiful and throbbing cock, the head of his cock red and leaking. It was a beautiful sight.

Rylan reached for Cameron's hand and moved it on top of his head, loving the slide of Cameron's fingers through the strands of his hair. He leaned in and pressed light kisses on his hipbone, inhaling his musky scent, before he palmed the base of his cock and rubbed his cheek against his satiny hardness. Each sound he drew from his husband causing his own cock to twitch.

Not wanting to wait another minute, he opened his mouth and drew the head of Cameron's cock into his mouth. His tongue darted out and flicked along the slit, savoring the liquid that dripped steadily into his mouth, loving the trace of tartness on his taste buds.

Gasping when Cameron gripped his hair, Rylan swallowed more of his cock down his throat. When the head reached the back of his throat, he took another involuntary swallow, shivering at the low moan escaping Cameron's throat. As he slid his mouth off, his lips tightened as his tongue traced over the protruding veins on the underside of his cock.

His hands moved to Cameron's hips, steadying him, as the sensations became overwhelming and his hips darted forward in small movements.

Done with his teasing, Rylan's movements picked up. He reached for his own cock,

squeezing the base and working his way to the head. He flicked his thumb over the pre-come leaking from his cock and after a stroke or two, his concentration went back to making Cameron come in his mouth.

Cameron glanced down. Rylan's swallowed at his intense look, filled with love and something more. Rylan took Cameron deep and swallowed around Cameron, stroking his own cock with fervor, until a tug on his hair, letting him know Cameron was close.

Not moving away, Rylan slid his mouth toward the head, slurping up the taste of his husband, before he swallowed him and hummed, pushing Cameron to the edge. He threw his head back and shouted his name, pushing Rylan over the edge with him.

The dual sensation of Cameron's cock swelling before he released into Rylan's mouth and his own cock pulsing out his release caused blackness to crowd his vision. He pulled back as Cameron's orgasm waned and with one last flick of his tongue, Cameron's cock dropped from his mouth and Rylan's head bent forward as he sucked in deep breaths.

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As his breathing evened out, his finger reached up and swiped a drop of come from his lip. He looked up at Cameron and with a small smile, his tongue darted out and he moaned at the taste.

Cameron reached for him and with more energy than he could muster at the moment, rinsed their bodies before shutting off the shower and toweling them off. Rylan closed his eyes as his husband lifted him into arms and carried him to bed.

The bed dipped and after Cameron lay down, Rylan snuggled closer. The tension drained from him, leaving him lethargic.

“What a day, huh?”

Cameron laughed, and the sound brought a smile to his face.

“Thank you, love.”

“What for?”

“Because you see me differently than anyone else in the world and you still love me.”

Cameron pulled back until he captured Rylan’s gaze.

“Meeting you was fate, I believe that. But we both recognized something in the other and took a chance. I will say this for the rest of our lives. I love you and the luckiest day of my life is when I spotted you dancing. And no matter what happens, we will always have each other.”



Rylan wiped a tear from his cheek before he kissed Cameron. “I love you, forever, with all of my heart.”

“I love you, too, angel. With all I am and all we will ever be.”

### CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR

#### CAMERON

Cameron put the last tray of his pumpkin shaped sugar cookies in the oven and set the timer.

“Ry?”

He heard the little giggle before Rylan walked in with little Emma on his hip. He moved toward Cameron and gave him a kiss, drawing another laugh from the seven-month-old.

Tickling Emma with his free hand, Rylan spoke. “You like that? Uncle Ry kissed Uncle Cameron?”

Knowing she was reacting to Rylan’s tone of voice rather than the question, Cameron still chuckled when a loud peal of laughter echoed through the kitchen. He leaned down and kissed little Emma on her cheek and she rewarded him with a tiny pat on his own.

Declan had brought his girlfriend, now wife, the year before to the barbecue to meet both of their friends and family. Tim, Eric, and Aaron had seen Declan before, when they thought Declan stood by and let his best friend insult Rylan, so they were a little wary of Rylan inviting him. But Issa broke the ice and hugged Declan and then Anna, welcoming them both to the fray. His parents came, and with all of them including Steffie and Suzy, they became one big happy family.

Rylan and Declan had grown closer after that day, getting to know each other and revealing the tough times they had with their dad. By the time Emma was born, Rylan was the proudest uncle, showering the little girl with whatever she wanted. They both offered to babysit over the Halloween weekend and sent Declan and Anna to a bed-and-breakfast in Vail, a present for their anniversary weekend.

And Rylan had gone crazy, creating several costumes for Emma to try on, taking pictures of the beautiful baby in every one, before she'd chosen the pink princess dress. She had fussed when Rylan had tried to take it off her, but he succeeded, only after she'd gone to bed the night before.

To celebrate Halloween, the trio, Suzy, Issa, Steffie, and his parents were all coming over and they would, as a group, go trick or treating with Emma. His parents also loved to spoil Emma, who had taken in Declan, Anna, and Emma as their own.

Cameron had made popcorn balls decorated in orange and black, but the night before the trio had eaten most of them and he had to remake them earlier that morning.

Not that he was complaining.

They had all graduated and with their degrees in hand, the trio decided to stay in Fort Collins. Tim worked with special needs children throughout Northern Colorado, traveling from school to school. Aaron worked with his dad as a mechanic in the garage his father owned for the past fifteen years, and Eric was the assistant football coach for the Colorado State Rams and was thinking about getting his MA in Education.

That morning, Cameron had started on the cookies. Using a pumpkin, ghost, bat, and other Halloween cookie cutter shapes, and he had decorated them with different frosting colors. Halloween was one of Rylan's favorite holidays and with Emma staying with them; he wanted everything to be special.

They knew any candy Emma would get tonight would go to the trio, but they looked forward to seeing the decorations and the costumes throughout their neighborhood.

“Hey, Ry?”

Cameron had been thinking about the next step in their lives and hoped Rylan was ready for it.

“Yeah, love?”

“What do you think about... adopting one of our own?”

Rylan’s head jerked up and stared at Cameron. His mouth opened wide as his beautiful gray eyes filled with tears.

Unable to decipher Rylan’s thoughts, Cameron rambled, “I think it’s the perfect time. Your fall and winter collection was a gigantic success for Ruby and her company, you are less stressed than ever before, and since I freelance when I feel like it, we would have plenty of time to spend with a child of our own. And other than the charity fashion show, which was a more successful this year than the one before, we have plenty of time to spend with a child before we plan next year’s event. And you have already started the spring collection, which isn’t due for another three months. What do you think?”

Before Rylan could speak, the horde burst through the front door and filled the kitchen. He heard the boys raid the refrigerator and watched as Issa and Suzy squeezed Rylan standing on either side of him. Steffie patted Rylan on the shoulder before she snagged a plain cookie off the tray. Still, he couldn’t move his eyes away from Rylan’s, waiting for his reaction.

The room quieted as they sensed something was off.

“What’s going on with you two?” Issa asked.

Emma, who recognized Issa’s voice, squirmed in Ry’s arms and reached for Issa. Plucking her out of his arms, she held Emma close and pressed a kiss to the baby’s cheek.

“I asked Rylan if he wanted to start the adoption process and have a baby of our own?”

“Oh,” was the collective comment before they all scattered, looking for food.

Rylan wiped a tear from his cheek. “Yes, I want to have a baby with you.”

Cameron caught Rylan as he jumped into his arms. Their lips met and his tongue swooped in, needing to taste his husband, and soon they became lost in each other.

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“How did you know?” Rylan asked.

“I didn’t, not really. But it’s the way you look at Emma and I know how much love you have to give. I put two and two together.”

Cameron squeezed Rylan close. “Plus, I would love to be a father, be a parent with you. You’ll be great with them and I’ll learn. And mom and dad have been hinting about grandkids they could spoil.”

Rylan giggled, unable to contain his happiness. “I have no clue how to go about starting the adoption process.”

He felt his cheeks heat as Rylan raised an eyebrow.

“I... well I sort of already filled out an application right after Emma was born and we have our first interview with the adoption agency on Tuesday.”

Rylan opened his mouth, but Cameron interrupted. “I checked your calendar, you’re free.”

His husband jumped up and down, a smile on his face. “We’re really doing this?”

“Yes. And this is something I want, with you, more than anything.”

The cascade of voices reminded them they weren’t alone.

“Do you want a boy or a girl?” Issa asked.

Aaron said, “I get to pick the name.”

“Why do you get to pick? I think we should all have a say,” Suzy huffed.

Cameron laughed. “What if they already have a name?”

“What if it isn’t a good name or something that doesn’t fit with Ellis-Hayes? Are you going to allow your child to go through life as a Bob or Bertha?” Tim asked.

Issa nodded over to Tim. “I’m with him. The baby won’t know if you change their name or you can use it as their middle name and pick a new first one.”

Eric brows drew down. “Giving your kid a middle name, although their surname is already hyphenated?”

Emma giggled and waved her arms around and Issa groaned. “Please don’t agree with your Uncle Eric, I think a middle name is fine.”

Rylan cleared his throat. “We’ll be the parents, do we have a say?”

His mom and dad walked into the kitchen. His dad hugged Rylan and then Cameron as his mom reached for Emma, who cooed at her grandmother.

“Your opinions matter. What are we talking about?”

“Well, Rylan and I are adopting a baby.”

His mom squealed and Emma joined in, thinking it was a game. She hugged both of them before she lifted Emma and pressed her lips to Emma’s tummy and blew raspberries.

“I scheduled the appointment for this Tuesday at two in the afternoon, so we’ll find out our chances then,” he said.

Cameron pulled Rylan close and kissed him again.

“I love you and thank you, for giving me everything I’ve ever wanted,” Rylan said.

“I have many more years to spoil you and our kids rotten. Along with all their aunts, uncles, and grandparents, we will all be a family and love every moment. I love you, angel, with everything I am.”

“We’ll go to your appointment with you,” Eric said.

Cameron looked up and Rylan stepped in front of him, allowing Cameron’s arms to wrap around his waist and hold him close.

“They have to interview us to see if we’re able to raise a baby.”



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“But if we all come with you, they’ll know you two have plenty of support from your family,” his mom added.

Issa waved her phone at them. “I texted Declan and he and Anna will be there, too.”

Rylan shrugged and looked back over his shoulder. “They’ll be here all the time anyway, so we might as well have them at the interview.”

“Fine.” Cameron would always give him everything he wanted, even if the large group wanted to crash their adoption interview.

“I’m hungry, where’s dinner?” Aaron asked.

He pressed a kiss to Rylan’s cheek and retreated to the refrigerator. As he started dinner, Rylan sat down with the others, drinking wine, and playing peek-a-boo with Emma until she fell asleep in Rylan’s arms.

Cameron smiled as he watched his beautiful husband along with their family. Rylan changed his world for the better, he knew there was no place he’d rather be.

Together, with the people he loved, he and Rylan were home.

The End