



Hitting the Jackpot

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Category: Romance, Adult, M-m Romance

Description: Lake

There is nothing more that Lake wants than to be a brave boy. He's trying. Lake is really trying. He's making big changes in his life, like moving into a new house with Remi and Dom. Or wearing the pretty clothes that make him happy. When Jesse gives Lake the perfect housewarming gift, Lake knows that now is his last chance. It's time that he is the bravest boy ever and gets the Daddy that already owns his heart.

Jesse

Money doesn't buy happiness. Isn't that the saying? Jesse knows for a fact that it's true in his case. He has everything that anyone could ever want. Some might call him selfish, but Jesse wants a true partner more than every cent in his bank account.

Jesse has taken the steps to ensure he's ready to claim the boy he's already fallen for. One gift leads to a date and Jesse and Lake start to build something real. Between interfering family and self-doubts, the two of them will have to rely on each other to keep from being torn apart. It's a good thing their found family is by their sides every step of the way.

Total Pages (Source): 80

Chapter One

Lake

Soft rock music played from the new stereo system in the corner of the room. His room. Lake looked around the room with pride. The house might not belong to him, but this was the first time that he'd gotten to decorate and claim his space as his true self.

A gorgeous thick gray carpet covered the floor from wall to wall. It had been Remi who had insisted on the thick padding for under the carpet. Remi claimed it would be better for Lake and Dom's knees when they were crawling around. Lake had wanted to argue about the extra cost but in the end, he agreed and allowed himself to be spoiled.

Lake could imagine what his mom or brothers would say if they knew that Lake had allowed anyone to buy him something. Anything. His father wouldn't use words to remind Lake. It had taken time, but Lake trusted the men that he now called his chosen family. Not that Lake was under any illusion that his blood family would be pleased when they'd found out what Lake had done.

It might have been cowardly, but Lake had moved out of the apartment he shared with two of his brothers, Jack and Brex, when they were out of town on a camping trip. Lake hated camping and his family knew it. They still pressured Lake to go along with them every year but this time Lake had been able to hold out and blame work. He had worked so it hadn't been a complete lie. Lake had also moved everything he owned from the shared apartment.

He'd had help moving his stuff too. Eric, Dane, and Remi had taken care of the big furniture as Ezra and Brandon had helped Lake load boxes. Dom still wasn't allowed to do much after his kidney transplant four weeks ago. Dom stayed home watching Eric and Ezra's little girl, Annabelle. Lake had moved out of that prison of an apartment in less than two hours.

Immediately after moving out Lake turned off his cell phone.

He cringed, thinking of all the missed calls, voicemails, and text messages that awaited him when he finally turned his phone back on. Maybe he wouldn't! Lake might just get a new number and be done with everyone else. Lake sighed, knowing he would never be that brave. A second phone wasn't a bad idea though.

If he shared his concerns with his friends, he knew they would have his back. Dom especially was protective over Lake even though Lake towered over Dom and outweighed him by a lot. Dom understood that it didn't matter how big someone was or if they looked scary. You couldn't judge someone by how they looked. Lake appeared to be big and bad and scary, but he would never hurt a soul. Never. That was the entire issue that Lake had with his blood family. His father and all four brothers were military to the core. Even his mom had served.

Lake had tried. He joined the army and did his duty. Unlike his family, Lake had hated every minute of it. As soon as his enlistment had ended, Lake had gotten out. His father had been furious. Since the years of his departure from the army, Lake had disappointed his family over and over.

First, he admitted that he was gay. His brothers had taunted him. His mom had cried. It had been his father that had stepped in and said it was okay as long as Lake was the top and never took a dick up his ass. Lake had been too afraid to admit he was a pure bottom, so he simply nodded and never mentioned it again.

His mother had reached the boiling point when Lake became vegan. She couldn't understand his reasons and refused to accommodate his preferences. Every week Lake was required to attend the family dinner where she piled his plate high with meat and other food that Lake wouldn't eat.

Lastly his family had a problem with Lake's job. They swore he was wasting his time working as a bouncer. Jack and Brex tried to get him into construction with them. Justice and Lenon were still enlisted in the army, but Lenon constantly put Lake down for his chosen profession.

He'd stopped defending himself years ago.

Lake loved his job. Of course, his family had no idea that Lake simply worked the door of a private kink club. His family would lose their shit and probably lock him away. He'd already allowed himself to be bullied into sharing an apartment with Jack and Brex because his family stated that he couldn't take care of himself.

All of that was behind him now. There was no going back now that Lake had made the huge step to move out and start his life his own way.

His bedroom was the first step.

Lake hadn't been comfortable keeping anything personal in his old room. Both Jack and Brex helped themselves to whatever they wanted of his and if they found anything, like the one gay romance book he'd taken home, they would steal it and give it to his father.

He'd started keeping anything important to him in his locker at work or over at his friends' places.

His little stuff. Lake's special clothes? None of that had been touched by his blood

family. He'd hidden it all. Lake didn't have to hide any longer.

Lake grinned. The king-size bed was covered with a gorgeous peach bedspread that matched the curtains that they'd hung. Along with the stereo and speakers to listen to music he liked, Lake had splurged and purchased the most beautiful vanity that he'd ever seen. Lake was still learning the tricks to applying makeup, but he now at least had the space to practice.

A tall bookcase nearly covered an entire wall and held his toys, books, and knickknacks that Lake thought were pretty. There were still plenty of empty shelves to fill. Lake could buy and display whatever he wanted and there wouldn't be any judgment. Not in his new home. Not by his chosen family.

He turned at the soft knock on his door.

That was another thing he wasn't used to. His brothers would barge in whenever they wanted. When Lake had put a lock on his bedroom door, they'd removed the knob and said they'd take the whole door if he tried to keep them out again.

"Come in," he called.

The door opened slowly before Dom stuck his head in the room. Dom tilted his head while frowning. "Why are you standing in the middle of your room?" He gave a saucy grin. "Get lost in this big ol' space?"

Lake laughed. The room was three times the size of his previous bedroom. "No, I was just admiring my room," he admitted.

Dom pushed the door open and strolled closer. "It is beautiful. Just like you, my friend."

He sniffed as his emotions overwhelmed him. How had he been so lucky to find himself in such an amazing friend group?

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Even though Dom wasn't the touchy-feely type of person, unless it was with his Daddy, he wrapped his arms around Lake's waist. "It's okay. We've got you. We love you."

Lake kissed the top of Dom's dark hair. He needed to color it again but since his transplant surgery, Dom hadn't been doing much. Dom blamed Remi for being overprotective but truthfully, they would all worry until Dom hit the six-week mark.

At six weeks after a transplant, if Dom's body hadn't started to reject the organ, there was an over ninety-percent chance that a rejection wouldn't happen. Even with good reports from his weekly checkups and Dom swearing that he felt fine, they all were holding their breath for two more weeks.

"You know I love you too." Lake made sure to tell his friend that often. He didn't want to have any more regrets than he already did.

"I know." Dom pulled away. "I am the most awesome person you know. And I came to tell you that dinner was ready."

Lake's stomach rumbled. He was a big guy and loved food. "What are we having for dinner?"

"Oh!" Dom gave a little wiggle. "I know this! I practiced." He took a deep breath. "On tonight's menu is a caramelized tofu with a soy-braised eggplant dish. Ha! Nailed it! And Remi said I would forget."

Emotions hit him hard again. All he'd asked his mom to do was not force meat on

him, but she refused. “You don’t have to change your diet because I—”

Dom smacked Lake’s stomach. “Are you kidding me? Remi loves making new dishes and has taken this on as a challenge.”

“But you—” Lake tried to argue.

“Can get my fix of junk at work or anytime I want. No one is doing without, and my doctors are loving what this change is doing for my numbers.”

“I’m happy to hear that,” Lake said. He didn’t want to force his lifestyle on anyone else, but Remi and Dom insisted on including him in everything.

“Remi might have let me be his taste tester and I swear I’ve never had something so good. I’m not complaining about this change to our diet.”

Lake was relieved. “Thanks, Dom.”

Dom grabbed his hand. “So, let’s eat. I hate when you go to work without dinner.”

“I haven’t done that since I moved in here,” Lake promised.

“I know!” Dom replied happily. “Do you want me to help you with your makeup tonight?”

Lake hesitated. Makeup was newer for him, but he absolutely loved getting dolled up. Since moving in, Dom kept offering to help him but Lake had always kept makeup to private little time.

“Remember you can say no. Only do what you’re comfortable with,” Dom said as they reached the hall.

“I want to,” Lake confessed. “I do. I’m just—”

“Scared,” Dom said. He squeezed Lake’s fingers tight. “What if Remi and I came to the club for a little bit? Hell, I think Brandon is off tonight, so I’ll see who else wants to come.”

“Really?” Lake loved when his friends came to the club. He could take his breaks and play with them in the little room.

“Daddy!” Dom hollered.

“Walk in here like a grown man and talk to me instead of shouting like a toddler,” Remi called.

“But I’m not a grown man! I’m your baby!” Dom shouted.

Remi stepped into the kitchen doorway, wiping his hands on a towel. “Do you need to spend some time in the ropes?”

Dom shuddered as he nodded. “But first can we go to the club tonight on Lake’s break?”

Remi glanced at him.

Lake’s immediate reaction was wanting to hide. He hated any attention on him, which was difficult to avoid when he was six foot four and two hundred and eighty pounds.

“I think that’s a great idea,” Remi said with a smile. “I know my boy is getting antsy being in the house.”

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“But is it safe?” Lake would never want his friend at risk just to make him feel better.

Both Remi and Dom nodded.

“The doctor actually encourages it. Dom will always be on the anti-rejection meds but if we’re careful and take precautions, he needs to get back out there and live his life,” Remi explained.

“And I’m going back to work next week,” Dom said.

Remi narrowed his eyes. “You might return to work next week.”

Dom’s sigh was long and dramatic.

“You’ll ask the other guys?” Lake questioned as he moved to the dining table where the food was already waiting. It did smell amazing.

“I’ll text them after we eat,” Remi promised.

Taking his seat, Lake caught Dom’s gaze. “Maybe you could help me get ready for work.”

“Yes!” Dom pumped his fist as he danced his way to the table.

Remi joined them and started to pass the dishes.

Lake filled his plate as he took in the warmth and comfort of a real meal with family.

This was what he'd always wanted with his birth family but never got. He might be getting a late start on living his life, but he had a beautiful future in front of him. They all did. Life was damn good.

* * * * *

Jesse

"That's him?" his twin brother leaned over to whisper in Jesse's ear.

Jesse nodded but didn't take his eyes away from Lake where he stood watching the door. This had become Jesse's table since it gave him the best view of the boy that had stolen his heart.

"He's gorgeous," Jacob commented.

"Off-limits," Jesse growled out. He had to agree with his brother though. Lake's tight black pants cupped his ass in the most perfect way. The body suit was pale yellow, making Lake's tan skin nearly glow. Jesse leaned forward. Lake's skin was more than glowing. He shimmered. "Is...is he wearing body glitter?"

"And his makeup is done perfectly," Jacob added. He sighed as he continued to stare at Jesse's man.

"I will take you out in the desert and bury you in a deep hole," Jesse threatened.

"Chill, bro." Jacob held his hands up in surrender. "I can appreciate an attractive boy."

"Not when it's my boy," Jesse replied.

“Didn’t know you’d finally claimed the boy,” Jacob muttered.

Jesse ignored his twin. He hadn’t claimed Lake and they both knew it. It wasn’t that Jesse didn’t want to. No, he burned with the need to have Lake as his own. Lake just wouldn’t let Jesse close.

He knew that his money and power intimidated other men, but he’d hoped that Lake would see past that. Lake was a notorious softy around the club members, always offering a friendly word and smile. Unless Jesse was around. It didn’t matter how many times Jesse had tried with Lake, Lake was closed off to him.

Since this business literally revolved around consent and communication, Jesse had backed off.

That didn’t mean that he’d stopped wanting the precious boy.

Jesse just kept those thoughts to himself. Well, and his brother. Jacob had been his confidante his entire life. He just didn’t want Jacob to get any ideas when it came to Lake.

The fact that they were both into a form of Daddy kink and both preferred the littles had to be almost mathematically improbable. Jesse had a gentler hand when it came to his boys and preferred sweetness over bratty when Jacob was all about trying to tame the brats.

Lake was the biggest sweetheart that Jesse had ever met.

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Even though Lake towered over most members of the club, including the Daddies, his personality was pure sugar. When Lake was fully immersed in his little persona, Jesse was enamored.

Jacob slapped his shoulder before refilling Jesse's glass.

Jesse tried to pull his attention away from the front of the club, but Lake threw his head back, laughing, and Jesse saw the makeup that Jacob had mentioned.

Fuck! Jesse hadn't thought that Lake could be more beautiful, but the boy managed it. He'd lined his eyes with black, making the hazel color pop. His high cheekbones were brushed with something pink and shiny that matched his lips.

Jesse grasped his glass and downed half quickly.

"Is this a drinking night already?"

Jesse whipped his head to the side where Remi and Dane were grinning at him. Wait! If the Daddies were there then the boys wouldn't be far away.

Sure enough, Jesse spotted Dom dragging Lake toward the playroom, with Brandon and Ezra bringing up the rear.

"Would you guys like to join us?" Jacob offered.

Jesse found his voice. "Shit, yeah, sorry."

Remi slid in the chair across from Jesse while Dane sat next to him and across from Jacob.

“I take it you just spotted Lake?” Remi asked knowingly.

Jesse nodded. “I had a meeting with my manager and then Jacob arrived. I haven’t spoken to Lake tonight.”

“He was nervous about wearing the makeup for the first time, so we promised to come for his first break,” Remi informed him.

“That boy has nothing to be nervous about,” Jacob said. “He is beautiful.”

Jesse growled at his brother. He really was going to end up burying him in the desert.

The waitress dropped off two glasses of water with lemon for Dane and Remi before scurrying off. Great, now Jesse was scaring his staff.

Remi laughed. “Yes, he is. Dom helped him and even with both of us telling him how pretty he looked, Lake nearly lost his nerve.”

“I would tell him all day every day how beautiful he is if he’d let me,” Jesse murmured.

Jacob paused in refilling his and Jesse’s glasses. “You are really that far gone over the boy?”

Jesse lifted his gaze to Dane, daring him to bring up the one time he’d had a mental breakdown over Lake while Christmas shopping. Dane lifted his water and sipped, meeting his gaze.

Damn, the man had a face of stone. Jesse couldn't read him.

Dane set the water back down and nodded. "Jesse has had a thing for our Lake for months now. Well as long as I've been around really."

"Interesting." Jacob tapped his chin with one finger.

"You look like an evil villain when you do that," Jesse bitched.

"I look just like you, so..."

Dane and Remi laughed.

Jesse glared.

Jacob shrugged. "I knew you were interested," he said. "I didn't realize it was this bad."

"There is nothing wrong with my interest in Lake," Jesse defended.

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Jacob hummed and Jesse received the look. The look that he knew well. They would be discussing this later.

“We’ll be throwing a housewarming party in a few weeks once we get past the six-week mark for Dom’s surgery,” Remi told him.

“It’s good to see him tonight,” Jesse said sincerely. “I hired a new cleaning team that disinfects the club every night.” Learning that Dom would be on anti-rejection meds for the rest of his life and would never have an immune system opened Jesse’s eyes to what more he could do for his members.

“You are a good man,” Remi told him. “And thanks again for all the meal deliveries that first couple of weeks.”

“You don’t have to thank me again,” Jesse replied. “I was happy to do it.” He had money. It was the least he could do.

Dane grunted. “Yes, we do. It was a stressful and scary time. And all the times you picked up Annabelle from daycare and watched her. It meant a lot to all of us and didn’t go unnoticed.”

Jesse nodded. He hated getting recognition for just being a friend. If he wasn’t a millionaire, no one would blink at asking him for a favor.

“What my brother means to say is you’re welcome,” Jacob said.

Jesse glared at his twin again.

Remi laughed. “Well, we appreciate it. And let me make this clear—”

Jesse straightened.

“You will be at our housewarming party,” Remi stated. “No excuses.”

Jesse pressed his lips together. He did not like being told what to do.

Dane grasped Remi’s shoulder. “It’s important.”

Remi nodded. “And Lake asked specifically if we invited you.”

“I’ll be there,” Jesse vowed. Not only would he do anything to spend any time with Lake but if Jesse didn’t show, he’d probably never hear the end of it from Dom. Dom was a lot scarier than his Daddy or any of the other Daddies in their group.

“Good.” Remi started to stand. “We need to get to the playroom before our boys end up finding trouble. You’re always welcome to come sit with us.”

Jesse nodded. He wouldn’t, though. When Jesse was around, Lake didn’t relax as much as he should. Although Jesse might peek in later if he could get rid of his brother.

“We’ll talk to you soon,” Dane said.

Jacob waited until the two Daddies disappeared down the hall leading to the playroom before he spoke. “Why are you holding off getting what you want? I thought you would either be over this crush or had moved on by now.”

“It’s not a crush,” Jesse replied hotly.

“I can see that,” Jacob agreed. “So, tell me why.”

“You know why,” Jesse responded. He didn't want to talk about this. Jesse received enough advice and shit-talking from Eric, Dom, Remi, and Dane when it came to Lake. And that was daily. He spoke to one of them at least once a day, even if it was just text messages checking in.

Surprisingly Jesse had made some real friends there.

However, in every conversation, Lake's name was usually mentioned. Normally it was just an update on what was going on with Lake and Jesse appreciated those, but Dom especially could be kind of mean.

“There are only two ways the interactions with people usually go. They usually want something from you, mostly money or for you to use your connections to help them out, or they want nothing to do with you,” Jacob said softly.

“Yeah, and Lake is visibly uncomfortable around me,” Jesse shared.

“It seems you have a good group of friends in your corner.”

“I do. But I am technically Lake's boss. At a kink club! I must abide by his wishes. I need his consent,” Jesse said firmly. He was tired of talking about this.

“I just think—”

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“How are your two houseguests doing?” Jesse turned the tables on his brother.

“They’re not houseguests,” Jacob argued, just like Jesse knew he would. “They rent the apartment above the garage.”

“For about a thousand dollars less than they should,” Jesse reminded him. His trip to visit his brother a few months ago had been eye-opening. He’d met his twin’s not-houseguests and knew Jacob had met his match.

“It’s not like I need the money,” Jacob said.

“True. So, they’re doing well?”

“Fine.”

Jesse smirked.

“There’s nothing going on. Scott is a very smart and dedicated student. I’m just helping him out by giving him a place to rent.”

Jesse snickered. “He was a very nice young man. We both know who I’m talking about though.”

“I only let James live there because Scott wouldn’t stay without him,” Jacob told him. Not for the first time.

“Uh-huh.”

“James is... He’s...”

“Sexy,” Jesse offered.

Jacob grunted.

“And drives you crazy,” Jesse added.

“He bought a motorcycle! Do you know the statistics on fatal accidents on bikes in California?”

“I bet you told him,” Jesse guessed.

“He winked at me before putting on a helmet!” Jacob threw himself back into his chair, visibly irritated.

“What did you do?” Oh, this would have been good.

“I called his brother Michael,” Jacob said. “Okay, I called his brother’s partner. His Daddy Finn, not the crazy one. Not Jackson. I can’t handle talking to him.”

Jesse barked out a laugh. “Because the crazy one would just encourage him?”

“Finn did inform me that he’d taken a motorcycle away from Jackson. Jackson said he sold it. Finn didn’t know that Jackson had sold it to James for twenty bucks. Michael was pissed when he found that out.”

Jesse had never met Michael, Finn, or Jackson but he’d heard a few very funny stories from his brother when the trouple went to visit his non-houseguests. “You tattled on him? Seriously?”

“It didn’t work. He still has the bike.”

He laughed loudly as his brother sat in front of him, pouting.

“It’s not that funny.”

Jesse wiped the tears from his eyes. “Usually, you can just scowl or give someone your professor Daddy look, and they fall all over themselves to follow your orders.”

“He’s a brat,” Jacob stated.

Well, that was his brother’s specialty. Jesse didn’t even have to say the words.

“He’s too young for me,” Jacob said. “He’s the same age as the students I teach.”

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“But he’s not your student,” Jesse pointed out.

Jacob shook his head. “It’s a bad idea.”

Jesse was all too aware of how sometimes what they wanted was the worst idea. That didn’t mean that it wasn’t hard to stop wanting what they saw. Lake was a complication that Jesse didn’t need. The smart thing to do would be to avoid Lake and find someone else to spend his time with.

There was no chance in hell that was going to happen though.

Chapter Two

Lake

Shifting from foot to foot, Lake looked nervously around at the people gathered in the living room and spilling out into the backyard by the open sliding glass door.

There were only about thirty people in attendance. Lake couldn’t spot the one person that he’d hoped would be there. He sighed, his shoulders slumping. Lake shouldn’t be surprised. Jesse was a very busy man. He ran multiple business ventures including real estate, was the owner of a casino and hotel, and the Teddy Bear kink club inside the casino resort. There were probably more that Lake didn’t even know about.

Yeah, Lake had been kidding himself, hoping that Jesse would be there. Even if Jesse was friends with Remi and Dom, he probably had a million parties that he was invited to.

“Hey.” Ezra stepped to his side. “I brought you a lemonade.”

Lake accepted the glass gratefully. He’d gone inside the kitchen earlier, but the space had been filled with laughing cops that worked with Remi, and Lake had hightailed it out of there.

Not that the cops would have been mean to him.

Remi worked with a good group of guys that had always been polite to him.

Lake just wasn’t sure if any of the cops there knew his father. After leaving the army, his father had taken a position with the local police department as a consultant. Lake was thankful none of his new friends had ever had to deal with his father. Lake’s father wouldn’t have been a fan. He just wasn’t sure about the other cops at the housewarming party.

“You doing okay?” Ezra asked.

Lake nodded. “It’s just very peoplely.”

“Ha! That’s what Dom said. I’ve come to grab you.”

“Where are we going?” Lake asked even as he willingly followed Ezra down the hall. He wasn’t surprised when they stopped at the playroom door.

Ezra knocked three times. “It’s us!”

The door opened before Brandon stuck his head out. “What’s the password?”

Ezra grinned. “Mother fluffer!”

Lake snorted and shook his head. He thought his friends had been joking about the password. They hadn't been. Damn, he loved these guys.

"Enter, please," Brandon said, opening the door wider and bowing.

Ezra giggled as he dragged Lake into the room.

Brandon slammed the door behind them before replacing the stuffie barrier guard. Lake wasn't certain how that came about but he dropped down to help Brandon. Their guards were very good at their job. They deserved all the praise in the world, so Lake made sure to give each stuffie a pat on the head.

"I thought you'd never get here," Dom complained from his reclined position in a giant beanbag chair.

Lake crawled over to his friend. "It's okay we're hiding from our own party?" He didn't want Remi mad at them.

"It's fine," Dom responded with a wave of his hand. "Daddy said I looked tired and should sit down."

"I don't think he quite meant this," Lake said, worried. He twisted his fingers together. "What if he comes looking for us?"

"Then he better know the password," Brandon said with a cackle.

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Ezra grabbed Lake's hand. "It's fine. I told my Daddy where we would be."

Dom snorted. "You two really need to learn how to brat!"

"We don't want to brat." Ezra lifted his chin in challenge.

"Fine," Dom said with a sigh.

Lake relaxed. This was the fun room, and he didn't need to be worried in the fun room.

"Do you want to hold Mister Beary?" Brandon handed over the blue bear with an apron on.

Nodding, he placed Mister Beary in his lap as Ezra dumped out a box of blocks. "What should we play?"

"Can we play fairies and dragons?" he asked shyly.

"Yes!" Brandon jumped up and raced toward the toy box.

Dom yawned, drawing Lake's attention.

"Are you feeling okay?" Lake asked his friend.

"Just tired. I'm fine lying here. I like hearing the sound of you guys playing," Dom said.

Ezra crawled over to the beanbag chair. He grabbed a nearby blanket and tucked it around Dom. Lake handed Ezra Mister Beary so Ezra could lay the stuffie with their friend.

Dom gave them a tired smile. “Thanks.”

“You just let us know if you need anything,” Lake said.

“You got it, buddy!” He wiggled in the beanbag chair before giving a contented sigh.

Brandon returned with two containers of figurines. He dumped them out with a laugh. He was the worst at cleaning up after they played too. Lake didn’t mind picking up after a playdate. He liked when everything was clean and in its proper place.

He’d done all the cleaning in his old apartment. Jack and Brex were slob and before Lake moved into the small spare room, their mom had still come over once a week to clean and do laundry. She even did their grocery shopping. Lake took over those duties since he didn’t think that was fair to his mom.

Lake wondered if his mom was back cleaning for his brothers.

It had been three weeks since Lake moved out.

His phone was still off.

He knew eventually that his time would run out and Lake would be forced to deal with his parents and brothers.

Ezra nudged him then handed Lake the pretty pink and purple dragons. Ezra kept the green and blue dragon before giving Brandon the orange and yellow one. Next, they divided the fairies. Lake waited until Ezra and Brandon picked theirs and was happy

with the white, red, and silver fairies. Those were so pretty. So, so, pretty.

“I’m going to make a bakery. We’ll sell all the best pastries to the dragons!” Ezra said.

“I’m going to make a dance club. Fairies love to dance!” Brandon said.

Lake sorted through the colorful blocks. “I’m going to make a nice little library for the dragons. They like to collect books.”

“What about the fairies?” Brandon asked. He grabbed a handful of blocks, not caring about the colors.

“They run the library! They loved floating the books to the shelves!” Lake exclaimed. That was an awesome idea.

“Oh! What if they’re next door to the bakery! The dragons can get a book, then a little treat!” Ezra clapped.

“I don’t want to make a club anymore,” Brandon whined. “I want to make something that goes with a bakery and library. Where the dragons can relax.”

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“Make a garden that connects the library and bakery,” Dom said sleepily.

“Yes! That’s what I want to make!” Brandon began to grab the green blocks.

Lake hummed as he used the red blocks to begin building his library. It would be awesome! Any creature could get a free library card. It didn’t matter if they were dragons, fairies, or human.

The three of them worked together to build what was an awesome complex for their fairies and dragons. It didn’t take long for Dom to start snoring, tucked in his beanbag chair.

All the tension from earlier left Lake’s body slowly.

He might not look like most of littles he’d seen at the club but inside Lake knew that this was the real him.

Inside Lake was soft and gooey. Just like a warm chocolate chip cookie fresh from the oven.

At the club, if there were new members or someone on a visitor’s pass, they normally pegged him immediately as a Dom. The assessment amused Lake since he couldn’t imagine order anyone around. Plus, Lake couldn’t even figure out his own life—how would he help guide someone else?

Ezra made dragon sounds as he flew two over the structures they’d built. Brandon was busy making his faeries bounce around as someone knocked on the playroom

door.

They all froze and looked at each other.

“I get it?” Ezra asked.

Brandon and Lake nodded. Only one of the Daddies should be interrupting them. The playroom was off-limits to anyone but the family.

Ezra sighed before slowly walking to the door. “Who is it?” he called.

“It’s me,” Eric replied.

Ezra cracked the door. “What’s the password?”

Brandon slapped a hand over his mouth when he started to giggle. Lake shook his head. Ezra was gonna get in trouble. Of course, Ezra never complained when his Daddy was punishing him. Bratting was new to Ezra. For the first time he was in a safe place to push boundaries.

“Open the door or get put over my knee,” Eric responded.

Ezra glanced over at them with wide eyes.

Lake nodded his head rapidly. That worked for him. Ezra, Brandon, and Dom all had a naughty side, but Lake was a total good boy.

“Now, boy,” Eric demanded.

Ezra began to move their stuffie guard from in front of the door before he pulled the door open.

Eric stepped in first. “Really?”

Brandon was still giggling. “You cheated! That wasn’t the password.”

Dane walked in behind Eric and Brandon’s giggles stopped.

“Uh...” Brandon drawled.

“Let’s go!” Dane picked Brandon up.

“But I’m playing!” Brandon argued.

Dane turned, carrying Brandon out. Eric was ushering Ezra from the room. Lake looked around. Did that mean that playtime was over?

Remi entered the room after the other four left. “Hey, how’s it going in here?”

“Dom’s sleeping,” Lake answered. He was sort of upset that playtime had ended so suddenly. He understood that they couldn’t be little all the time, but Lake was feeling so much better now. Happy and at peace. He loved little time.

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“I see that.” Remi crouched beside him. “There’s someone here to see you.”

Panic filled Lake and he shook his head. No one should be looking for him. Was it one of his brothers? Oh jeez! What if it was his dad? The shaking began before Lake could control his fear.

Remi ran a hand down Lake’s back. “I promise it will be okay. I would never allow anyone in here who would hurt you.”

Lake knew that. He nodded slowly.

“Come on in!” Remi called.

He watched the door as another man entered. Jesse! He had actually come to their little housewarming party. Lake couldn’t believe it. Jesse was there in the playroom.

He made a weird sound in the back of his throat when he realized Jesse was going to see their special space.

“It’s okay,” Remi whispered, patting Lake’s back.

“Hey, Lake,” Jesse said, stepping over their fallen stuffie guards. “Is it okay if I give you something?”

“Me?” Lake pointed at himself.

Jesse smiled.

Lake had to swallow hard. Jesse was just so attractive. It wasn't fair that anyone could fill out a suit the way that Jesse could. Lake had never seen him dressed down and often fantasized what Jesse hid under those perfectly tailored suits. Not that he'd ever find out. No matter what Lake's friends said. Jesse was far out of Lake's league.

"I have a gift for the house and one for you too," Jesse told him. It was only then that Lake noticed Jesse was holding two beautifully arranged bags with colorful tissue paper.

Lake glanced at Remi.

"I need to get Dom to bed," Remi said. "Why don't you open both gifts and we can tell Dom about it in the morning."

Glancing at his sleeping friend, Lake nodded. Dom needed his rest. "I can do that." Lake wanted to force the little mindset away, but he found it difficult when he was in his favorite room and knew he was safe.

As embarrassed as he was for Jesse to see the new playroom, this wasn't the first time Jesse had been around when they were all regressed. Eric had remodeled their entire basement into a huge space for their little time. Since before Christmas, Jesse had been visiting more often.

It was quiet as Remi lifted Dom from the beanbag chair then carried him out of the room.

Lake was still holding a fairy and only noticed when Jesse looked down and smiled.

"I didn't mean to interrupt your playtime," Jesse said.

He shrugged. It must be getting late if Ezra and Brandon went home. Now that they

shared a humongous backyard, it was so easy to have playtime. Both houses had the best playrooms, after all.

Jesse sat beside Lake.

Lake peered nervously up at Jesse through his lashes. Dressed in a loose pair of jeans and a hoodie, he wasn't wearing anything revealing but he still felt exposed sitting next to Jesse and his expensive suit.

"This is for the house," Jesse said, handing over the bright blue bag.

Lake eagerly yanked out the soft paper, getting to the box inside the big bag. He shoved the tissue and bag away to Jesse's quiet chuckle and drew out the heavy box. "What is it?"

"Well, open it and find out," Jesse told him with amusement evident.

Lake rolled his eyes but placed the box on the carpet in front of him. He carefully opened the side tabs then pushed the lid up.

A gorgeous white porcelain tea set was nestled in foam.

Lake gasped.

"I figured the tea set you all played with probably stayed at the other house," Jesse said. "You need one for here too."

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Lake's hand trembled as he ran a fingertip over one of the cups. "So pretty!"

"I spotted this set when I was visiting my brother. I just knew that you all needed it," Jesse told him.

"It's too much," Lake whispered. It killed him to say the words but there was no way that was a gift Lake could accept. It was too expensive.

"I think it's perfect." Jesse wrapped his fingers around where Lake was still resting his on the cup. "A pretty tea set for a pretty boy."

Lake flushed hot but he was too shocked that Jesse was touching him that he couldn't move. Jesse never touched him! Jesse was also nice and polite but very hands-off. "I..."

"Please accept this gift," Jesse said softly. "It would make me very happy to think of you boys having a proper teatime when playing."

It was for all of them, not just Lake. Turning down the present would just be silly. "Thank you," Lake said. "I'll make sure that we play with it right away."

"That's great." Jesse shook the other bag. "This is for you."

"You already gave me something!"

"That's for the housewarming," Jesse said. "This is for you."

“But why?” Lake didn’t understand why he got something special when it was Remi and Dom who’d bought the house. All Lake had done was move into his own room and buy the things he’d always wanted but never had the nerve to own when he lived with family. His pretty room.

Jesse set the bag in his own lap.

Lake nearly grabbed his present because he wanted it. Instead, he twisted his fingers together. No touching. He knew that.

“Are we friends, Lake?” Jesse asked.

The question threw off Lake’s thinking. He had not expected that. “Umm...” How did he answer that? Jesse was his boss or sort of his boss. Jesse was Lake’s boss’s boss’s boss. That counted, right?

Except Jesse knew Lake’s secret and was not only accepting but also supportive. Jesse had been around enough since Christmas that Lake was getting used to seeing him with their friends. Friends. Lake nodded slowly. “Yes?”

“You don’t sound so sure, but I’ll take it,” Jesse said. “I want us to be friends.”

“Okay.” Lake wasn’t certain how that would work.

Jesse chuckled. “It’s funny how things work out.”

Lake’s gaze drifted to the wrapped present on Jesse’s lap. “What do you mean?” he managed to say. Lake really wanted to know what Jesse would buy for him. What did the man who could buy anything get for Lake?

“If I hadn’t suspected my own security team of selling drugs, I wouldn’t have hired

Eric. If Eric hadn't worked undercover here, he wouldn't have met Ezra. Eric and Ezra opened a whole new dynamic for us. Their connection brought us closer together, even though you and Dom had been working here for years."

Lake nodded. That was true.

"And even though you and Dom both went to the club, it wasn't until recently that the two of you have become more comfortable," Jesse said.

"It helps having more friends in the lifestyle," Lake offered. He wasn't sure that was the full truth. Lake could admit that the reason he was exploring more was because of his friends but it was the specific friends that made the difference.

Lake liked to believe that he had lots of friends at the club. He worked hard to be nice to everyone, especially the subs. It wasn't easy to be new exploring a kink. Lake hoped he offered new members a little bit of braveness with being extra-kind. His friend group was different. Dom, Ezra, and Brandon didn't push Lake out of his comfort zone. They just enticed him into being more himself.

"I'm sure it does," Jesse agreed. "It's also helped me."

"It has?"

"Meeting Remi, Eric, and Dane has shown me what I've been missing," Jesse said.

"Missing?"

"A boy of my own," Jesse told him.

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It didn't surprise Lake that Jesse was looking for a boy. That was why most people went to the club. Lake didn't expect the pang to his heart when he thought about Jesse with someone else.

"Did you know that I thought you were attractive the first time we met?"

Lake jerked. "What?"

A faint blush highlighted Jesse's sharp cheekbones. "I thought you were beautiful."

Lake had to swallow hard. "Um..."

"I told myself you were off-limits," Jesse said quietly.

The same as Lake thought. The two of them wouldn't work even if it appeared that they were both attracted. Dang it, did this mean that Dom was right? Lake didn't want his sassy friend to be right. Dom wouldn't shut up about it.

"You started to change," Jesse said.

Had he? Well yes, but Lake was proud of the man and little that he was turning into. Even if it lost him the chance with Jesse, Lake wouldn't go back to before when he lived in fear all the time. When Lake hid every part of himself.

"You've blossomed before my eyes." Jesse placed a hand on Lake's knee. "It's been amazing seeing you find yourself."

Wait! What? “You like the new me?” He didn’t mean to ask that out loud.

“I don’t think it’s the new you.” Jesse patted his leg. “I think you’re just showing us the real you. Maybe showing yourself too.”

Lake nodded. “Maybe.” More than likely.

“I’m blessed to be a part of your journey.” Jesse lifted the bag then set it in Lake’s lap. “That’s why I got this for you.”

“I can open it now?” Lake asked.

“Please do,” Jesse replied.

This time Lake carefully removed the colorful tissue paper. He set it to the side until he could reach into the bag and pull out a sheet of paper. He lifted it.

“An adoption certificate?” he said.

Jesse nodded.

He had tried really hard to use his manners and take his time but now Lake was dying to know what he had...adopted? Lake shoved both hands inside and yanked out the big soft stuffed animal.

“Oh!” It was the most beautiful stuffie that Lake had ever seen! A bright rainbow zebra. The zebra was dressed in a pink shirt, rainbow tutu, and even had sparkly pink bows on its ears. It even had a hot pink tail and mohawk. “Mine?” Lake loved it already.

“Yes.” Jesse petted the top of the zebra. “A pretty baby for a pretty baby.”

That was sweet. Lake hugged his new friend to his chest.

Jesse picked up the adoption certificate. “I named him but it’s okay if you want to change it. I might not be the best at naming stuffies.”

Lake glanced down. Zeb. His new friend’s name was Zeb. “Zeb’s a nice name for a pretty boy.” Not what Lake would have chosen but it meant something that Jesse took the extra time to make Zeb even more special. He’d be keeping the name.

“Does that mean you like him?” Jesse asked.

“I love him!” Lake exclaimed. “He can sleep with me every night so he isn’t scared in a new place.”

“That’s a great idea,” Jesse said. “I kept him in my office with me so he wouldn’t get lost.”

Lake nodded very seriously. “That was very nice of you.”

“Thank you. There are more clothes inside the bag in case Zeb needs to change.”

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“Oh!” Lake began to dig back into the bag. There were more shirts all in pretty colors and lots of skirts and even pajamas. Lake held up the purple nightgown that said princess. “He loves the clothes he has on the best, but this is his favorite to sleep in.”

“I should have thought about that.”

“It’s okay.” Lake patted Jesse’s arm. He was feeling more little than normal when around someone other than his friends. “You’re new at this.”

“I am new. I hope I did okay.”

“Great!” Lake assured him.

“Maybe I could take you back to the store and we could make Zeb a friend?” Jesse asked.

“Would you like a friend?” Lake questioned Zeb. He grinned up at Jesse. “Zeb and I would like that.”

Jesse flashed a bright white smile. “Cool. It’s a date then.”

A date? Had Lake agreed to a date? Well, yes, he sort of had. “Can Zeb come?”

“Of course Zeb can come. Whatever makes you comfortable,” Jesse replied.

Lake nearly asked about Dom, Ezra, and Brandon but that would probably be too

much for a date. But Jesse might have just used the word date and not meant for it to be like a date-date.

“I know you’re back to work tomorrow,” Jesse said. “What are your days off this week?”

They were really doing this? “Tuesday, Wednesday, and Sunday.”

“Could I pick you up Tuesday? We could have lunch then go to the store.”

“I’m vegan,” Lake blurted out. For some reason his choices in food bothered a lot of people. They argued with Lake’s reasoning or tried to change his mind. Lake never forced his choices on anyone else or made them feel bad about what they chose to eat. Too bad other people didn’t have the same respect.

“I know. I have the perfect place in mind. There’ll be plenty for us to choose from,” Jesse said.

“Okay.” They were going on a date! Maybe. Lake thought it was a date. He was totally going to have to ask Dom. Maybe even get Dom to help pick out an outfit for him and Zeb.

Jesse’s watch beeped and he glanced at it. He groaned. “It’s getting late. How about I help you clean up in here and then walk you to your room?”

Lake looked at the toys they’d been playing with. He’d forgotten what they had been doing. “Sure.” He gave Zeb a quick hug before setting his new friend down. “I’ll be right back, Zeb.”

Jesse smiled at him before rising and offering Lake his hand up.

Lake accepted the help. It didn't take long for the two of them to clean up the floor. Jesse put the containers of figurines back up as Lake tossed things into the toy box. The last thing Lake did was put up the stuffie guard after introducing each to Zeb. It took longer than Lake had expected but Jesse never hurried him. Jesse just held the stuffie and then put them back in place.

They left the boxed tea set on the small table so Lake could show Dom tomorrow.

With the room cleaned up, Lake hugged Zeb tight.

Jesse picked up the adoption certificate.

"I should hang that up in my room, so Zeb knows he's wanted," he mused.

"I'll get you a frame tomorrow," Jesse promised.

"Really?" Lake could buy it himself, but he liked that Jesse wanted to help. Zeb deserved the best.

"Yes, I'll leave it at the front desk for when you get to work tomorrow," Jesse said.

"Thanks!" Lake pushed up to his tiptoes and smacked a kiss on Jesse's cheek.

Jesse froze and Lake was scared he'd crossed a line. He should have asked but he was so happy.

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“You’re very welcome,” Jesse said quietly before taking Lake’s free hand. “Let’s get you to your room.”

“Okay!” Lake swung their arms as they headed out of the room and down the hall.

Chapter Three

Lake

Placing Zeb carefully on the bench in front of his locker, Lake turned so he could get ready for his shift. Zeb had become a regular at the security desk for the club and everyone loved him. Not as much as Lake loved Zeb, but Lake was happy that Zeb had lots of new friends.

“Hey, Lake,” Carter one of the servers and pups said quietly as he entered the locker room.

“Hey, Carter!” Lake greeted. “Are you having a good day?”

Carter stopped and shook his head.

“Do you need a hug?” Lake offered.

Carter, like Lake, had family troubles. They both struggled with family members that didn’t accept them.

Lake opened his arms wide.

Carter made a soft sound before he dove for Lake. Lake wrapped his arms carefully but firmly around his friend. He rocked slightly as he held Carter. No words were needed. Lake understood that sometimes a hug could fix the cracks that family could cause.

Carter clung to him hard.

“Hey, Lake!” Jesse called as he entered the locker room. He froze when he spotted Lake and Carter hugging.

Carter yanked away from Lake.

“I’m sorry for interrupting,” Jesse told them.

“No, sir,” Carter said, shaking his head. “I shouldn’t have—”

“Hey.” Jesse walked forward with long, sure strides. He paused beside them. “Never apologizing for needing a hug or even taking a quiet moment.”

Carter shifted from foot to foot. With his gaze on the ground.

“And I have it on good authority that Lake gives the best hugs,” Jesse said with a wink.

Lake flushed, remembering the long hug that he and Jesse had shared after Jesse had walked Lake to his room the night that he’d been gifted Zeb.

“He does,” Carter agreed, looking up.

“I’m not too bad at hugs either,” Jesse said. “Or if you need someone to talk to.”

Carter nodded. “Thanks.”

Lake shook his head. He'd had a long talk with Remi and Dom about Jesse and Lake's concerns about him. It had been Remi who had given Lake the most to think about. Dom's advice was to go for it no matter what. That had not been helpful. Remi had shared some of the struggles that he'd seen for Jesse.

Having money didn't mean Jesse's life was easy, according to Remi.

Also, Lake was surprised to find out that Jesse hadn't always had money. He and his twin had struggled their entire lives. Neither man had even been able to afford college. Jesse had made his money from determination and hard work.

But having money now meant that Jesse found it hard to make real friends or even connect with people.

Lake had been watching Jesse interact with those around them. Jesse was amazing but his position made everyone else around him nervous. He stepped closer to Jesse to rest his cheek on Jesse's arm. “Jesse does give good hugs too.” He wanted his friends to see how great Jesse truly was.

Carter's eyes widened. “Yeah? But he's the boss!”

Jesse sighed.

Lake was really starting to see where Jesse's frustration came from. "Technically he's not. When he's at the club, he's here as an advisor, Dom, and safe person."

Carter blinked at him. "Really?"

Jesse nodded as he rubbed Lake's back. "Yes."

"Could I get a double hug?" Carter asked.

"Absolutely!" Lake tackle-hugged Carter before he nodded to Jesse.

Thank you, Jesse mouthed to Lake.

Lake smiled in return, feeling as if he wasn't just helping Carter but Jesse as well.

Lake was proud of Jesse when he wrapped his arms around the two of them, holding them tight. He didn't speak or demand answers. Jesse just held them until Carter began to giggle.

Carter's happiness was contagious, and it wasn't long until Lake was laughing as well.

Lake was a firm believer in never ending a hug first, so he waited until Carter pulled away.

“That was the best hug I’ve ever had,” Carter stated with a grin. “Thanks, guys.”

“Anytime!” Lake replied.

“What he said,” Jesse joked.

“I better get ready for work,” Carter told them.

“Find me if you need anything else,” Jesse said. He turned to Lake. “I just came in to ask if you would mind trading break times with Callie. Her girlfriend’s coming in to meet her for dinner, if it’s okay.”

“Of course it’s okay.” Since Carter had gone to the other side of the room, Lake returned to his locker. Jesse stayed on his heels. “I never mind trading.”

“I didn’t think you’d have a problem with it,” Jesse said. “I overheard Callie and Mike talking, so I volunteered to ask you.”

Lake unlocked his locker and opened it up before removing his button-up.

“You look very beautiful tonight,” Jesse whispered. “Not that you don’t normally look good, but I love the eye makeup that you’ve been adding.”

Lake kept his head down but inside he was secretly pleased. He was getting better with the makeup and Dom was always there to help. “Thanks.”

“Anyway.” Jesse cleared his throat.

Lake glanced over his shoulder as he removed the button-up that hid his lace camisole he’d picked for the night.

Jesse was sitting on the bench with Zeb on his knee. Lake loved seeing Jesse with Zeb. Every night that Zeb had joined Lake on shift, Jesse had stopped by and greeted Zeb. It was silly but it meant more to Lake than he could ever say.

“What’s wrong?” Lake asked. Jesse wasn’t normally nervous around him.

Jesse looked up from where he was petting Zeb. “I was wondering since your break time is after my last conference call, if you’d join me for dinner? I could have it delivered to my office so you can eat and have time to relax.”

Before Lake could answer, Jesse kept talking.

“I know our date is for tomorrow, so if you would rather spend your break another way, please don’t feel obligated.”

“I don’t feel obligated.” Lake shuffled forward. “What do you think, Zeb? Dinner break with Jesse?” It felt so weird to use Jesse’s first name, but it was getting easier.

Jesse lifted Zeb up before making the stuffie nod.

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Lake giggled. “It’s settled then.”

“Is there anything in particular you’d like tonight?” Jesse asked.

“Just...” Lake shrugged. “You know.”

“I do. How about something light and yummy?”

“Yes, please.” Lake was sort of curious about what Jesse would pick on his own. There were a lot of good restaurants that catered to the vegan lifestyle.

“This is for you. I had it made the other day, but this is the perfect time to give it to you.” Jesse held out a black keycard.

“What is it?” Lake took the card.

“That will get you into my private elevator and office. You can come up at any time,” Jesse replied.

“I have a key to the Batcave!” Lake gave a little wiggle. “Dom is gonna be so jealous!”

Jesse chuckled as he stood. “Well, I trust you not to leave googly eyes on all the office staff’s equipment.”

Oh! Lake had forgotten about that. Dom had even videotaped his sneaky trip to Jesse’s office. “I would never!”

“I know.” Jesse kissed Lake’s cheek. Oh! That was wonderful! “You are a good boy. Dom needs more time spent over his Daddy’s knee.”

Lake nodded in agreement, trying to ignore the tingling where Jesse’s lips had been.

“I’ll see you later then.” Jesse sat Zeb back on the bench. “You both be good.”

“We will!” Lake promised.

Once Jesse was out of the locker room, Lake picked up Zeb and twirled him around. Carter had left when he’d been talking, leaving Lake the entire locker room to himself. Well, him and Zeb. He danced along the bench, spinning and wiggling. They had a dinner date with Jesse!

That was so cool!

Normally Lake just ate whatever he packed for dinner. Remi loved to feed him. Lake didn’t think that Remi would be mad if he didn’t eat the food and spent the time with Jesse. Should he text Remi just in case?

Lake picked up his phone. There were no phones allowed in the club, so he had to lock it away until his break. He had a radio to communicate with the rest of the security team and his manager while on shift.

Noticing the time, Lake nearly panicked. He was late! Lake was never late to work. He hurried to stash everything in his locker except Zeb and raced toward the front.

“Hey! You’re fine. I asked Johnathon to watch the front until you came out,” Carter said, stopping him. “He was happy to help.”

Lake blew out a breath. Then another. The adrenaline made his pulse beat rapidly. It

was okay. No one would be mad at him.

“Breathe for me,” Carter said. One hand gripping Lake’s bicep. “Johnathon said you’d covered for him last week when his mom was sick, and worked the floor during your break. He was grateful he could help you out even if it was for only a couple of minutes.”

Carter was right. Lake went out of his way to help his coworkers. Even though Lake didn’t enjoy working security on the floor as much as the front desk, he always stepped in when needed. Everyone needed help sometimes.

“Thanks.” Lake smiled and gave Carter a quick hug.

“We’ve got your back,” Carter said. “Always. Don’t forget that.”

Lake was a little confused by the sudden serious turn of Carter’s words but unless he wanted to be even later, then he couldn’t think about that now.

“Now go ahead. I’ll bring you a glass of water with extra lemons in a minute. “

“You’re the best!” Lake declared. He loved lemons!

“Go!” Carter waved him away.

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This early there wasn't much of a crowd. Still, it was Lake's job to be at the front desk to make sure that no one who wasn't a member or didn't have an invitation didn't get in. It was an important job.

He pulled the heavy glass door open before stepping behind the counter. Johnathon was scanning two membership cards through the system.

"Hey, Jimmy! Good evening, Master Ken," Lake greeted the couple as he joined Johnathon.

"Evening, Lake," Master Ken replied.

"There you are! I was worried when I didn't see you!" Jimmy exclaimed dramatically.

"I told you that he would be right here," Johnathon commented.

"You could have just been saying that to throw me off!" Jimmy explained. "What if he'd been abducted by aliens? You could be working for the aliens, you know."

Lake pressed his lips together. Jimmy was new to the area after having moved there after dating his partner online for over a year. Jimmy had recently become obsessed with Area 51 and all things aliens. Much to his Master's dismay.

"I wasn't abducted, and I promise Johnathon isn't working with the aliens," Lake said.

“Hmm.” Jimmy eyed Johnathon. “I’ll be watching you just in case. You might not even know that you’re working for them.”

“Boy,” Master Ken growled. “What did I tell you about accusing other people about working for the aliens?”

“Sorry!” Jimmy didn’t stop looking at Johnathon with suspicion though.

“Here you go, sir.” Johnathon handed the cards back to Master Ken. “Have a great night.”

“We will. Thank you both.” Master Ken guided his boy into the club.

Johnathon turned to Lake with a scowl. “How come I couldn’t have been abducted and you be working for the aliens?”

Lake shrugged. “Maybe I don’t have the ‘I work for aliens’ look?” he offered.

Johnathon gasped. “I look like I could?”

“Uh, no?”

“I don’t believe you! You think I could be working for aliens,” Johnathon accused.

“No,” Lake drawled. He got drawn into the weirdest conversations at work. It was great! But he just knew this was going to be a conversation for the entire night now. “It’s just out of the two of us, if someone was working for the aliens, it wouldn’t be me.”

One of the other security guards walked by on the other side of the glass door.

“Hey, Larry!” Johnathon called. “I got a question for you!”

Lake was grinning as he turned to place Zeb in his favorite spot by the monitor. The screen showed both ends of the hallway that led to the club so Lake could keep an eye out for trouble coming or going.

He spotted the small plastic pink brush with a sticky note and wanted to dance.

The sticky note said For Zeb and Lake knew it was from Jesse. Every shift there had been something for Zeb. A new bow, a headband, and now a brush.

How great was it that Jesse was spoiling Zeb just the way that made Lake all gooey on the inside.

A lot of men, especially older men, who were part of the club thought that littles were cute but didn't really understand the meaning behind regressing. True, it was different for every person who found themselves identifying as little, middle, or engaged with any kind of age regression. For Lake it was the release from having to be perfect all the time.

When Lake was little, he could be silly, quiet, and didn't have to make any of the hard decisions. He didn't have to justify how he felt inside or meet anyone's expectations. It was a break from real life.

Even some of the Daddies that Lake meant supported their little partners but didn't engage outside of taking care of their partner.

Luckily Remi, Eric, and Dane had shown Lake that there were men who would get on the floor and play with them.

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Lake was beyond thrilled that Jesse appeared to be more like their friends. Jesse was totally embracing Zeb as the pretty princess he was!

“Look at your brush!” Lake said, showing Zeb.

Zeb liked the brush.

Lake set the brush down beside Zeb as he spotted another couple heading down the hall toward him.

The club was located in a section of the casino that could only be accessed with a code. It kept the space around them safe. The setup was well thought out and Lake appreciated that Jesse had taken extra steps to make sure they were all comfortable.

* * * * *

Jesse

He checked his phone for the third time in as many minutes. Dinner should be delivered at any moment and Lake wouldn't be too far behind. Looking around his office, Jesse wondered what Lake would think about the space where Jesse spent most of his time.

Having his office located on one of the top floors of his casino just made sense logistically. Jesse didn't want to spend hours in a car trying to get around town when traffic this close to the Las Vegas strip was always hectic.

Jesse lived in the top floor penthouse, had his office a few floors below that, and even ate most of his meals from one of the many restaurants they housed. He walked over to his desk where the plans for the newest restaurant lay.

His casino already hosted the highest-rated steak house, Italian restaurant, bistro, and coffee house. What had been missing? A special place for people who wanted a fresher and healthier option. A vegan restaurant that would be perfect for Lake.

Was he opening a restaurant all because of one man? Yes, yes, he was. However, Lake's preferences had just shown Jesse there was a lack of options in town. That was just smart business, and Jesse was a fucking genius at business.

He jumped then hurried for the door when he heard the knock.

Jesse swung open the door and smiled at the young lady bringing up dinner. "Thank you, Christy."

"My pleasure, sir." Christy pushed the cart inside. "Would you like me to set this up at your desk or on the table?"

"I can do it." Jesse wanted everything perfect for Lake. It was technically their first date after all.

"Are you sure, sir? I don't mind," Christy replied.

"I appreciate it, but I've got it from here." He passed her a hefty tip before walking her to the door.

"Thanks!" Christy strode away and Jesse turned back to the cart.

He'd already placed a peach tablecloth over the small table in the corner that he

hardly used. Most of the time Jesse ate sitting at his desk while working. Bad habit, yes, but Jesse was determined to turn his life around. After some serious conversations with his friends and brother, Jesse was ready to make the changes necessary for getting what he wanted most out of life. A partner to share everything with.

Jesse had been paying close attention to Lake for months now.

He loved seeing Lake in the lacy peach bodysuit that he'd worn a few times. The soft color stood out against Lake's dark tanned skin. The softness also fit Lake's kind nature. Jesse wanted to cradle Lake in his arms and make sure no one ever hurt him again.

And Lake had been hurt.

Jesse was around their mutual friend group enough to hear some whispered conversations about Lake's family. Jesse never pushed for more information although it killed him not to. Jesse hoped that someday Lake would trust him enough to share his story.

In the meantime, Jesse would show Lake that he was serious about the two of him.

It had been eye-opening when Jesse had been called out by his friends and brother. Jesse complained about being alone but no one in his support group had given him the sympathy that Jesse had thought he deserved. Instead, Jesse was forced to face the fact that he was the one to blame. Or that his need for more was the culprit.

Jesse hadn't liked that revelation and even taken off a few weeks to spend with his brother, who Jesse had expected to understand. Jacob had agreed with his friends. There had been some hard talking between him and his twin, but Jacob had never been scared to tell Jesse the truth.

Returning home, Jesse had vowed to change.

He thought it would be easier.

His businesses were important, but they couldn't be the most important thing in his life any longer. Not if Jesse wanted the boy that had caught his attention so long ago.

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Jacob had been right about one thing. Jesse was very lucky that Lake hadn't found someone else in the time that Jesse had been an idiot. Jesse couldn't take the chance of losing Lake before he even got to really know him.

Jesse wasn't blowing this chance!

He hurried over to the table and pushed in three chairs. On one chair he set a booster seat. Huh, not high enough. Pillow! He had a couple pillows in the closet from when he slept in his office on the couch. Jesse piled the pillows on the booster seat. Perfect.

Next, he added two long-stem candles. Then added the vase of a dozen pink roses in front of the chair for Lake. Once that was done, Jesse opened the curtains to the large floor-to-ceiling windows to show the gorgeous nighttime view of the strip.

Now all of that was set up, Jesse turned toward the food cart. Silver domes covered the three plates. Three glasses of ice water and a bowl of lemons. Jesse grabbed those first and put them in place.

His phone beeped. His guest was on the way from the elevator.

He carefully moved the plates where they belonged.

Three places for the three plates.

Jesse turned at the light knock on the open door. "Hi."

Lake shifted nervously as he hovered in the doorway. Zeb was clutched to Lake's

chest. “Hi.”

“I have dinner ready for us,” Jesse said, motioning Lake forward.

Lake shuffled inside the office slowly.

Wanting Lake to be comfortable with him, Jesse left the door open. Jesse would know if anyone exited the elevator.

“Here.” Jesse held his hand out for Zeb. “I have a place for our beautiful boy.”

Lake beamed as he passed Zeb over.

Jesse placed Zeb into the pillow-covered booster seat before turning back toward Lake. Jesse pulled out the chair. “And for the other pretty baby.”

Lake blushed just like Jesse knew he would.

“Come on,” Jesse encouraged. “We don’t want the food to get cold.”

“Okay.” Lake sat and Jesse pushed the chair in.

Jesse sat across from Lake. He lifted Lake’s dome first. “Avocado and veggie grain bowl with cilantro sauce. It’s from the best vegan restaurant in town. Something light and yummy.”

Lake’s eyes were huge. “It smells so good!”

“And for our pretty boy, some lettuce.” Jesse lifted the dome off Zeb’s plate.

Lake clapped and cheered.

“And finally, mine. I ordered a creamy broccoli and tomato plant-based pasta. Completely vegan in case you’d like a bite,” Jesse told him.

“Oh! You didn’t have to order—”

“Sweet baby,” Jesse said. “It’s a pleasure to order something we can share.”

Lake dropped his gaze then looked up. “You called me baby.”

Jesse swallowed hard. “I did.”

“I liked it,” Lake said softly.

“I like saying it,” Jesse confessed.

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“You don’t mind sharing food?” Lake asked.

“I’d love to share food with you,” Jesse replied. “For many more meals.”

“Okay,” Lake said. “For many more meals. Tomorrow too, right?”

“Yes, tomorrow too.” Jesse picked up the cloth napkin rolled around the silverware.

“Now you need to eat. I don’t want you stressing out about getting back to work.”

“Yeah.” Lake picked up his own silverware.

“While we eat, you can tell me who’s working for the aliens and who’s in danger of being abducted.”

Lake groaned.

“I would be working with the aliens, wouldn’t I?” Jesse asked.

Lake nodded. “You would. Sorry?”

Jesse shrugged. “I guess it makes sense.”

“That’s all anyone is talking about.” Lake took a bite, and his entire face lit up. “This is so good!”

“I’m glad you like it,” Jesse said, pleased.

“But we’ve separated most of the club into two groups. The alien abductions and those that must be watched.”

“At least Dom’s not there. He would be having a field day with this.”

Lake giggled. “The group chat is already going wild. I have no idea who told him but when I grabbed my phone before heading up here, he stated he was making a spreadsheet.”

This time it was Jesse who groaned.

“Dom included the entire coffee shop, security team, and some of the dealers.”

It shouldn’t amuse him as much as it did. The entire conversation was ridiculous, and Jesse was enjoying every minute of it. If he learned anything from spending time with Jesse and their friend group, it was that they needed more ridiculous in their lives.

“Well, if I’m working for the aliens, then I insist that Remi, Eric, and Dane also get judged.”

Lake nodded. “Remi and Dane are with you. Eric’s one of us.”

“One of you,” Jesse scoffed.

“Me, Ezra, and Brandon.” Lake smirked. “You get Dom.”

“No!” Jesse said, horrified. “I refuse!”

Lake shook his head. “We took a vote.”

“No! Make another category,” Jesse demanded.

“What category?” Lake asked. He was trying to hide his grin. Lake wasn’t doing a good job of it, but he was trying.

“The...the...” Jesse snapped his fingers. “The ones the aliens return!”

Lake laughed so hard he shook the table as he held onto it.

Jesse felt like he was the richest man in the world, and it had nothing to do with the amount of money he had. Seeing Lake’s entire face light up in glee was worth every doubt that Jesse pushed down.

Chapter Four

Jesse

He nervously wiped his palms on his pants before Jesse rang the doorbell. Jesse knew he didn't need to be so formal and maybe the suit pants and white button-down shirt was too much, but the clothing was his armor.

If Jesse looked the part, then maybe he could forget the years of living in filth and dirt. Not having enough to eat. Sharing his bed with his twin, bugs, and other things he wanted to forget.

It was still a surprise to him sometimes when he reflected on the last twenty years. When Jesse and his twin had bought the first house to remodel and flip for profit, it had been out of necessity. Now Jesse couldn't even remember half of the properties that he'd once owned. That first house, he did remember that, and how it felt when he'd deposited the big check into his bank account.

"He's here!" Jesse heard Dom shout from inside the house.

Jesse shook his head as he chuckled. Dom was a handful, but Remi ended up being the perfect partner and Daddy for the young man. Jesse was used to staying in the background and watching those around him. He'd gotten used to being alone, or he'd thought, until Dom had changed Jesse's entire world. Instead of being intimidated by Jesse or his money, Dom had treated Jesse just like he treated everyone else. Jesse was more thankful for that than he could ever say. The boy was a brat and Jesse probably didn't help that he often found himself spoiling Dom and the entire friend group. Without words he was trying to show them how grateful he was for their acceptance of who he truly was. It wasn't about the money for the boys. That comfort

was rare in his world.

The door opened and Remi grinned at him. “Hey, man.”

“Afternoon,” Jesse said with a tilt of his head. “Everything okay in here?” He was only halfway joking. Lake could have changed his mind. Jesse wouldn’t blame them. One fun, laughter-filled dinner didn’t mean that Jesse had won Lake over. Lake still had reservations about them. Jesse could read it in his face.

“Everything is fine. Lake is almost ready.” Remi motioned Jesse inside. “I think Dom might be more excited than Lake.”

“Does Lake want to cancel?” Jesse asked and held his breath. He would respect Lake’s wishes.

“No,” Remi replied sharply. “Dom is just really excited. He’s been helping Lake get ready for over an hour and won’t let me in the room with them.”

Jesse chuckled. Okay, Jesse wasn’t too worried then. He knew Dom was rooting for him and Lake getting together. All their friends were.

Stepping into the foyer, he closed the door behind him. The new house was really starting to come together. It had been slower than Remi or Dom had wanted but life did often get in the way of dreams.

Remi had put the offer in on the house right before Dom had gotten the call that he’d be receiving a new kidney. Jesse had helped with the business side of things for Remi to concentrate on taking care of his boy.

It hadn’t been his money that was needed. Jesse would have been happy to help in that way, but they’d needed his business expertise and Jesse had taken on getting the

house closed in time for them to bring Dom home. It had made Jesse really feel like part of the team. Plus, Lake had been involved, giving Jesse the chance to spend more time with the boy.

“It looks good in here,” Jesse said.

Remi grinned. “It’s perfect for us. A little chaotic especially since we tore down the back fence and Brandon and Ezra drop by all the time, but I wouldn’t have it any other way.”

Jesse nodded as he pushed down his jealousy. He’d had too many houses to count but currently found himself holed up in a suite on the top floor of his casino/ hotel. Jesse didn’t have the time to maintain a house. He also hated living alone now that his brother had settled permanently in California.

“Sounds like fun,” Jesse said.

Remi snorted. “Most of the time. Would you like something to drink? Water? Lemonade?”

“I’m fine.” Jesse strolled into the large living room and peered at the pictures lined up over the mantel. He paused at one he hadn’t seen before. One that he was in with all the boys. Christmas. He vaguely remembered Ezra going crazy with his new camera.

“That’s Lake’s favorite,” Remi said quietly.

Jesse glanced over his shoulder at his friend.

“Not that he would tell us that, but he was smiling so big when Dom put that in a frame,” Remi told him.

“I like seeing Lake smile like that,” Jesse admitted.

“We all do,” Remi agreed. “And he’s been smiling ever since he got home last night. The two of you have a nice dinner?”

“We did.” Jesse shrugged. “I would spend every minute with him if I could. I know that’s not possible when—”

Remi hummed as he leaned against the back of the couch. “You’d be surprised what’s possible. Even with me back to work full-time and Dom taking a few shifts a week, we see plenty of each other. And the boys have one another so they’re never alone. It works for us.”

Jesse nodded.

“It could work for you too,” Remi finished.

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That was what Jesse wanted. “I listened to what you said before. To all the advice that you guys gave me. I’m in this with Lake. For as long and as much as he wants. I’m in it!”

“I believe you,” Remi said. “But I’m not the one you have to convince.”

“I’m trying to show him,” Jesse responded.

“I know.” Remi sighed. “We all know how you feel about him. You haven't made it a secret from us. Lake wants to trust you.”

Jesse’s heart gave a twinge. “I would never hurt him.”

“Good. Because he’s been hurt enough in his life. Just have him keep smiling like when he came home. We like that.”

A door opened down the hall as Dom laughed loudly.

“Come on! He’s waiting!” Dom coaxed.

Lake’s reply was too soft to hear. Jesse ran his hand over his shirt to make sure all the buttons were still in place and he wasn’t wrinkled. He wanted to look good for his boy.

“You look wonderful! I love that color,” Dom said.

Jesse waited.

Damn, he felt like he was seventeen again waiting on his prom date with her parents staring at him. Jesse hadn't been the kind of kid any parent would have wanted for their child. He'd changed since then. At least on the outside. What was inside was only for him and Jacob to worry about.

Dom came around the corner first but he dragged Lake along with him.

Jesse's breath caught.

He barely even noticed Dom standing there.

Lake was beautiful. Just stunning. He wore a pale-yellow waffle fabric loose pants and matching top outfit. His dark hair was curled around the ends, hanging into his face, but Jesse could still see his eyes were lined.

"You look gorgeous, baby," Jesse whispered.

Lake immediately flushed.

Dom yelled, pumping his fist.

Remi grabbed Dom, pulling him from between Jesse and Lake.

Jesse stepped forward until he hovered before Lake. "I mean it." He gently cupped Lake's face, brushing his thumb over the white sparkles that highlighted his cheeks. "Beautiful."

Lake met his gaze. "Dom helped me."

Jesse nodded. "I'm glad he encourages you to be yourself."

“I...” Lake swallowed hard. “It’s okay for lunch and shopping?”

Jesse would be a fool to say no, and he was no fool. “It’s perfect. And I’m proud to be your date.”

“You really like it?” Lake sounded so shy.

“I swear that I love seeing you like this. The way you were meant to face the world.” Jesse was getting a little emotional having Lake take this chance with him.

“Thank you. I think I’m ready to go,” Lake said.

Jesse was now doubly glad he booked a private session for their shopping trip. “Great.” He looked down. “Is Zeb not going with us?”

“Oh!” Lake’s eyes widened. “He can come?”

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“I’m sure he’d like to meet his new brother or sister,” Jesse replied.

“I’ll get him!” Dom shouted and raced off.

Jesse was finding it nearly impossible to take his gaze from Lake, so he was pleased they weren’t momentarily separated. Even for such a quick trip to grab Zeb. Lake really was beautiful. Lake could look at him all day.

“Thanks,” Lake whispered.

Leaning forward, Jesse brushed his lips over Lake’s cheek. “You never have to thank me for inviting Zeb along. I got him for you, so I knew you’d always have a friend by your side.”

Lake shook his head. “Not that, well, yes that but...but for everything.”

Since he could tell that Lake was getting overwhelmed, Jesse simply nodded.

“Here he is!” Dom ran back into the living room. “And I grabbed a little backpack that you can carry him in!”

“Good idea,” Jesse praised. He accepted the backpack and Zeb. “Hello, pretty fellow,” he said before kissing Zeb’s head. “Let’s go get lunch.”

Lake and Dom giggled as Jesse got Zeb inside the small backpack with his head sticking out. Each time he’d seen the zebra, Zeb had a new outfit on. Lake was taking very good care of their little one.

Dom hugged Lake, whispering something that made Lake's cheeks turn red. Remi cleared his throat, making Dom drawback, and Jesse took that opportunity to grasp Lake's hand with his.

"We'll see you guys later," Jesse said.

"Don't do anything I wouldn't do!" Dom called after them.

Lake snorted without even looking back. "If you wouldn't do it, then it's probably illegal."

Jesse laughed. That was possibly true. He led Lake out the front door and to his silver SUV waiting in the drive. He opened the door and ushered Lake into the passenger side.

"Are you holding Zeb or should I buckle him in?" Jesse questioned.

Lake pressed his lips together before finally answering. "He'd like to see where we're going. He's a little nervous."

"Make sure you give him extra hugs on the drive. I'll explain the plan for the day as I drive so he knows he has nothing to worry about."

Relief flashed over Lake's face. "He'd like that."

Jesse pulled Zeb back out of the bag. Did they even need it? Jesse was pretty sure Lake's little friend was going to be with them every step of the way. Leaning over, he placed Zeb in Lake's lap before he pulled the seatbelt over the two of them. "Have to make sure my pretty boys stay safe."

"Thanks." Lake smiled but his cheeks were still red.

Jesse closed the door before hurrying to the other side of the vehicle. He climbed behind the wheel then turned to stash the backpack on the back seat. He turned back around and started the vehicle.

“Seatbelt for you too?” Lake said quietly.

“That’s right.” Jesse beamed at the boy as he buckled himself in. “Crazy Vegas traffic.”

Lake nodded and giggled. “Zeb doesn’t like driving with Dom.”

“I can see that.” Jesse checked his mirrors before carefully pulling out of the drive. He had a driver most of the time, but when he was with Lake, Jesse wanted to be in control and able to see to Lake’s needs on his own. “I’m just glad he never got that motorcycle he was talking about.”

Lake gasped. “I’d forgotten about that!”

“It was before Remi came along so I’m sure it’s no longer a worry.” Jesse hoped so anyway.

“Remi would never allow that,” Lake agreed.

“We’re going to lunch as at a small plant-based restaurant over on Rainbow,” Jesse said as he made a right out of Lake’s neighborhood.

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“Oh!” Lake bounced. “I passed that place. It looks nice.”

“It’s very nice. I’m talking to the owners about opening a location inside the casino. I want to be able to offer more options for visitors when they come.”

Lake leaned closer, showing interest in the conversation. “Are they thinking about it? Really? That would be great!”

“They’re very intrigued and we’re in negotiations,” Jesse shared.

Lake was quiet for a few minutes. “It’s not just for visitors though.”

Jesse waited until he was stopped at a red light before speaking. He glanced over at his companion. “I happen to know a boy at work that would probably enjoy the restaurant as well.”

Lake bit his lip.

While Jesse would have loved to continue to watch him, the light turned green. “What are you thinking?”

Lake sighed. “You know you don’t have to buy a restaurant to show me you’re interested, right? I’m already on a date with you.”

Jesse chuckled. That might have been the most Dom thing that Lake had ever said to him. And not Dom as in Dominant but meaning their friend. “I’m not buying the restaurant,” he corrected. “I’m adding to the already highly sought after food and

entertainment options that I already offer.”

Lake opened his mouth before quickly closing it.

“Although it was you that opened my eyes to the need for more food options. I hate to admit that I never thought how hard it was to find vegan food until I looked for it.”

“I can usually find something to eat anywhere as long as they let me make substitutions.”

“I bet that’s true, but it must be nice to be in an environment where you don’t have to worry about that,” Jesse pointed out.

“It is,” Lake agreed. “No one really cared whether I could eat somewhere or not. Before, you know.”

“I’m sorry about that.” Jesse reached over and grasped Lake’s hand.

“It’s no big deal,” Lake said with a shrug.

Jesse knew the boy wasn’t telling the complete truth. He pulled into the parking lot of the small restaurant, knowing that he needed to address one more thing that Lake said.

As expected, the restaurant wasn’t too busy this late in the afternoon and Jesse was able to find a parking spot easily. He left the vehicle running as he turned in his seat.

Lake was running the fingers of his free hand over Zeb’s back.

Jesse gave the fingers he held a squeeze. “I’m happy that you agreed to this date and acknowledge that I’m interested in you.”

Lake nodded. “The others...they told me, but I didn't believe them.” Lake huffed. “Or I didn't want to believe them.”

“Can you tell me why?”

“I...” Lake stared hard out the front window. “I don't know what I have to offer you. You have so much—”

This wasn't the first time that Jesse had heard this concern. It hurt more hearing Lake say the words.

“Dang it!” Lake said suddenly.

Jesse realized he'd been getting lost in his own head again. “I'm sorry, what?”

“I promised Dom I wouldn't do this!” Lake exclaimed.

“Do what?” Jesse was confused.

“Start doubting myself,” Lake explained. “I want to enjoy my date with you. You make me feel special and beautiful and...and normal.”

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Jesse lifted Lake's hand to his mouth to kiss the back of it. "You are all of those things."

"And you've been showing me for months what kind of man you are. You've taken care of things for Remi and Dom when they needed help. You're respectful to your employees and everyone in the club. You're sweet to me. I deserve to be on this date!"

Jesse couldn't remember being this happy on a date ever before. "We both deserve to be on this date."

"You're trusting me and I'm trusting you," Lake said. It sounded like he was repeating something he'd heard.

"Yes."

Lake nodded. "Yes."

Was that it? Jesse looked toward the restaurant. "Are you still hungry?"

"I'm starving!" Lake told him.

"Good. I'll help you out of the vehicle." He had to release Lake's hand and Jesse hated that but there would be more hand-holding, he promised himself. They had a whole date in front of them.

* * * * *

Lake

Laughing as Zeb swung between him and Jesse, Lake was sure they were getting some weird looks walking down the mall, but he honestly didn't care. Zeb had even sat at the table during lunch and the waiter hadn't mentioned it. Jesse was so smooth and confident that anything he did just got him a smile.

For someone who always worried what others thought about him, it was refreshing to be with Jesse, who didn't seem to notice the attention they garnered.

"Now remember that I booked us a private shopping so you can take your time," Jesse told him as they approached the store in question.

"You didn't have to do that," Lake said again.

"I want us to enjoy our time. I was a little overwhelmed when I came for you. There were lots of kids—of course it was a Saturday, not the middle of the week like now when kids should be in school—but it was loud and crowded."

Lake smiled because he just couldn't help it. He was being so brave on their date and Jesse was as sweet as he always was.

That morning, he had been a mess when he'd been thinking about his date, and Dom had needed to step in and stop Lake from canceling. Lake was glad he hadn't canceled. This was an experience that Lake had never dreamed about.

"Here we are." Jesse moved to open the door for Lake.

"Hi!" A young man about Lake's age waved from the register.

"Hello," Jesse called back.

Lake looked around in amazement. He'd seen the store on shows and in movies, but he'd never been inside one. There were animals of every variety on shelves covering two walls. The other walls were filled with every type of clothing and accessories that Lake could think of. These animals were before they were stuffed where Lake would be able to pick whether he wished for a squishy baby or a harder full stuffed animal.

"Wow!" Lake breathed out.

The young man left the counter to walk over and place a sign in the window of the door. "You must be Lake! I'm Scotty and it is my pleasure to help you make a new friend today!"

"Thanks, Scotty." Lake smiled at the happy guy. "I appreciate you doing this for us."

"Oh! You brought Zeb back! Do you love him? Isn't he the prettiest boy ever?"

Lake felt an instant connection with Scotty. "He is the prettiest and goodiest boy ever!"

"That would be you, baby," Jesse said, kissing the top of Lake's head. "Would you like to do a walk-through before you decide on what friend you want?"

"There are so many!" Lake gushed.

"There really are!" Scotty bounced on his toes. "I can only buy one a month or my whole paychecks would be spent here! And I get a discount!"

Lake turned to look at Jesse.

Jesse grinned. “One.”

But there were so many! Lake pushed his bottom lip out.

The smile fell from Jesse’s face. “One, Lake!”

“What if I hurt one of their feelings for not taking them home?” Lake asked.

Scotty giggled before slapping a hand over his mouth.

Jesse hesitated. Lake could feel him starting to soften. Lake was only half joking. He didn’t even know where he’d put all his new friends, but he wanted them. “One,” Jesse said. “But we’ll book another time to come back while we’re here today and we’ll bring Dom, Ezra, and Brandon with us. Between the four of you, you can share friends.”

Lake bounced over and hugged Jesse. “Really?”

“Oh! A party! Those are my favorites,” Scotty said.

“You are gonna love my friends too!” Lake said.

“Cool! I’ve only been here six months. I haven’t met a lot of friends yet. My boyfriend and I came here to get away from his family who couldn’t accept that he’s gay.”

Lake squealed. “New friend!” He hugged Scotty to him. “Show me around.” He loved meeting new awesome people.

Scotty took Lake’s hand and led him to the first wall of shelves.

Jesse followed behind them, listening and holding on to Zeb. It wasn’t until they reached the back that Lake knew he’d found the perfect new stuffie! He turned to Jesse with a smile.

Jesse leaned against Lake’s back. “We can’t not get him.”

“Right!” Lake bounced. “Isn’t he perfect?”

Scotty looked from Lake to Jesse then pointed at the stuffie that still needed to be stuffed. Ha! That was funny. “This one? Okay, I was not expecting that.”

“He’s so perfect,” Lake drawled.

Scotty shrugged. “If you say so.” He picked up Lake’s new friend. “We need to get him stuffed and then pick out his clothes.”

“He wants pretty clothes like Zeb!” Lake said.

“Of course he does,” Jesse agreed. “And Zeb saw some bows that he just can’t live without.”

This was the best date ever. If anyone ever went on a date this good, then they were the luckiest boy in the entire world, just like Lake. Lake turned to Jesse and opened his arms. “Can I have a hug?”

“Yes.” Jesse wrapped his arms around Lake and held him tight. “This is fun.”

“Best date ever!” Lake told him.

“What if we took Zeb and...his new brother for ice cream after this?” Jesse suggested.

“Yes!” Lake exclaimed. “There’s a vegan ice cream place down the street from here.”

Jesse grinned. “I know.”

He knew! Because Jesse was awesome like that. Jesse wanted to take care of Lake. Jesse was a Daddy, after all. Lake stepped back. Jesse was watching him with genuine pleasure.

Lake wondered if this was the moment he would always remember. Jesse wasn’t his boss. Jesse wasn’t just the rich guy that came around from time to time. Jesse was the man that Lake wanted to call Daddy.

“You okay, baby?” Jesse said, cupping his face.

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“Baby? Pretty baby?” Lake whispered.

“The prettiest baby in the world,” Jesse said. He leaned forward to brush his lips over Lake’s forehead. “One day I hope to say my baby.”

Lake wrapped his thick fingers around Jesse’s wrist where he still touched Lake. “I really think I would like that.”

Jesse nodded. “We move at your pace. I know you’re still coming to terms with everything. A lot has changed suddenly for you. I just want to be by your side as you continue to find yourself.”

“And help if I need it?” Lake asked.

“And help if you need it,” Jesse agreed.

“That sounds good to me,” Lake said.

“Hey, guys!” Scotty called. “Are we going to stuff this alien?”

Lake giggled. The blue and green alien was just too perfect to pass up. Maybe he would even name him Dom. That would be so great, and his friend couldn’t even get mad because Lake’s new alien was now family. Zeb liked having a brother who dressed as pretty as he did. Maybe they could even share clothes!

“We’re coming,” Jesse said. He dragged Lake along to the stuffing station.

Now that he had his new friend picked out, Lake was dying to look at the clothes. And everything else. Then he was getting ice cream. And Lake was really hoping that the date would end with a kiss. A real kiss. Not one to his cheek or forehead. He wanted to feel Jesse's lips on his.

Chapter Five

Jesse

The feel of Lake's big body under his was heaven on earth. Jesse clutched the boy hard as he thrust over and over. Jesse's cock had found a home that he never wanted to leave.

The sweet and sexy sounds that Lake made amped up Jesse's need for the boy.

"Please, Daddy!" Lake begged. "I need to come!"

"Not yet," Jesse gritted out between his clenched teeth. He thrust hard and fast. "Wait for me."

"I can't..." Lake wailed. "Please!"

Gripping Lake's hips, Jesse paused with his cock buried deep. "Say it again!"

Lake panted. "What? Say what? Please? Please let me come!"

Jesse leaned closer to Lake's ear. "Call me Daddy," he demanded.

"Daddy!" Lake repeated. "Please, Daddy!"

Jesse drew back before thrusting again. And again. He held on tight as he rode Lake

until his balls drew up. Reaching around, he grasped Lake's cock and began to jack him along with each deep plunge.

"Now, pretty baby," Jesse ordered.

Lake cried out and came all over Jesse's hand as Jesse filled the boy with his seed. Lake shook with aftershocks while Jesse helped him lower himself to the mattress.

Jesse jerked at the ringing of his phone.

"Fuck!" He groaned and rubbed his hands roughly down his face. That dream, that fucking dream, had been hot. And Jesse's cock was still rock-hard. Jesse reached for his dick, but his phone started to ring again.

"Who the—" Jesse sat up in bed and glanced at his phone on the nightstand. Three in the morning. Who would be calling him at three in the fucking morning? He snatched the phone up, accidentally yanking it from the charging cord.

The general manager of the casino.

"Hey, William," Jesse greeted.

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“I’m so sorry to wake you,” William said.

“It’s fine.” It wasn’t. Jesse couldn’t have this shit happening when he was with Lake. That was a problem for another day, apparently. “What’s going on?”

“That couple you asked me to look out for? They showed up. They reserved one of our rooms.”

Dread filled him. “You’re sure it’s them?”

“They used the name and identification that you gave me,” William answered.

Fuck! Jesse had hoped that this day would never come. After months without a word or showing. Jesse wished this was over. “Keep an eye on them. Assign someone from security to watch and report everywhere they go. I especially want to know if they go anywhere near the coffee shop.”

“You got it, boss,” William said.

“They just checked in?”

“Yes, it was unusual enough for such a late check-in that it caught my attention,” William said. “I was right there when Maria gave them the keys.”

“What’s the room number?”

“Thirty-seven-twenty,” William replied.

“Thanks, Will. I appreciate the call.”

“You got it, boss. I’ll see you in the morning. Uh, I mean later this morning,” William said.

“I’ll bring you a coffee,” Jesse promised.

“Appreciate it.”

Jesse ended the call. Well at least the call had killed his erection. He debated sending the text then or waiting. Shower, coffee for himself, and then Jesse would check on their guests himself. Then he would send the text. No one else should have to be woken up by this news at this ungodly hour.

He climbed off the bed, naked, and strolled to the bathroom.

One thing he could say about his suite was that it was everything a penthouse should be in fabulous Las Vegas.

Jesse didn’t need five bedrooms, three bathrooms, two bars, two living rooms, office, and multiple entertainment spaces. He was expected to have the best, so he’d put himself in the best.

He would have much preferred the nice house that Remi, Dom, and Lake lived in. Even the smaller but equally nice house that Eric, Ezra, Dane, and Brandon shared. Communal living of sorts. Not something that Jesse would have ever considered once he had enough money to pay rent in a decent place.

Now all he wished was that he was in the same space as Lake.

His boy.

They'd shared one kiss so far.

Jesse had kissed Lake on the doorstep when he'd dropped him off after ice cream. The sweet kiss that was better than any other interaction that Jesse had in his life. And admittedly Jesse had his fair share of men when he'd been younger. None of them compared to the sweetness or wide-eyed wonder that Lake gave to him.

How was Lake still single?

Why didn't anyone else see what a wonderful human being that Lake truly was? Jesse shouldn't complain since this gave him the opportunity for his chance with Lake.

Jesse turned on the shower and let it heat up as he walked over to the mirror.

He stared at his reflection, knowing that no one had seen him like this. Not any of the men in his past. Not his brother. The secret under his clothing was for Jesse, or had been, until Lake had come into his life.

The intricate array of tattoos that covered him from collarbone to ankle weren't just decoration. They hid the years of horror and torture that Jesse didn't tell anyone about. Ever. Jacob knew but he had his own way of covering up the past.

The scars from cuts and burns were one of the few ways that someone would be able to tell the two of them apart. If Jesse or Jacob allowed anyone that close. They didn't normally.

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The bruises had faded from his body but there was no helping his memories. Hurts given to him by the man who was supposed to love and protect him. The feigned ignorance of the woman who had turned a blind eye to what was being done. His father had been pure evil and even his mother had suffered under his cruel hand. Still, she'd never shown any kindness to her twin sons. Never tried to save them.

Jesse had started with the tattoos before he'd come up with any kind of plan.

He'd just wanted to get rid of the ghosts from his past.

The little money that they squirreled away went toward rent, food, and tattoos. Until the money started to flow in and Jesse had run out of room on his body. Now Jesse kept the lost and hurt child locked behind the expensive suits and his money.

Jesse turned his back to the mirror.

Lake was in for some surprises as their relationship grew. And Jesse was intent on finally claiming Jesse as his own. The last two days of spending time with Lake was more than Jesse could have asked for. Lake was a pleasure to be around.

The alien had been named Al so now Zeb and Al had found their forever home. It took too many texts and a lot of planning for the boys' next visit to the store to make their own new friends, but Jesse had been happy when they had a date for three weeks. It meant so much to Jesse to be able to spoil the boys.

Stepping into the shower stall, Jesse groaned as the hot water hit his shoulders. He'd been stressed about his date with Lake. He knew that Lake wasn't interested in his

money as much as Lake needed someone who accepted him as he was. Jesse had trouble not offering to ease Lake's way with his money. He knew it wouldn't work. That had just become Jesse's solution most of the time.

Having to rely on his instincts and be the kind of man that Lake needed was a challenge, but one that Jesse planned to pass.

Lake had the night off so Jesse wouldn't be seeing him. Maybe it would be okay to spend some money though. Just a little?

* * * * *

Lake

Finishing his lunch, Lake stared at the gift that had arrived earlier.

The arrangement was beautiful. Like really gorgeous. Not anything overdone like the dozen red roses Lake still had from his first dinner in Jesse's office. This flower arrangement was so much more. An array of bright, colorful flowers, inside a deep vase, wrapped with a yellow ribbon.

If Lake picked out flowers for himself, it would have been those. Not that Lake ever bought himself flowers. That was just silly. He had purchased some for his mom on her birthday and Mother's Day but never for himself. Lake didn't even know that men sent other men flowers.

Giving in, Lake leaned forward and smelled the bouquet.

Turned out that he really liked flowers.

They were just so pretty!

He lifted the heavy vase as he looked around. The roses were beside his bed so he could think about Jesse before he went to sleep but this arrangement was too pretty to be locked away in Lake's room.

The sun was shining through the sliding glass door and window in the dining room though. Lake set them in the middle of the empty table and smiled. Perfect. Now they could all enjoy the flowers. Slipping his hand in his pocket, Lake fingered the little note that had been attached to the vase.

That note was just for him.

A handwritten note.

Lake pulled the note out to reread it.

My Lake,

Thank you again for our date. Something pretty for my pretty. I'll see you soon!

J

Lake hugged the note to his chest.

Was this romance? It sure felt like it. The fluttering in his belly wasn't from nerves or the dread that had filled him every time that Lake had to deal with his family. This freedom was something different, allowing Lake to get excited about dates and the man who'd had his attention for far too long.

A shout caught Lake's attention, and he stuffed the note back in his pocket before gazing out the window. Dane was putting his K9 Maverick through his morning commands and exercise, which meant that Brandon would be somewhere close.

There he was! Sitting under the porch awning, watching his man and pup.

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Lake had been there when Dane had told Brandon that he was too distracting to be outside when Dane and Maverick were working. It appeared that argument hadn't ended the way Dane wanted. Not if Brandon was out there with a big smile on his face.

As much as Lake didn't want to be a distraction either, he did want to talk to Brandon. He exited the sliding glass door quietly and stood on his own porch.

Brandon waved and Lake waved back.

When Brandon rose and began to creep closer to the edge of the side fence, Lake did the same. Luckily Dane and Maverick were on the other side of the yard where Dane had boxes with different scents set up.

With the back fence taken down, a new one had been put around the pool located in their yard. No one wanted an accident with little Annabelle running around. Lake skirted around the pool fence before finally reaching the side fence. He and Brandon continued until they met in the middle.

"Hey, buddy," Brandon said softly.

Lake hugged his friend quickly before pulling Brandon down onto the lush grass.
"Hey."

"What are you up to today?" Brandon asked.

"Nothing much. I slept in and just had lunch. I see you're keeping an eye on your

men.”

Brandon laughed. “They both make me so proud. Dane has been working hard on a case and last night he finally got the bust he was after. Maverick did so well. I spoiled Maverick all night, but Dane said they can’t get lazy.”

Lake nudged Brandon’s shoulder. “I bet Maverick isn’t the only one who got spoiled.”

Brandon’s grin was wicked. “Maverick’s was the only PG spoiling. I might have taken care of my man later. He was a good boy too after all making sure that our streets stay safe.”

Lake had to shake his head. “I noticed you didn’t say that loudly.”

Brandon snorted. “I’m no fool. Now enough about me. I want to know all about your date.”

“It was so good,” Lake said, leaning against Brandon’s shoulder so he wouldn’t get too loud. It was hard when he was so excited. “I really like him.”

“I know you do.” Brandon twined their fingers together. “But that also means that he better be on his best behavior with you.”

“He was such a gentleman,” Lake assured his friend. “He opened doors for me, buckled me in his SUV, let Zeb sit at our table at lunch, and we had so much fun making Al.”

“I can’t believe you picked an alien,” Brandon said. “That is too perfect. Dom is going crazy with alien conspiracies right now.”

“It’s driving him crazy,” Lake shared. “He is sending me all kinds of links to YouTube videos.”

“Me too,” Brandon told him. “It’s fun!”

“I just never expected it from Dom. We just have to keep him away from Jimmy. They two of them together...” Lake gave a fake shudder.

“True!” Brandon agreed. “Now tell me something good. Did Jesse kiss you?”

Lake’s face heated and he knew that Brandon saw when his friend’s smile widened.

“He did, didn’t he?” Brandon said elbowing Lake in the ribs.

“Yes,” Lake admitted.

“And...” Brandon pushed.

“It was everything a kiss should be,” Lake said. It really had been.

“Yes!” Brandon shouted and pumped a fist.

Dane and Maverick both turned to them.

“Shh!” Lake grabbed Brandon’s arm. “You’re gonna get us in trouble!”

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Brandon waved the hand that Lake wasn't clinging to. "They're almost done anyway."

"Don't make me send you both inside," Dane called.

"But there are toys inside!" Brandon yelled back. "Is that really a threat?"

"There are also corners inside," Dane warned.

Lake slapped his hand over Brandon's mouth. "We'll be good." Not that Lake was worried about being sent to the corner by Dane. There were rules set up for them since their dynamic was different than what most people would consider a friend group.

Not weird different but a comforting difference that Lake needed.

It was no secret that Lake didn't have a Daddy and until recently, like a few days, never expected to ever have a Daddy. Eric, Dane, and Remi all stood in as surrogates for him. Lake still had limits even with his friends. He wasn't a brat and rarely needed correction but when he did, Lake preferred a more gentle approach.

"I know you will be," Dane said. He narrowed his eyes at his boy. "Brandon better remember that I have the next few days off with him."

Brandon's eyes widened and he nodded.

Lake removed his hand.

“We’ll be good.” Brandon repeated what Lake had said.

“Let me finish up with Maverick and I might have a treat inside for the two of you. You can stay, Lake? You have the night off?” Dane asked.

“I can stay,” Lake replied. He hadn’t had any grand plans so this was great. Dom and Remi were at work. Dom would be home first and he knew to check over at the other house if Lake wasn’t home.

“We’re gonna go play!” Brandon announced as he climbed to his feet.

Lake scrambled up with him.

“Good idea. That should keep you out of trouble,” Dane said.

“So, we can still have our treat?” Brandon questioned with a fake innocent smile. He was really laying in on thick in Lake’s opinion.

“No makeup or Play-Doh,” Dane ordered.

Brandon sighed. “But, Daddy!”

“And absolutely no glitter. If I see any glitter, you will sleep in the corner.”

“Fine.” Brandon grabbed Lake’s hand and began dragging him into the house.

Lake followed along, knowing that Brandon would already have a plan forming. When they were little, Lake preferred to let the other boys decide on what they were going to do. Maybe it was because Lake was just so glad to be included in little time.

The house was nice and cool. Lake hadn’t even realized how hot it had been sitting in

the sun.

Brandon led him into the kitchen where he grabbed two juice boxes from the fridge. Lake gratefully took his organic apple juice then followed Brandon down the hall to the basement door.

“No running down the steps,” Brandon whispered. “Daddy will know.”

His friend was already regressing. “Okay, I won’t,” Lake promised.

“I fell last week and Daddy got mad,” Brandon shared.

“You didn’t tell me that.” Lake stepped carefully from one stair to another. He didn’t want to get his friend in trouble.

“It’s embarrassing but Daddy carried me around for the rest of the day, so it wasn’t that bad.”

Lake had never and would never be carried around. Not like the other boys. He was as tall as the Daddies and outweighed most of them. Most of the time he struggled with the difference between him and his friends. Lake wished he was a smaller guy. That he wasn’t naturally tall and big boned. Many nights he cried himself to sleep just wishing he was different.

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Since he'd moved in with Remi and Dom, Lake could admit that a lot of his previous feelings also had a lot to do with the fact that he didn't fit in with his birth family.

All of them, his father and brothers, were bigger guys like Lake. They didn't identify as little of course, and if Lake was more like them, then he wouldn't struggle with finding a Daddy. That was what he had believed.

It made a difference when Remi, Dom, and the others went out of their way to show that they liked Lake just the way he was. And Jesse, yes Jesse, was changing Lake's mind about a lot of things as well.

Jesse called him beautiful. Held his hand in public. Didn't care when other people watched them and whispered. Jesse's nonchalant attitude was what Lake had needed all along. Well that that the support of his friends.

Because Lake couldn't change himself.

Hadn't he suffered for years because he was the problem? Lake hadn't accepted himself so why should he have expected anyone else to?

Lake made his way to the little table and dropped to his knees.

The furniture in the playroom was perfect for all of them. Even Lake.

As Brandon began to pick toys from the shelves nearby, Lake could feel himself slipping into his little persona. Sipping on his juice, Lake smiled.

This was the life that he had always said he wanted.

He'd had to let go of the past and the family that he never measured up to. Lake hoped that one day, sooner rather than later, he could have some sort of relationship with his parents and brothers, but he needed to focus on himself.

Lake had tried and failed at being the perfect son and brother. Because trying to fit in with his family meant denying the basic fabric of himself.

No more living for other people.

The safe place that he'd found living with Dom and Remi gave him the confidence to go after what he wanted. And what did Lake want most of all? He wanted a Daddy all his own.

It was time to be brave.

Lake could do this!

Although it wouldn't hurt to have backup.

Lake set his juice down hard on the table in front of him. "I'm a brave boy," he declared loudly.

Brandon turned so fast that he nearly dropped two containers. "You are a brave boy," Brandon said immediately. "You are brave, and kind, and pretty. You are awesome."

Lake beamed. "I'm getting my Daddy."

Brandon didn't drop the toy containers as much as he threw them to race over to Lake. He dropped down and hugged Lake. "Yes, you are!"

Lake hugged Brandon back. “I’m going to be brave and make Jesse my Daddy.” It felt good to say the words out loud. To announce his intent into the universe.

“How can I help?” Brandon asked.

That was a good question. What did Lake need to do. He knew that Jesse was interested in him. Their date had gone well. Jesse had sent the flowers just so Lake didn't have to wonder or worry. Jesse was always thinking about what would make Lake happy or comfortable.

The answer hit Lake like a sledgehammer.

He sucked in a breath.

“What?” Brandon drew back from the hug to shake him. “You have an idea.”

Lake nodded. So far Jesse had made all the moves. Jesse had even gone to the Daddies for advice. While Lake had been hiding and pretending that he didn't know about Jesse's interest, Jesse hadn't given up. “I want to do something special for him.”

“Oh! That's romantic. Like what?” Brandon asked.

Well Lake hadn't gotten that far. He slumped his shoulders. “I don't know.”

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“That’s okay.” Brandon patted his back. “We’ll think of something.”

Lake nodded in appreciation.

“Do you know what he likes to do? Does he have any hobbies?” Brandon questioned.

The panic started to fill him when Lake realized that he didn’t know that much about Jesse. Not really. He knew the boss man. The one in charge of several businesses and had more money than God. As a boss, Jesse was kind and fair. The programs that Jesse put into place were to better the lives of his employees.

He knew Jesse as a friend to the group. While Jesse wasn’t always able to hang out with them, he always made it for the big events. Like holidays and family dinner, that Brandon insisted on. And he never came empty-handed. Jesse always brought a gift for the boys.

At the club, Jesse was a caring Dom that didn’t pay too close attention to any of the boys but was always there if there was trouble. Jesse ran the club with an iron fist. They were safe there because Jesse put their safety above everything else. That was why Lake enjoyed working at the club after all. He knew that if he brought up a concern, he would be listened to. That every member of the staff had the right and was encouraged to speak up if they saw or heard anything.

When Jesse had suspected that his own employees had been up to no good and putting others at risk, he’d gone to the cops himself. He hadn’t waited around for the police to ask him questions. Jesse had sought them out.

He had a strict moral code. Hadn't that been what had first attracted Lake after all?

What else? What else?

Jesse had a twin brother that lived in California. His brother was a professor, but Lake hadn't even asked what he taught. The two visited each other often so they must be close. Lake knew nothing else about Jesse's family. Lake had no idea if Jesse's parents were still alive or if they were estranged. Other siblings, grandparents, aunts and uncles, or cousins? Lake had no clue about his family.

He felt horrible!

Lake was a bad boyfriend! And he didn't even know if Jesse considered them boyfriends after dinner and one date!

"Bran!" Lake whined.

"It's okay." Brandon went back to hugging him. "We can do this."

"I don't know anything he likes," Lake argued.

Brandon started to laugh.

Lake wasn't finding any of this funny.

"Wait," Brandon said. He wiggled away and pulled his phone out of his pocket. "We do know one thing that he likes."

"What's that?" Lake asked, needing to know...well anything.

"You!" Brandon exclaimed. "He likes you."

“He does,” Lake agreed.

“That’s at least a starting point, right?”

But was it enough.

“You know what we need?” Brandon asked.

“No, what?”

Brandon wiggled his phone. “Reinforcements!”

Chapter Six

Jesse

His eyes were beginning to ache, and a low-grade headache was threatening to get worse. Jesse knew it was just the numbers in the spreadsheet weren’t to blame for his foul mood or agitation. After sending the text early that morning, Jesse wasn’t surprised when Eric showed up in his office. He had been shocked that Ezra had been with his Daddy.

Jesse had wanted to protect Ezra now that his parents were back in town.

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Apparently, Eric had promised the boy that he wouldn't hide anything that had to do with the couple from Ezra again, so they both had shown up in Jesse's office.

Jesse had to sit across the desk and watch the fear fill Ezra's eyes as he explained that Ezra's parents had started to ask about him inside the casino. Jesse's employees knew better than to talk to the couple—they took safety precautions regarding their employees.

He hated to be the one to share the news with Ezra, but it had to be done.

They needed to know that the older couple hadn't given up.

His hands started to shake, and Jesse pushed away from his desk.

This was such bullshit! Jesse had the money and means to get rid of this couple once and for all. He could make all of Ezra's troubles go away with just a few phone calls. Jesse wasn't allowed to do that though. No, there were rules and laws, and a moral code.

He snorted. Jesse was a firm believer in doing what was right. His need to fix things was pushing Jesse to want to cross a line he would never have considered before. Did that make him a bad person?

His watch beeped and Lake's name flashed on the screen as he heard the chime of the elevator arriving at his floor.

Was Lake there? Why was Lake there? Was something wrong?

Jesse started to walk around his desk when Lake appeared in his doorway.

“Lake?” Jesse said.

“Hi.” Lake shifted nervously from foot to foot. In his hands he held an old wicker basket and blanket.

“What are you doing here? Is something wrong?” Fear filled him. Had something happened with Ezra’s parents? Jesse had security watching them!

“Nothing’s wrong,” Lake said quietly. “I...I wanted to ask you something.”

Jesse had paused halfway across his office. “You can ask me anything.” He hoped that Lake knew that.

Lake took a big deep breath then blew it out. “I’m a brave boy,” he whispered.

Jesse wasn’t sure if he was supposed to have heard that or not. He decided to answer anyway. “You are a brave, kind, beautiful boy,” Jesse told him.

Lake glanced at him quickly. “Would you like to have dinner with me? Now?”

Jesse blinked at him. Lake had come all the way across town to invite him to dinner? “I would love that.”

Lake shuffled inside the room a couple steps.

Jesse looked down at what Lake was carrying. “Is that for us?”

“Yes.” Lake nodded. “I took care of everything. All I need is you.”

Jesse strode forward to cup Lake's cheek. "You have me," he vowed. "Always."

"So, picnic?" Lake said. "Here?"

A picnic? That was so cute! But his office wasn't the ideal place. Too many distractions. And Jesse didn't ever want Lake to feel like he came second to Jesse's work. Jesse had somewhere better in mind. He held up one finger. "One minute."

Lake nodded.

"I have somewhere special to show you. You took care of everything we needed but let me do this?" Jesse requested.

"Okay!" Lake agreed quickly.

Jesse returned to his desk and exited out of the program that he'd been working in. He powered down his laptop then held out his hand. "Can I help carry something?" Lake was wearing a backpack that looked stuffed full plus holding the big basket and blanket.

"Thank you," Lake said sweetly as he passed over the basket and blanket.

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Jesse held everything in his right hand as he twined the fingers of his left with Lake's hand. "Come with me, please."

"Okay."

The trust that Lake showed him still surprised him sometimes. Jesse didn't know what he'd done to deserve such a sweet boy by his side. He led Lake back to the elevator. Using his watch, he opened the elevator and programmed it to go up to the penthouse.

"The penthouse?" Lake asked. "Fancy!"

Jesse laughed. "I've been staying there since I sold my last house."

"You live here too?" Lake questioned.

"It seemed like a good idea at the time," Jesse told him. "I'll eventually find a new house."

Lake squeezed his fingers. "You should have a separation between work and home."

"I know." Jesse laughed. "I've been working on it. Or I have a reason to work on it now."

The boy flushed.

"Yes." Jesse leaned closer. "I'm talking about you." He brushed his lips gently

against Lake's.

Lake sighed against his mouth as the elevator dinged.

With regret Jesse pulled away. "Come on." He pulled Lake from the elevator.

Very few people had access to the penthouse with Jesse staying there and he was always alerted if someone did access the floor.

Lake gasped as he looked around with wide eyes filled with wonder. "It's so big."

Jesse was embarrassed. "It's more room than I need, for sure."

"Dining room?" Lake asked, pointing to the basket that Jesse had set on the counter.

"It looks like you packed for a picnic though."

Lake shrugged. "I thought we would picnic on your office floor. I didn't want to disturb your work but wanted to see you."

"I am so glad that you did," Jesse said sincerely. He loosened his tie before unbuttoning the top two buttons of his shirt. "But why don't we still have a picnic?"

"Really?" Lake bounced a little.

"It's romantic," Jesse said. "And I think it's a great idea."

"I thought it was romantic too!" Lake said.

Jesse rolled up the sleeves of his shirt. He'd left his suit jacket on the back of his chair in the office.

Lake had been looking around the open space but froze staring at him.

Jesse stopped what he was doing. “Lake?”

“You have tattoos?”

He looked down. Jesse had just exposed his forearms to Lake. That wasn’t something he ever did. Jesse hadn’t even thought about it. He was so comfortable around the other man. “I do. There are still a few things you don’t know about me.”

Instead of laughing like Jesse had planned, Lake’s eyes filled with tears.

“Baby!” Jesse rushed forward. “I was just kidding. Please don’t cry!” Did Lake hate tattoos or something? It wasn’t like Jesse could get rid of an entire body full.

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Lake sniffed. “That’s the problem!”

Jesse ached for upsetting the boy. “What’s the problem? I can cover the tattoos if you hate them that much.” Although getting naked would be a definite problem.

Lake shook his head frantically. “Not the tattoos!” he sobbed. “I don’t know you!”

“Baby, you know me,” Jesse said gently.

“No, I don’t! That’s why I wanted to do this for you! To get to know you. To show you that I’m...I’m interested in you too.”

Jesse didn’t understand. “Come here, please.” He drew Lake across the room to the balcony door after grabbing the basket and blanket. He slid the door open to the amazing intimate spot for the penthouse. There was a private pool, a lounge area, and even a grassy lawn that would be perfect for a picnic. The lights and view of the Las Vegas Strip were magnificent up this high.

Jesse brought Lake to the grass and squeezed his fingers before releasing him. He set the basket down then grabbed the blanket and snapped it open. He smoothed out the blanket before urging Lake down with him.

Lake had stopped crying, but his eyes were now red, and he looked miserable.

“You know me, Lake,” Jesse told him kindly. He grabbed Lake’s hand and placed it over his own chest. “You know me inside here. The tattoos are something different but isn’t it fun to be able to learn more about me as we become closer?”

Lake nodded. "Yes, I guess."

"Can you tell me what brought this on?" Jesse requested.

"I was thinking about you earlier," Lake said.

Well, that made Jesse happy. "What were you thinking about?"

"That I'm really happy that we are...dating?"

That sounded like a question. "I'd like to think we are dating," Jesse assured him. "And how I hope for more in the future."

"I want that too. I realized though that you have been showing me your interest and going out of your way to make me happy, but I haven't been doing the same. I want you to know that I'm in this. I want to be with you."

Jesse was beyond thrilled. This might be the best night of his life. "Thank you, baby. For telling me that."

"I wanted to do something special for you and that was when I realized that I don't know you."

Jesse opened his mouth to argue.

Lake shook his head. "I know the boss you, the club owner you, and the friend you. I know that you're protective, kind, and that you care about everyone around you. But I want more than that. I want to know what makes you smile. Do you like watching TV or movies? Are you a reader?" He swallowed hard. "I want to know you better than anyone else."

Jesse was struck speechless. No one had ever said those words to him.

“Is that okay?” Lake asked softly.

It was at that moment that Jesse realized that he was in love with Lake. He’d been attracted to him. Of course he was. Lake was beautiful, sweet, just a wonderful human being, but Jesse loved him. “It’s more than okay.”

Lake leaned in.

Jesse reached back and threaded his fingers in Lake’s hair as their lips brushed. Then Lake opened for him and Jesse slipped his tongue inside the boy’s mouth. Lake moaned into his mouth as Jesse coaxed Lake’s tongue to move with his.

With his free hand he grabbed the back of Lake’s shirt, holding the boy close.

They kissed slowly, exploring, and testing.

It was sweet and hot.

Jesse leaned over, urging Lake back.

He hovered over Lake’s body as he continued to kiss him.

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Jesse's entire body tingled with nerves and desire.

Lake moaned as he strained closer to Jesse.

As much as he hated it, Jesse pulled slowly away.

Lake's eyes were glassy, and his face flushed.

Jesse smiled down at his boy. "I could kiss you forever."

"Yes, that, let's do that." Lake's voice was husky with need.

"Don't we have a picnic to get to?" Jesse teased.

"Now you want to eat?"

"You went to a lot of trouble for me," Jesse reminded him.

Lake nodded. "It wasn't easy. I had to call in the whole crew."

Jesse helped Lake sit up. They were both sporting erections, but Jesse really did want to see what all his boy had done. "The crew?"

"I don't even know what your favorite food is," Lake said. "Or if you have any hobbies. I needed help."

"And you found it?"

“Dom and Remi asked around here. The security team, table dealers, slot technicians. Anyone who was on shift. Several of them said that you eat at the Italian restaurant several times a week.”

Wow, Lake had really gone to a lot of trouble for him. Just for him. “Italian is my favorite. It’s filling.”

Lake beamed. “Awesome! And the waitress knew your favorite dish and even had vegan options.”

“Very smart thinking,” Jesse praised.

“Eric had the basket, and the blanket was Ezra’s idea.”

Jesse nodded.

“And Dane and Brandon grabbed some of the other stuff from the store.”

“That’s amazing,” Jesse said. Now he knew what it felt like when he showered the boys with his gifts. Saying thank you just wasn’t enough. He understood that now.

“Here.” Lake grabbed the backpack and dropped it on Jesse’s legs. “We have company.”

“We do?” Jesse asked. It was probably a good thing that they hadn’t gotten naked then.

Lake nudged the backpack.

Following the unspoken instruction, Jesse unzipped the bag and grinned. This was the kind of company that he didn’t mind. He pulled Zeb and Al out of their hidden spot.

Jesse set both stuffed friends on the edge of the blanket as Lake picked up the basket.

Lake opened the top of the basket, folding both ends out. Reaching in, Lake drew out a bouquet of tulips and handed them to Jesse. "For you."

Jesse accepted the flowers. "Thank you, baby."

"Thank you for the flowers you sent to me. They were so colorful and bright. I loved them!"

"They reminded me of your smile," Jesse confessed.

"I didn't write you a note," Lake said. "I thought about it but what I wanted to say I needed to do in person."

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“What do you want to say?”

“Just that I hope this works. Between us, I mean,” Lake said. “I want this to work so much.”

“Me too,” Jesse replied, putting all his desire for the same into his words. “Me too, Lake.”

“Good.” He started to dig through the basket but paused. “Are we boyfriends? Like official and exclusive?”

A fierce stab of possessiveness pierced his heart. “I don’t share.”

Lake smiled. “Me either.”

Jesse gave a sharp nod. That was settled then.

Lake handed Jesse two wineglasses then a bottle of sparkling grape juice.

Jesse lifted a brow in surprise.

Lake shrugged. “I know wine is what most people drink with Italian,” he said. “But Dane and Brandon grabbed this from the store so...you know, no alcohol.”

Jesse loved it. He leaned closer to Lake and dropped his voice. “Can I tell you a secret?”

Lake's eyes widened before he nodded eagerly.

"I hate wine," Jesse confessed.

"You do?"

"I only drink it because like you said, it's often paired with certain foods. I don't like it at all. It doesn't matter if it's eight dollars or eight hundred. I hate wine." Jesse shook the bottle of sparkling juice. "This I can drink."

Lake giggled.

"What else do you have in that magic basket?" Jesse asked.

"Dinner!" Lake pulled out two to-go containers and a foil-wrapped roll of bread.

Jesse groaned. "It smells so good." He hadn't realized how hungry he was. Had he even eaten lunch? Jesse couldn't remember. Not after spending all day worrying about Ezra's parents.

"And dessert" Lake pulled out two more bowls.

"This is the best dinner date that I've ever had," Jesse said sincerely. It was so much more special since Lake had done this on his own. Or with the help of their friends. And apparently his staff.

"I'm glad to hear that," Lake said. "I didn't know what else to do. How to show you."

"Just talk to me," Jesse replied. "We can talk about these things. Get to know each other in a new way."

“Yes, please.”

“Now let’s eat and talk,” Jesse encouraged.

* * * * *

Lake

“Swimming,” Lake repeated.

“I love it. I swim every morning. It’s one of the perks of staying in the penthouse. That private pool.”

“We have a pool,” Lake said. He wasn’t even sure why. Of course, Jesse knew they had a pool. Jesse had helped hire the crew that had built the fence around it.

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“Do you like to swim though?” Jesse ran a finger across Lake’s collarbone.

Now that dinner and dessert were gone, Lake lay with his head on Jesse’s legs and stared up at the sky. The bright lights from the city made it too hard to see the stars but Lake knew they were there.

“Baby?”

“I like to float,” Lake answered. “Swimming for exercise is taxing.”

“You work out though.” Jesse squeezed the muscle in his arm.

“I like lifting weights,” Lake said. He laughed. “Just another contradiction about myself. I love dressing up and being pretty, but I also enjoy a good hard workout. Maxing out my muscles. Feeling it deep down.”

Jesse groaned. “You’re just using those words to get me worked up.”

That wasn’t a lie. It was fun to tease Jesse. Lake was safe with Jesse. He knew it in his bones. “Am I?”

“I know you are. I like seeing this wicked side of you too,” Jesse said.

“I’m a good boy,” Lake retorted. “Everyone knows that.”

“The best boy,” Jesse agreed. “With maybe a wicked streak that comes out around the right people.”

“Yeah.” Lake breathed out his agreement.

“Then I look forward to seeing more of this side of you.”

“And I want to watch you swim sometime,” Lake said. He could already picture Jesse in nothing but a speedo with his long arms cutting through the water.

“I might like to be watched.”

Lake flipped onto his side to peer up at Jesse. He dropped his gaze to Jesse’s forearms and then to where the collar of his shirt had parted. “Would you tell me about the tattoos?”

Jesse nodded. “Can I ask you something first?”

“Yes,” Lake agreed. He had been the one asking the most questions. There was just so much that he wanted to know about Jesse.

“Have you talked to your family since you moved out?”

The question surprised him and Lake couldn’t help but stiffen.

“You don’t have to answer,” Jesse told him.

“No, it’s okay.” Lake had been avoiding the subject with all his friends, but he was supposed to be opening up to Jesse. “I haven’t.”

“They haven’t called you at all?”

“Maybe,” Lake admitted. “I turned my phone off the minute that they left for the family camping trip.”

“That’s why you got a new number and phone?”

“It seemed easier this way,” Lake said. “I still have my old number and phone. I just...can’t...not yet.”

Jesse stroked Lake’s hair. “I’m sorry.”

“I was sad,” Lake admitted. “I tried so hard for so long. But then something else happened.”

“What, baby?”

“I started living my life for myself. I stopped wondering what my brothers would think, what my parents would say. Instead, I began doing what I wanted.”

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“Like accepting a date with me,” Jesse said.

“I told my parents I was gay. Before I left for basic training.”

“From what I’ve heard of your family, that was very brave,” Jesse told him.

“I sort if did it out of spite,” Lake admitted. “Just to see the look on my father’s face. For the first time in my life, he was proud of me. For something that I didn’t even want to do. So, I ruined it.”

“My wicked boy.” The words sounded like praise.

“My father told me to keep my mouth shut about it. My mom cried and started to pray. They must have told my brothers, because when I returned home after I completed basic, they’d started to treat me different. A push here, a shove there...the name-calling was often.”

“And your parents never stopped them?”

“My dad had his own way to get the digs in. My mom ignored it all,” Lake shared. “Well, that isn’t fair to everyone. Justice, my oldest brother, wasn’t even there. He’s still serving. The longest tenure. He’s career-military. Over the years he’s tried to get them to stop but with Dad leading the way and Justice not around a lot it just was what it was.”

“Family sucks,” Jesse said after Lake stopped talking.

Lake snorted. “Some do. I’m quite happy with my family of choice.”

“I have my brother,” Jesse said. “He was all the family I ever needed.”

There was a pause filled with anticipation. Lake knew Jesse was going to share something big with him. He waited, trying to force his body to remain relaxed.

“You asked about my tattoos?”

“Yes, if you want to tell me,” Lake replied.

Jesse’s fingers went back to stroking his hair. “We grew up in Texas. Jacob, me, my mom, and dad. My mom lost her parents after she had us and we never met my dad’s family. He was an asshole. They didn’t want anything to do with him or us.”

“I’m not going to like this story, am I?” Lake asked.

Leaning forward, Jesse kissed Lake’s forehead. “No, baby, you’re not. And no one knows most of what I’m going to tell you. Other than me and Jacob. I don’t talk about this. Never talk about my family in interviews.”

“I noticed.”

“Did you Google me, baby?” Jesse teased.

“I might have. I told you I wanted to know more about you!” Lake justified. It was kind of creepy to Google a boyfriend, right?

“It’s alright,” Jesse said. “I probably would have done the same.”

“I didn’t find anything good. Nothing that gave me any insight on how to surprise

you.”

“It was Jacob’s idea to keep things quiet when we started making money and getting noticed. He was afraid my father’s family might try to find us, looking for a handout or something.”

“Okay,” Lake whispered. “That makes sense.”

“Anyway, it’s not really a big deal. Our father was a bastard that liked to take out his frustrations on his family. He was a failure at everything he did. Couldn’t keep a job because of his drinking. He sent my mom out to the streets to make money for us.”

“He...he...”

“Pimped out his own wife,” Jesse finished for him.

“Jesus!” Lake gasped out.

“When she came home with money, he would beat her for her trouble,” Jesse said. “If she came home with no money, then he beat her more.”

“And you and Jacob,” Lake said.

“It was his favorite pastime,” Jesse admitted.

“I’m so sorry!”

“I’m over it now. Jacob and I lasted until we graduated but that was all. My father started talking about how much pretty boys like us could make him. We left in the middle of the night. Didn’t even take anything with us. There was nothing worth taking.”

“Where did you go?” Lake asked. He was fascinated with Jesse’s story. It was sad, yes, but it also showed that everything he had now Jesse had worked hard for. That he deserved his station in life.

“Luckily our town was located outside the interstate,” Jesse told him. “We bartered and hitchhiked our way across the country and ended up on a beach in California.”

“I bet that was different,” Lake said.

“It was wonderful,” Jesse said dreamily. “Everything was so simple. We were able to find day jobs in construction. The money started to come, and we bought our first house to flip.”

“And the rest was history,” Lake said.

“Except every time I looked in the mirror and saw the scars I couldn’t forget.”

“The tattoos,” Lake replied.

“I started just covering the worst of the scars,” Jesse said. “And one day before I knew it, I was covered.”

“Covered?”

Jesse started to unbutton his shirt the rest of the way.

Lake’s fingers shook as he spread them over the skin that was revealed to his eyes. “I had no idea.”

Jesse chuckled. “I know.”

“I love them,” Lake told him. “And I love that I get to see you like this.”

Jesse closed his eyes before letting the shirt fall from his shoulders. “The only one to ever see me like this.”

Moving to his knees, Lake hovered in front of Jesse. “Just me?”

“Just you, baby,” Jesse answered.

“Well, if that’s the case, then I want a very close look,” Lake said.

“As close as you want.”

“Will you take me to bed?” Lake asked softly. The fear of rejection was there but Lake was a brave boy.

“We don’t have to,” Jesse said, cupping his face. “We can wait.”

“I don’t want to wait,” Lake replied. “I’ve been waiting.”

“You’re sure?”

“I’m sure about us,” Lake responded. “I know what I want, Jesse.”

“Who am I to argue with a boy who has his mind made up?”

“That’s right.” Lake swallowed hard. “Daddy.”

Groaning, Jesse leaned forward, pressing his forehead against Lake’s. “I’ve dreamed of you calling me that. Of hearing that word come out of your sexy lips.”

“Then take me to bed, Daddy,” Lake ordered.

Chapter Seven

Jesse

In all the years that he'd been intimate with men, Jesse had never been this nervous. Or turned on. He undressed Lake slowly as they stood next to the big king-sized bed.

"Such pretty skin," Jesse said, peppering kisses down Lake's throat.

"That's not a creepy thing to say," Lake told him with a smirk.

Jesse pulled back and grinned. He loved this secret wicked side of Lake. "Is it?"

"A little Hannibal Lecter," Lake teased.

"Hmm," Jesse mused before nipping Lake's collarbone.

Instead of complaining, Lake pushed into the bite with a groan.

Well now, wasn't that interesting? "Like that, do you?"

Lake's eyes were wide and dark. He nodded shakily.

Jesse gently pushed Lake until he was sitting on the side of the mattress. "You can tell me to stop at any time."

"I don't want you to stop." Lake grabbed the back of his neck to hold on tight. "We

both have to be brave now.”

His boy was so smart. “You’re right, baby.” Jesse rubbed his nose along Lake’s. “We both will be brave.”

“And more kissing,” Lake told him.

“A lot more kissing,” Jesse agreed. “And touching.”

Lake pushed his bottom lip out. “You still have clothes on.”

He pushed back and rose. Lake’s gaze stayed on him as Jesse slowly loosened his belt before pulling it through the loops of his suit pants. Jesse slid the button of his slacks through the hole then unzipped while Lake licked his lips. Pushing the pants down his legs, Jesse let them hit the floor before kicking them away.

They’d removed their shoes and socks before entering the bedroom suite.

Jesse stood in just his tight black silk briefs.

Lake made a small whimpering sound. His gaze moving up and down Jesse’s body. Lake licked his lips again. “Are there more?”

“Tattoos?”

“Yeah,” Lake said.

Jesse hooked his thumbs into his briefs. “See for yourself.” He peeled his underwear down his legs, revealing the ink above his groin and around. He let the last piece of cloth fall then slowly turned in a circle so Lake could see his marked ass cheeks and the rest of his back and the backs of his legs.

“Beautiful.” Lake’s fingers gripped Jesse’s hips before urging Jesse back.

Jesse stiffened as Lake’s lips brushed his lower back. When he felt Lake move back, Jesse turned. His cock was hard, had been since they’d been kissing outside, but now he was starting to ache. Lake was in a very similar situation and Lake’s dick was as beautiful as every other part of him.

“We’re both naked now,” Lake said. Nerves showed in the shakiness of his voice.

Jesse lowered himself to his knees between Lake’s legs. He gripped Lake’s knees.
“We are.”

“I don’t look like the other boys,” Lake told him.

“What other boys are you talking about?” Jesse knew but he wanted Lake to say the words. There could be no question here between them now.

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“You know,” Lake whispered. “The boys from the club.”

Jesse nodded. “Have you ever seen me with any of the other boys at the club?”

“I’ve never seen you with anyone.”

“That’s right,” Jesse replied. “Because I’m not interested in the other boys at the club. You had my attention the first time I laid eyes on you. There is no one that compares to you.”

Lake smiled.

“I know what you need,” Jesse said.

“What’s that?”

“More kisses,” Jesse replied.

Lake leaned closer to press their mouths together.

Jesse pushed closer, forcing Lake’s legs farther apart as he strained up so Lake didn’t have to bend so far down.

Lake pulled back. “Maybe you should join me on the bed.”

“Yeah.” Jesse groaned. “But I might need help getting off the floor. This was easier when I was younger.”

“Come here, Daddy!” Lake offered his hand then pulled Jesse up.

Once Jesse had his feet under him, he crawled the rest of the way onto the mattress. Lake leaned back, allowing Jesse to kneel between his legs. He couldn’t believe that Jesse was here with him. That they were here together.

He kissed Lake, giving the boy the promised kisses.

Jesse slid his tongue against Lake’s before sucking on Lake’s tongue. Lake wrapped his arms around Jesse, keeping him close. Closing his eyes, Jesse allowed himself to sink into Lake’s body.

Their cocks brushed, drawing a moan from each of them.

Jesse kept kissing Lake, lowering himself to nip at the boy’s chin and collarbone, leaving a mark next to the other from earlier. Lake jerked as he cried out in pleasure. Jesse really had no idea that Lake would like that.

He kept moving down, lavishing attention all over Lake’s big body. Jesse hadn’t been lying. Lake was the perfect boy for him. Lake was so strong but fragile in a way that made him more special.

Once he started, Jesse couldn’t stop kissing and licking and loving on Lake. He reached Lake’s erection and took him in hand.

“Yes!” Lake hissed.

Jesse pumped Lake’s cock. He ran his thumb over the head of Lake’s shaft, collecting the precome, then used the fluid to ease his strokes. Lake pushed up into his hold.

Before they got carried away, Jesse had to taste his boy. Needed to feel the weight of

Lake's cock against his tongue.

Running his tongue across Lake's slit, he teased the opening then sucked Lake as far as he could. Until Lake's tip hit the back of his throat. Jesse swallowed and Lake went crazy underneath him. The movement shoved Lake's dick farther down Jesse's throat.

He had to pull back. Jesse gasped and took in air before he dove back down. More. Jesse wanted more.

"Please! Please!" Lake chanted.

Even though he wanted to make Lake come. To swallow down the sweet seed until he had his fill. Jesse was also desperate to be inside his boy. He popped off Lake's cock.

Strong fingers gripped the back of his hair and tugged. "No!"

"I need to get the condoms and lube, baby." Jesse tried to pry Lake's fingers from his hair.

Lake's fingers twitched.

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“Baby, open your eyes for me,” Jesse commanded.

Lake took a deep breath then did as Jesse ordered. He blinked until he was peering up at Jesse.

“I need to get the condom and lube, baby.”

Lake nodded.

“You have to let me go in order to do that,” Jesse said as he tugged once again on Lake’s fingers. He was going to lose more than a few strands of hair. A willing sacrifice for him to see Lake so crazy in lust. In need.

Lake’s fingers flexed and Jesse was able to get away. He lunged for the nightstand drawer, pulling too hard. The drawer dropped to the floor.

“Fuck!” Jesse spat.

Halfway under him, Lake started to laugh.

Jesse twisted to stare at him. “Really?”

“You dropped the important stuff,” Lake told him through his laughter.

“I did.” Jesse found himself chuckling along.

Lake’s laughter trailed off. “You better get them before I explode.”

Jesse was feeling pretty much the same. He crawled to the end of the mattress, reaching down for the small bottle of lube. He tossed it behind him. "Hold that."

"Yes, Daddy!"

It took a little more straining, but he managed to grab two condoms. He cheered in triumph and held them up.

"Great job. Are you coming back up here with me?"

"I can't," Jesse admitted. "I'm stuck." And wasn't that embarrassing.

"Oh, I'll help." Lake grabbed his arm and hefted.

Jesse straightened with Lake's help. He dropped the condoms next to Lake. "Thanks, baby."

"Anytime." Lake wagged his brows. "Like right now."

"Right now, my boy," Jesse agreed.

* * * * *

Lake

Who knew that his Daddy was a sadist?

Pushing back onto three of Jesse's thick fingers, Lake was losing his mind. "Please!"

"Okay, baby." Jesse withdrew his fingers, leaving Lake feeling empty. "Turn back over. I want to see your face the first time we make love."

That was an order that Lake was happy to follow. Okay, there wasn't much that Jesse commanded that Lake wouldn't do. He rolled over onto his back. Jesse was on his knees with one of the condom wrappers between his teeth.

Jesse's tatted-up body wasn't what Lake had expected. It was even better. Jesse appeared like a fallen angel kneeling there on the mattress with the moon and lights coming in behind him.

That was one sexy man. Lake settled on the bed, digging his heels into the mattress as he spread his legs. It felt like he'd been on the edge for hours.

Jesse tore the condom open and winked. "Are you ready, pretty baby?"

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“I want you,” Lake replied. He had never wanted, needed, like this. “Please.”

“I want you too,” Jesse replied. He pulled the condom from the wrapper before he started to roll the latex down his length.

This was it. Lake tried to relax as Jesse added lube over the condom. “Ready?”

“I’m ready!” Lake said. He was fucking dying here!

Jesse leaned over, caging in Lake’s head with his forearms as he lowered his mouth. Lake loved Jesse’s kisses. Lake grabbed the back of Jesse’s neck, pulling him the rest of the way home. Their lips met.

Lake slid his tongue along Jesse’s lower lip and Jesse opened for him.

With the stroke of their tongues, Jesse gripped Lake’s leg to push him farther open. Jesse’s cock pushed against his rim.

Jesse pulled his mouth away a few inches. “Relax for me.”

“Trying!” Lake panted.

Jesse’s dick breached Lake’s hole. Lake forced his body to remain lax as Jesse slid inside.

Lake’s body clamped around the shaft inside him.

“Breathe for me,” Jesse whispered.

Lake breathed.

“Good boy,” Jesse praised. He drew back before slowly sliding inside again.

Every nerve in Lake’s body came alive. He gripped Jesse’s back as Jesse started to move faster.

“Yes!” Lake hissed.

“Fuck, Lake!” Jesse moved to his knees. He held on hard to Lake’s hips while driving deep.

This was fucking perfect! Lake wrapped his legs around Jesse’s back and their bodies talked to each other in the way that lovers did.

* * * * *

Jesse

Rolling over, Jesse wrapped his arm around the body in front of him and pulled Lake back.

Lake murmured but settled more firmly in Jesse’s arms.

Jesse kissed the back of Lake’s neck. After making love, Jesse had whispered quietly to Lake until the boy had fallen asleep. Jesse should be asleep but he just couldn’t force himself to close his eyes when he could continue to stare at his boy.

His boy.

After tonight there was no way that Jesse was ever going to let Lake go. Jesse was completely in love. The boy's soft breathing brought Jesse back to the only other time that he'd shared a bed with anyone.

Jesse wasn't one to stay after he'd had sex.

Staying meant that he'd inadvertently say or do something that would reveal one of his secrets. When he'd had sexual partners in the past, Jesse rarely even undressed all the way. Luckily, a lot of men thought it was sexy when Jesse fucked them with just his pants open. A kink that Jesse had used to his advantage.

He'd known that being with Lake would be different.

There was no hiding anything from Lake. Hell, Jesse didn't want to keep things from the boy. Lake already knew more than anyone, except for his brother.

Thinking about Jacob made Jesse want to reach out. Jacob had always been Jesse's confidant. They'd shared everything. Ever since the thin dirty mattress on the floor in the rundown house had been their sanctuary from their father.

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Jesse would shove Jacob into the corner and lie over him so that if their father did come into the room, he couldn't get to Jacob. He was the older brother. It might have been by just a few minutes, but he was meant to protect Jacob.

His brother often teased him that Jesse's over protectiveness stemmed from trying to save him. Since Jacob was the smartest person that Jesse knew, Jesse was okay with the teasing. Because he was overprotective. Jesse knew that about himself. It could be a problem in the future since Lake was such an independent person.

If Jesse had his choice, Lake would never have to see or talk to his family again.

Jesse knew the pain and trauma of letting family go. He was also an expert on what happened when someone allowed their family to control them.

"Why are you thinking so hard?"

Jesse jerked as the soft voice surprised him. "What?"

Lake's cheerful giggle raised the hairs on Jesse's arms.

"Why are you awake?" Jesse asked as he hugged Lake tight from behind.

"You were thinking so loudly that it woke me up," Jesse responded.

"I was not!" Little sassy boy. Jesse smiled.

Lake gripped the hand that Jesse had laid on his stomach. "What were you thinking

about?”

Jesse sighed. It already felt like he'd split his wrist and bled all over the place to share his story.

“You don't have to,” Lake said quietly.

And now he did. “I was lying here thinking that the only other person that I've shared a bed with is Jacob.”

“Your brother?” Lake asked. “I'm not trying to be a brat but I know you've had sex with other men.”

Jesse snorted. “Of course I have. That doesn't mean that I've slept with them after. I've never held anyone like this.”

“You're trying to tell me that I'm special,” Lake commented.

“No, I was just answering your question. About what I was thinking about.”

“I never had to share a bed with my brothers, but I shared a room growing up with Jack and Brex. Justice and Lenon shared. After Justice left Jack moved in with Lenon leaving me with Brex,” Lake shared.

“You lived in the apartment with Jack and Brex?” Jesse knew that Lake hadn't enjoyed his time with his brothers.

“After I got back from the service,” Lake replied. “It was either them or my parents.”

“You were old enough to live alone,” Jesse pointed out. He didn't mean to push but getting Lake to talk about his family was like pulling teeth.

“In this economy?” Lake asked. “I could live alone but I don’t know that I could afford it.”

“There’s more,” Jesse said. He kissed the back of Lake’s neck in encouragement.

“I don’t like being by myself,” Lake said. “Living alone.”

Jesse could understand that. It was a whole different world with Jacob several hours away.

“There’s something about the noise and chaos that I find comforting.” Lake snorted. “That sounds so stupid.”

“It doesn’t,” Jesse assured his boy.

“Yes, it does.” Lake rolled so they were facing each other.

“My brothers are complete assholes. Living with them was terrible. I still stayed because it was better than being alone,” Lake told him.

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“I begged my brother not to take the job in Surf City,” Jesse confessed. “He’d been at UNLV and I thought he was happy here. When he told me...I lost it. We’d never been apart before.”

“Oh, Jesse!” Lake peppered kisses across Jesse’s chin. “That sucks.”

“His mind was made up,” Jesse said. “No matter what I said, I could see that Jacob was going to take the position.”

“He’s happy there though?” Lake asked.

“Jacob loves it. He has a cute little house a block from the beach and six blocks from the university.” Jesse shook his head. “He rides a damn bicycle to work every day.”

“Wow,” Lake drew out. “I can’t even imagine.”

“Me either,” Jesse agreed. “It’s like stepping back in time when I go see him. There’s a main street that has all these little shops along the road. It’s a specialty university so very few students and residents. The complete opposite of here.”

“I’d like to visit it,” Lake said.

“I want to take you there,” Jesse replied. “We can hang out on the beach. You’d wear a little tight speedo for me, right?”

“Only if you wear one for me,” Lake quipped.

“I’ll agree to that.” Jesse would after all agree to anything for his boy.

“You better. You already said I could watch you swim in the morning,” Lake reminded him.

“You could swim with me,” Jesse asked.

“I would much rather watch you,” Lake said.

“Okay, baby.”

Lake rubbed his lips over Jesse’s bottom lip. There was a slight tremble.

“Are you okay?”

“I’m great. Still a little shocked that I’m here with you.”

“You were a brave boy,” Jesse said.

Lake’s eyes widened. “I really was.”

“It meant a lot that you came for me tonight. No one has ever done anything like that before.”

“Because you’re the more dominant partner?”

“I think it’s because I never let anyone. I knew that they were using me for my money or clout,” Jesse confessed.

“And you let them?”

“It was better than being alone,” Jesse admitted.

“We have more in common than I thought,” Lake said.

“I knew,” Jesse said. “I knew we belonged together.”

“You say that but how could you know?”

Jesse wanted to laugh and crack a joke. This was embarrassing.

“Are you blushing?” Lake teased. “Oh my God! You are!”

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“Maybe we should discuss discipline for a naughty boy,” Jesse questioned, hoping for a change in the subject.

Lake shook his head. “I’m a good boy. Everyone knows that.”

“Wicked,” Jesse reminded.

“Only for you,” Lake said. “Now why were you blushing?”

“That first time I saw you,” Jesse said.

“I couldn’t even talk around you. Remember that?”

“Except that wasn’t the first time I saw you.”

“Sure it was,” Lake argued.

“No, baby. You came to the club to sign some paperwork. You were wearing a pink button-down shirt tucked into black jeans with shining black boots. I was coming out of the supply room trying to figure out where two cases of napkins had disappeared to. You passed the hall that I was standing in and I swear to fucking God that I saw heaven. Like the ceiling opened up and the sun was shining down on you. Fuck! I might have heard harps playing.”

Lake stared at him in silence for several long minutes.

Was that too much? Just as Jesse was beginning to regret being that open and honest

with Lake, the boy began to giggle.

The giggles turned into full belly laughs.

Jesse's mouth dropped open. Lake was laughing at him?

Lake grabbed onto Jesse's shoulders before pushing Jesse onto his back and hovering over him.

As sexy as it was to be manhandled by him, Jesse's feelings were more than a little hurt.

"I thought I imagined you," Lake said seriously.

"What?"

"When we met. We were being introduced, and it was like someone had gone in my head and made you from my fantasies."

"I think that's laying it on a little much," Jesse replied.

"Unliked the skies opening up or hearing harps?" Lake teased.

That was fair. "Aren't we a pair?"

Lake rested his chin on Jesse's chest as he peered up at him. "A good pair. The best."

"We are pretty awesome," Jesse agreed. "It's early. Do you want to go back to sleep?"

"No," Lake drawled.

“Are you hungry? Thirsty?”

“No.”

“What do you want to do?” Jesse questioned.

Lake bit his lip. “There is one thing.”

“Anything, baby. What?”

“You promise not to laugh?” Lake requested.

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“I would never laugh. Not at anything you wanted to do.”

“Even if it’s childish and a little silly?” Lake asked.

“Baby.” Jesse wrapped his arms around Lake’s back. “I’m a Daddy and you’re a little. There’s nothing childish or silly between us.”

“But this isn’t about little time. It’s about...sexy time.”

“I like sexy time too,” Jesse assured him. He ran his palm down Lake’s back to his ass.

“Can we kiss?”

“Always.” Jesse lifted his head.

“No, I mean kiss,” Lake said. “Like just kiss and kiss. Maybe some rubbing?”

Jesse grinned. “Does my boy want a good old-fashioned make-out session.”

“Is that okay?”

“I would love that,” Jesse replied. “There’s nothing I love more than kissing you.”

Lake leaned closer. “Really?”

“Baby.” They were close enough that their lips brushed as Jesse spoke. “Yes.”

Lake closed the distance. The first kiss was soft, barely there, but that quickly led to them sharing a deeper kiss. Jesse flexed his fingers before trailing them across Lake's lower back.

Lake moaned as Jesse ate at his mouth.

Their breathing picked up. Kissing wasn't something that Jesse had given enough credit to.

This was wonderful!

Jesse really liked this.

He kissed Lake harder.

The boy was grinding his lips gently.

If this was how mornings would go, then Jesse would happily give up sleep for more moments like this.

The kisses were almost drugging.

With his eyes closed and Lake's heavy body on top of his, Jesse didn't want to ever move. Maybe they could just stay in bed. Forever. Jesse had the money to hire an entire staff that could take care of their every need.

Staying in bed was the best idea that he ever had.

Chapter Eight

Lake

The teasing from his coworkers was fun. Lake opened the door to the club to allow the couple he'd just checked in to enter and received half a dozen smirks in response.

The hickies on his neck would have been hard to cover even if Lake didn't like wearing his lace bodysuits on shift. The lack of material really didn't give Lake any choice but to proudly display the marks left behind from his long make-out session with Jesse.

He'd hadn't even bothered trying with his makeup. Lake wasn't that much of an expert since he was still learning techniques to highlight his best facial features. Lake could have asked Dom who had somehow surprisingly mastered applying makeup and didn't even wear any. His friend had been learning for Lake.

There might have been a little part of Lake that wanted other people to know. His way of claiming Jesse.

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Lake wasn't as unobservant as he pretended. The entire staff of the club was aware of Jesse's interest in him. Lake might have acted like he didn't know but he had. And so did his friends. The hickies were enough of a statement. Well that and the fact that Jesse had walked Lake to work and kissed him goodbye. In front of everyone.

"So, I heard a rumor."

Lake jumped as he spun around.

Dom was draped across the front of the desk.

"What are you doing here? Shouldn't you be at work?"

"We'll see, I was at work. But one of the servers here came to grab a coffee and shared a little tidbit with me," Dom said.

Lake had a feeling he'd been ratted out. "You should be at work."

"My shift is over. And I just had to see with my own eyes that my little friend got him some loving last night," Dom replied.

"I would have told you myself," Lake told him.

"Except you weren't home when I woke up and still weren't home by the time I left for work," Dom pointed out. Reaching out, Dom cupped Lake's face. "Hey, pretty!"

"Hey."

“Are you happy?” Dom asked softly.

“So happy,” Lake confessed.

Leaning forward, Dom rested his forehead against Lake’s. “Was it everything you imagined?”

Closing his eyes, Lake nodded. “More.”

“And he was good to you? Didn’t pressure or—”

“He was wonderful to me,” Lake assured him.

“Then I’m happy for you.” Dom pulled back. “And we should celebrate!”

Lake laughed. “How?”

“Slumber party?”

Lake shrugged. He was sort of hoping to spend the night with Jesse again.

“You’d rather celebrate with your Daddy, am I right?”

“Yeah, kind of,” Lake admitted.

“How about a little day this weekend?” Dom suggested. “Ezra works the early shift at the coffee shop on Saturday. Both you and Brandon are on late shift and I’m off so we could start right before lunch. I bet I could even talk the boys into sharing those vegan nuggies that we bought.”

A little afternoon? That sounded like the best way to celebrate to him. “Yes!” Lake

rushed around the desk to hug Dom.

Dom hugged him back even though Dom wasn't as touchy-feely as Lake was. "I'm really happy for you."

They drew back when someone cleared their throat.

He grinned at Jesse watching them with a soft smile.

"Oh! Hey there, Jesse," Dom said slyly. "Nice job on staking your claim."

Lake's face heated.

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Jesse grinned. "I might have gotten carried away. I blame Lake."

"Me?" Lake scoffed.

Jesse sidled up to his side. "You're just too sexy to resist." He kissed along the left side of Lake's neck where Jesse had previously left his marks.

Lake giggled as he pulled away.

"Aren't you two just so cute," Dom said with a scowl. "Gross."

"Gross?" Lake repeated. "This from the same guy that literally can't keep his hands or mouth off his Daddy."

Dom grinned and waggled his brows. "That's why I approve."

Jesse shook his head. He turned to Lake, suddenly serious.

Dread filled him. "What's wrong?"

Dom was by his side, gripping his hand.

Jesse tried to smile but Lake could tell that he was faking it. Was Jesse going to break up with him? After one night? Had Lake done something wrong? Maybe he'd...No! Fuck that! Lake wasn't going to start doubting what he and Jesse had. Lake knew that Jesse cared about him. This was something else.

“I’m sorry, baby, but I have something to tell you,” Jesse said.

“It’s bad?” Lake asked.

“It doesn’t have to be. And you don’t need to do anything if you don’t want to. I can and will take care of this for you,” Jesse said.

“Take care of what?” Dom demanded.

Jesse took his hand. “Your brother is here. He’s at security demanding to talk to you.”

The ground under his feet shook.

“Hey!” Dom hugged him from behind as Jesse held his arms, keeping Lake upright.

“But—”“

“It’s Justice,” Jesse said. “He asked for you and says he won’t leave until he talks to you.”

That sounded like Justice. He wouldn’t take no for an answer. “I...I...” What did he do?

“I can get rid of him,” Jesse told him.

“He’ll just come back. Or wait until I leave.” Lake shook his head. He’d known that ignoring his family wasn’t something that he could do indefinitely.

“Baby,” Jesse said. “I can do this for you.”

It wasn’t fair to Jesse but Lake wanted to let him take over. Lake hated

confrontations. Couldn't function when someone's anger was directed at him. Lake looked up into Jesse's eyes, praying that Jesse knew what he needed.

"Okay," Jesse said. "We'll go talk to your brother. Assure him that you're fine and just need some time away from your family. Once he sees you for himself, I think that might make him feel better."

"That's a good idea," Dom said. "He's probably just worried about you."

Lake nodded.

"Here, baby." Jesse unbuttoned his jacket before holding it out to Lake. "We'll button this up and he won't see what you're wearing."

Lake hadn't even thought about what he wore. Justice would sure be surprised finding his little brother in a sexy lace outfit. Jesse slid the jacket onto his shoulders before turning to Lake.

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“It’s okay,” Jesse said as he buttoned up the jacket. “I won’t let anything happen to you.”

“I’m coming too,” Dom said.

“You don’t have to.” Lake turned but Dom was sliding in front of him.

“I know you have your big bad Daddy and he’ll take care of everything. I’ll be by your side though. You just grab my hand and squeeze if you need me to get you out of there. Jesse will make sure we aren’t followed.”

“That’s...that’s a good idea,” Lake agreed.

Jesse straightened the lapels of the jacket. “Perfect, pretty baby.”

“Th...thank you, Daddy.”

Jesse kissed him. “I have someone from security coming to watch the desk. Let’s go.”

With his fingers wrapped up in Jesse’s and Dom hovering behind him, Lake was led down the hall. They reached the elevator that would take them to the casino before Lake was ready. He didn’t say anything as they stepped inside the elevator.

Jesse held his watch up to the sensor before pushing the button for the first floor.

“I need one of those,” Dom said. He grabbed the card hanging from the lanyard around his neck. “Much cooler than this.”

“I ordered one for Lake. I’ll see if I can add to it,” Jesse replied.

“You ordered me a watch?” Jesse questioned.

Jesse squeezed his fingers. “Of course I did. You’re my boy. You can have access to anywhere you want. You’ll always be able to get to me.”

“I...appreciate that,” Lake whispered.

Jesse pointed one finger at Dom. “You do not get access to all the floors.”

Dom pushed out his bottom lip. “Why not?”

“Because I don’t need you showing up in my penthouse when I’m sleeping,” Jesse said.

Lake laughed because that was a real concern.

“You know me too well,” Dom admitted with a grin. “And you live in the penthouse? Nice!”

“Lake can show it to you later,” Jesse promised.

The elevator dinged before the doors opened. Lake took a deep breath as they exited the elevator.

“Security office,” Jesse said. “He made a scene until security was called.”

“I’m sorry.” Lake hated that his brother had shown up. He’d never wanted his personal life and work life to collide. Which was funny when he was dating the most important man in the entire building.

“It’s no big deal,” Jesse told him. “Things like this happens.”

Not to Lake they didn’t.

The walk to the security office took a long time. It might be because Lake’s steps kept faltering. He was scared. Lake didn’t want to lose his family. He might have needed a break, it had been too much, but they were still his family. He loved them.

“No matter what happens we’re here with you,” Dom said.

Yeah, and they were his family too.

He spotted Justice as they turned the corner. His brother stood with his back to the window. Justice’s stance was confrontational. Legs spread, arms behind his back, his hands fisted.

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“He’s mad,” Lake whispered.

“Security escorted him here against his will. Your brother didn’t know where you worked in the casino so he was loud,” Jesse said.

“Idiot,” Lake said with a huff.

“You ready?” Jesse asked with his hand on the knob.

“As ready as I’ll ever be.”

Jesse turned the knob before pushing open the door.

His brother turned.

Lake followed Jesse into the room with Dom following and closing the door behind them.

The two security officers were glaring at his brother but sent Lake a nod and a smile as Lake glanced at them.

“Lake!” Justice barreled forward.

Jesse stepped between them and Justice growled. “Move.”

“That isn’t going to happen,” Jesse said.

“He is my brother.” Justice’s voice was deep, firm, annoyed.

“And he is mine,” Jesse replied, just as angry. “You can talk to him but you will not touch him.”

“What the fuck!” Justice spat. “I wouldn’t hurt him!”

“Maybe not.” Jesse shrugged.

Lake was staring at Jesse’s back to avoid looking at his brother. He didn’t want to see the disappointment or disdain in Justice’s eyes. Justice was the nicest one to him. He had even tried to protect Lake.

Justice and Jesse were still exchanging words. Getting louder.

“Stop!” Lake whispered.

They ignored him. Or maybe didn’t hear him.

“Stop!” he said a little louder.

Justice grabbed at Jesse.

“Stop!” Lake shouted.

All movement stopped.

“Please stop fighting,” Lake begged. “I can’t have the two of you fighting.”

Jesse turned.

Lake dropped his gaze. He shouldn't have yelled.

Soft hands were on his face before Lake's chin was lifted. "I'm sorry. You're right, baby. We shouldn't have been arguing."

"He's my brother," Lake said quietly.

"I know." Jesse turned and was shoulder to shoulder when Lake faced his brother.

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There was a small smile on Justice's face. "Hey, little brother."

"Hi," Lake replied. "What are you doing here?"

Justice sighed. "You disappeared, Lake. No one can get a hold of you. Mom and Dad are worried."

Lake snorted.

"Okay, Dad is pissed and Mom is crying."

That sounded more accurate. "I needed a break. I can't..." Lake took a deep breath. "I can't deal with them."

"What happened, Lake? Where did you go? What's going on?" Justice demanded.

Jesse's arm went around his waist. Dom reached forward to grasp his hand. Lake smiled. This was his strength. "This is my boyfriend, Jesse."

Justice's jaw clenched before he nodded. "I know who he is."

Of course. Who in town didn't know who Jesse was? "And this is Dom. One of my best friends. I moved into the house with him and his boyfriend."

Justice nodded. "Okay. You moved in with friends. That has to be better than living with Jack and Brex."

Lake nodded. "It's where I want to be."

"Why didn't you tell us?" Justice asked.

Lake tried to answer but Justice held up his hand.

"That was a stupid question," Justice said. "You had to do it this way. It was the only way to escape."

"Mom and Dad are different with me. I don't live up to their standards. Jack and Brex are assholes. I don't want to be around them," Lake admitted. "It's my choice."

"But you're not alone?" Justice stepped forward. "You have people that will be there for you."

"I have the best people," Lake said. "I have the family that I chose."

Instead of getting closer, Justice turned and paced away.

Lake stepped away from Jesse while releasing Dom's hand.

Justice sat heavily into the chair.

Lake hurried over to sit beside him. "Jus?"

Lowering his hands between his legs, Justice dropped his head. "I'm sorry, Lake."

"Sorry?" Lake didn't understand. "For what?"

Justice looked up and glanced around. "I guess we're doing this in public."

It wasn't very public. Just the two security guards Tatum and Bob, him, Jesse, and Dom.

"We can take a walk around the floor. Make sure no one is causing any problems," Tatum said as he rose.

"I'll wait outside," Dom said.

Jesse crossed his arms over his chest. "I'm not leaving."

Lake hadn't expected him to. Not after promising to stay with him.

“It’s fine,” Justice said.

Lake wasn’t sure what was going on. It was only a few minutes before the three of them were left alone in the office.

“Can they do that?” Justice asked. “Just leave the office. Don’t they have to be watching monitors or something?”

“That happens on another level of the casino,” Jesse said. He remained across the room, but his words were accusatory. “This is just a place to keep security close but out of the way in case someone causes problems.”

“I’m sorry about that,” Justice said. “But look at it from my point of view. My brother cancels at the last minute on the family camping trip, which he’s never done before. We got back and he’s just gone. Left a fucking note that he was moving in with friends and was fine. He doesn’t answer calls or text messages. I was scared. I was so goddamn scared that he’d gotten mixed up with people who would take advantage of him. I’m sure I don’t have to point out how damn kind and sweet Lake is.”

“We do know that about him. That’s why security and everyone around here acted so quickly when you were yelling for Lake. We protect our own here,” Jesse said.

Lake had gone about this all wrong. He had his reasons, but he had taken the coward’s way out. “I—”

“Please don’t say you’re sorry,” Justice said. “I’m the one apologizing here.”

“I don’t understand.”

“I failed you,” Justice said quietly.

“What? Why?” Lake asked.

“I know how Mom and Dad are,” Justice told him. “I am fully aware what assholes our brothers are. I should have checked on you more. Been there for you.”

“No,” Lake said. “Justice. You might be my big brother but I’m an adult.”

“You were always the best of us.” Justice grabbed Lake’s hand. “Even when we were little you had the kindest heart. You were always trying to rescue stray or injured animals. First to take the blame if something got broken. And a lot of things got broke.”

Lake laughed. “Five boys. That had to be hard.”

“It was no excuse for how Mom and Dad treated you. Or for me abandoning you.”

“I don’t feel abandoned by you. You were always there to talk to me when I needed you. I appreciate you more than you know,” Lake said.

“It wasn’t enough,” Justice said. “I hardly came home. I hate coming home.”

“You do?” Lake squeezed Justice’s hand. “I didn’t know that.”

“I’m not as brave as you,” Justice replied.

“Brave?” Lake scoffed. “I literally ran away, and you had to come look for me.”

Justice glanced at Jesse. “How long have you two been together?”

Lake didn’t follow what that had to do with anything. “Not long?”

“It took awhile to get Lake to agree to a date,” Jesse said as he crossed the room. “I’ve known for months that he was it for me.”

“I can just imagine how difficult it was to get him to agree to anything,” Justice said to Jesse.

“He pretended he didn’t know but I eventually wore him down.”

Justice grinned at Lake. “I’m glad.”

“How could I resist? Have you seen how sexy my man is?” Lake whispered.

“Yeah. It seems like you hit the jackpot.”

“That was me,” Jesse said. “I hit the jackpot with this one.”

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A sudden thought occurred to him. “Do you even like the military?”

Justice shrugged. “It’s not bad. At least now that I’m not being sent to war-torn countries.”

“You could leave,” Lake told him.

“And do what? Move home and work with our asshole brothers?” Justice questioned with a scoff.

“I hear there’s a room available.”

Both Justice and Jesse laughed.

“And if you do want to come home, there’s a job here,” Jesse said. “I love hiring ex-military as part of the security staff.”

“Are you offering me a job?” Justice asked.

Jesse shrugged. “And a place to stay when you visit.”

Lake nudged his brother’s arm. “He lives in the penthouse.”

Justice grinned. “I mean, I might come visit more if I wasn’t sleeping on the twin bed in my old room.”

“I’d like that.” Lake side-eyed his brother. “Would you be bringing anyone back with

you? A girlfriend or..."

Justice shook his head. "There's no one right now."

"But there was?" Lake pressed. He could be the annoying little brother if he needed to.

"Maybe," Justice said. "I fucked that up pretty bad."

"Maybe instead of apologizing to me when it's not needed, you could call someone else," Lake suggested.

"I might need more practice," Justice said.

"When are you leaving?" Jesse asked. "Like I said, we have plenty of room."

"We?" Lake asked.

Jesse winked at him. "Are you really going to leave me with your brother? What if we start arguing again?"

Justice nodded. "We probably should be supervised."

Lake rolled his eyes.

"I need to leave first thing in the morning," Justice said.

"I'll order dinner," Jesse said.

"Do you think I can meet the rest of your friends soon?" Justice asked.

“Dom is outside. I’m sure we can get Remi here. I’m not sure about the rest of them,” Lake said.

“I’ll make the calls and get a head count,” Jesse offered.

“Aren’t you working?” Justice asked Lake. “Do you need to get back on shift? I really didn’t mean to pull you away. I just knew that you usually worked at night.”

Lake looked at Jesse.

“It’s been covered,” Jesse said. “He’s free for the night.”

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“Cool.” Justice grinned.

“Why don’t you take your brother upstairs?” Jesse suggested. “I’ll be up as soon as I can.”

Lake rose. “Thanks.”

Jesse stood and didn’t even seem embarrassed to kiss him in front of Justice.

“Well, this is a little awkward, I can admit,” Justice said.

Lake laughed. He might not have everyone in his family back by his side, but it appeared that he did have one brother. That was enough for now. “What are you going to tell Mom and Dad?”

Justice shrugged. “I’ll tell them the truth. That I saw you and you’re fine. That you’ll contact them when you’re ready.”

“I appreciate it,” Lake said sincerely.

“Anytime, little brother.”

* * * * *

Jesse

Closing the bedroom door, Jesse caught Lake yawning. “Tired, baby?”

Lake turned and sat on the bed. “It was fun, right?”

“I like your brother.” Jesse crossed the room.

“It was nice to spend time with him. He and Remi hit it off too.”

“I think it will help so that we’ll see more of him,” Jesse offered.

“Do you think he’d consider your offer?” Lake questioned.

“If not now, we’ll keep talking to him about it. We won’t give up.” Jesse leaned over and cupped Lake’s face. “You might not have all your family back, but you have him.”

“That’s enough for now,” Lake said.

“For now,” Jesse agreed. If Lake wanted to reconnect with the rest of his family, then Jesse would work his ass off to make that happen. If not, then Jesse would be there to help Lake through it.

“Thank you. For everything,” Lake said.

“You never have to thank me, baby.”

Lake grinned. “Remi brought me some clean clothes to change into.”

Jesse nodded. Lake had removed his suit jacket and traded it in for one of Jesse’s shirts.

“Shower?” Lake suggested. “I’m pretty sure that the sound of the water would drown out anything Justice might overhear.”

“I put him in the room downstairs as far from here as possible for a reason,” Jesse said.

“Smart Daddy,” Lake teased.

“I am a very smart Daddy.” Jesse straightened before offering Lake a hand up.

Lake allowed Jesse to help him off the bed. Jesse led Lake across the room and into the bathroom. “Get undressed. I’ll start the water.”

Lake started to unbutton his borrowed shirt. “Hot. I like it hot.”

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“You’re hot,” Jesse teased.

Lake rolled his eyes. “Funny. I mean it. I was always the last to shower so by the time it was my turn, there was barely any hot water left.”

“Hot water,” Jesse said. “I’ll make sure that you always have hot water.”

“Thanks.” Lake looked around the room. “This is nice.”

“You don’t have to say it like that.” Jesse reached in and turned the shower on. He set the temperature a few degrees higher than he’d normally used. Not enough to burn either of them but Jesse had promised a hot shower to his boy.

“Like what?” Lake asked as he dropped the shirt to the floor.

Jesse started on his own clothes. “I know this isn’t a home.” He regretted selling his last house. Having Lake in the penthouse didn’t seem right.

Lake shrugged. “Where’s all your stuff.” He pushed his jeans down his legs. “You have to have stuff, right?”

“I have stuff,” Jesse said. He just didn’t have a lot of stuff.

“Here, let me help.” Lake strolled over and took over removing Jesse’s shirt.

“Thanks, baby.” Jesse would never complain about Lake’s hands on him.

“Did you notice that Justice never said a pronoun when he was talking about his ex?”

Jesse wondered if Lake had caught that. “Yes.”

“What do you think that means?”

“I think it means that he’s not comfortable discussing his relationships.”

“You think I should mind my own business,” Lake said.

“I’m not saying that at all,” Jesse corrected. “Just don’t push too much. Not until he’s ready.”

“Fine,” Lake responded with a pout.

“That’s my good boy,” Jesse praised. With both their clothes littering the tiled floor, Jesse pulled Lake close and kissed him.

Wrapping his arms around Jesse’s neck, Lake kissed him back.

Jesse backed Lake toward the shower. He planned on making Lake moan his name and really didn’t want Justice to hear.

The penthouse was big enough that shouldn’t be an issue. Jesse really didn’t want his relationship with any of Lake’s family beginning with one of them hearing him and Lake being intimate.

“Step.” Jesse pulled away to warn.

Still clinging to him, Lake lifted one foot and then the other as Jesse urged him into the shower.

Heavy steam filled the space quickly as Jesse shut the glass door.

Lake pushed up and kissed him again.

Jesse pushed Lake against the wall, covering his body with Jesse's own. He slid his knee between Lake's legs as he left Lake's mouth to mouth at his neck.

Lake bucked against him. "You'll leave more marks."

Jesse nipped the skin. "Don't act like you didn't like showing off my marks."

"Maybe." Lake grinded down.

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“For sure,” Jesse teased. He nibbled under Lake’s ear. “Everyone was talking about us. I received knowing smiles from everyone all night.”

Lake grunted. “At least they know you’re mine now.”

“They knew.” Jesse grasped both their cocks. He gave one firm stroke.

“I wanted to be sure.”

Jesse stroked them together. He kissed Lake again. Encouraged Lake to kiss him back.

Lake’s fingers dug into the muscles on his back.

Jesse gave a thrust as he twisted his hand.

Lake yanked his mouth away while crying out.

“You like that, baby?”

“Yes,” Lake hissed. “More.”

Jesse tightened his fingers. “Thrust with me.”

“Yeah.” Lake rocked against him.

“Good boy.” Jesse clenched his teeth. He thrust again. Matching Lake’s rhythm and

giving their cocks squeezes, he quickly brought the both of them to climax.

Lake released first but it wasn't long before Jesse was following him over the edge.

Cum coated Jesse's fingers and both their cocks until they were spent.

Leaning heavily against the wall, Lake laughed. "I really like showering with you."

"Me too, baby." Jesse gave him one more kiss then released their dicks. He reached out and filled his hand with shower gel from the container beside Lake. "Let me get us cleaned up now."

Lake yawned. "I'm tired."

"I know you are, baby." Jesse ran his slick hands down Lake's neck to his shoulders and massaged the shower gel in. "I need to get you cleaned up though."

"Okay." Lake blinked slowly. "Will you swim for me in the morning again?"

"Yes baby," Jesse replied quietly. "Anything you want."

As much as Jesse wanted to take his time, it was more important to get Lake settled for the night. He turned Lake to face the wall then started to clean Lake's back. By the time Jesse was urging Lake under the water, Lake was nearly asleep on his feet.

Jesse got Lake rinsed off and quickly gave himself a quick wash before he turned the water off. "Almost done, baby."

"K." Lake leaned heavily on him as Jesse got them out of the shower.

He grabbed a towel from the heated rail and wrapped it around his waist before

picking up another one. Jesse wiped the water off Lake's big body, finding himself smiling.

"Little day," Lake murmured.

"What's that, baby?"

"We're having a little day on Saturday," Lake said. "To celebrate."

Jesse knelt. "To celebrate what?" he asked while drying Lake's legs.

"You." Lake eyes were still closed.

“Me?”

“Me and you,” Lake said. “Celebration.”

“Then I better make sure that I have the day off so I can make sure all you boys get spoiled properly.”

“Best Daddy ever,” Lake said.

“Best boy ever,” Jesse replied standing. “Now, let’s get you in bed.”

Chapter Nine

Jesse

“I don’t like it,” Jesse said to William the general manager of the casino. “They haven’t done anything.”

“It’s almost like they’re on vacation or something,” William replied. “Crazy as that might seem.”

“These aren’t vacation people,” Jesse argued. “I know they’re up to no good.”

“If they are, then they’re great actors. Playing tourists and not causing any trouble.”

Jesse sighed. It didn’t make sense. Jesse knew that Ezra’s parents weren’t good people. They wanted to take Annabelle from Ezra and Eric. Ezra who loved his

daughter more than anything in the world. Eric who was just as dedicated to the little girl.

They were all making a family for Annabelle. With parents that loved and supported her and a whole bunch of uncles that would be right there by her side. Annabelle had charmed her way into Jesse's heart the first time she smiled at him while climbing onto his knee. She'd wanted ice cream and Jesse had been the weak link.

It wasn't Jesse's fault that he was a pushover. He just wanted to make everyone happy. Lake, their friends, and the little girl—all of them deserved to be happy.

"Jesse?" William asked.

"I don't know what to do." Jesse admitted.

"What if there isn't anything to do?"

Jesse shook his head, dropping down into the chair behind his desk. "Thanks, William. Keep watching them, please."

"I will." William continued to stand there.

"Is there something else?" Jesse really didn't need any more bad news.

"The rumor mill is working overtime today."

Jesse snorted. "Is it?"

William nodded.

"Don't keep me in suspense," Jesse ordered. He had a pretty damn good idea what

was going on.

“Lake. The bouncer for the club,” William said.

“What about him?”

William glared. “Are you together?”

“Does it matter?”

“Not to me,” William replied.

“To everyone else?”

“No.”

“Then what’s the problem?” Jesse asked.

“Is this the reason that you sold some of the companies? Hired more staff? Started to cut back your hours?”

Jesse stared at his general manager. No, William was more than that. He was a friend. They’d worked together for years. William had started as a blackjack dealer before working his way up. The two of them had spent many nights drinking and imagining how to make the casino the best one in the city. “Yes.”

“Good.”

Jesse lifted a brow. “Good?”

“About damn time,” William offered.

“Yeah.” Jesse laughed.

“I hope everything works out for the two of you,” William said.

“Thanks.” Jesse meant it.

William smiled. “I better get back to work.”

“I’ll see you later,” Jesse promised. He waited until he was alone in the office to flop

back in his chair. He was not happy with the report but what could he do?

His phone chimed.

Jesse grabbed his cell and grinned. He loved seeing Lake's name across the screen.

Lake:I'm stopping by the coffee shop before my shift

Lake:Meet me?

He hurried to type a message. Yes, how long?

Lake:Pulling into the parking garage

I'll see you in ten

Lake:K

Jesse chuckled. He had a surprise for his boy. Opening his bottom drawer, Jesse pulled out the new pair of sparkling shoes for Zeb. Al was currently resting on Jesse's bed, but Zeb was never out of Lake's reach. The boy took his favorite stuffie everywhere.

"Mason?" Jesse called through the open door.

His assistant stuck his head in. "What's up, boss?"

"I'm running down to the coffee shop," Jesse told him.

"Oh! I can go," Mason offered.

“Not unless you plan to give Lake kisses as well?” Jesse teased.

Mason held up his hands. “I’m pretty sure that you can handle that. You’re clear for at least an hour but then we have that call with the investors in New York for the new shopping center.”

Jesse rose and stuffed the present for Lake in his pocket. “That’s fine. I went over the numbers this morning.”

“Great,” Mason replied. He ducked back out of sight.

“Hey, Mas,” Jesse called.

And he popped back into view. “Boss?”

“What do you think about the shopping center?”

“What do you mean?” Mason asked as he stepped farther into the office.

“Do you think it’s a good deal?” Jesse asked. He’d hired Mason right out of business school. Mason was older than most students since he’d started so late but had good sense and worked hard. Mason had worked for two years, saving every penny he could until he was able to afford community college. Since their stories were so similar, Jesse had taken the chance on the young man. He was glad he had.

“You really want to know my opinion?”

“I asked, didn’t I?” Jesse reminded him.

“Then no. I don’t think you should invest,” Mason answered.

“Why? Break it down for me,” Jesse ordered.

“The investment company as a whole is a bad bet. They go in and build then quickly sell. They don’t care about the communities that they’re building in. There are even rumors that they aren’t above using questionable methods to get the land they want,” Mason said.

Jesse knew about the quick turnovers but not the latter. “I didn’t come across that.”

“It’s buried deep,” Mason told him. “Just some threads online that I came across while I was researching them for you. Nothing has been proven.”

“But you think it might be true?”

“I don’t know,” Mason replied. “That’s why I didn’t put it in my report.”

“You should have,” Jesse told him.

“It’s not business-related,” Mason said. “My professor would have failed me if I had added it to the report.”

“Your professor is an idiot. I want your opinions added to the reports. I trust your judgment.”

“Thanks, boss. I appreciate it,” Mason said.

“I need to go.”

“Your new boyfriend awaits,” Mason teased. “Do you want me to cancel the call?”

Jesse considered. “No, I’ll tell them myself that I’m passing on the deal.”

“Got it, boss.”

Jesse strode from the room and toward the elevator. He answered emails from his cell as he rode down to the casino level. He sent one last email to Jacob, letting his brother know they were passing on the New York shopping center. Jacob wouldn’t care. Jesse took care of the business side of their money, allowing Jacob to concentrate on the job he truly loved.

Pocketing his phone, Jesse exited the elevator when the doors opened.

He strode through the casino, heading toward the coffee shop located on the other side. Jesse waved to the employees that he passed but he was a man on a mission. Usually, Jesse would stop and talk. He received a few questioning looks but ignored them. By the time he was turning the corner where the coffee shop came into view, he was nearly out of breath.

Jesse really needed to find a quicker way to the coffee shop.

Laughter reached him as he approached the entrance.

Lake was leaning against the counter as Dom sat beside him and Ezra was laughing from the espresso machine. It appeared that Lake was trying to tell a story but Dom and Ezra wouldn't stop laughing.

Jesse stepped up behind Lake and wrapped an arm around his stomach, pulling him back.

"I really hope that's Jesse or I am going to have some explaining to do."

Jesse nipped Lake's neck. "You would have more than a little explaining to do."

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Lake leaned his head back on Jesse's shoulder. "Hi."

"Hello, baby." Jesse kissed Lake's cheek. "Missed you."

"I missed you too."

Dom began to make gagging noises.

Jesse glared at the boy. "Real mature."

"I'm a brat," Dom told him.

"Tell me about it." Jesse turned to Lake. "I must insist on a proper kiss from my good boy."

Lake grinned as he wrapped his arms around Jesse's neck.

Jesse kissed him.

"This is a public place," Dom complained.

Jesse nipped Lake's bottom lip as he drew away. "I feel better."

"Oh goodie," Dom quipped.

"Ignore him," Lake said.

“I plan to,” Jesse promised. “I do need to return Remi’s text from earlier.”

Dom gasped. “You wouldn’t.”

Jesse pulled Lake back under his arm. “I would.”

“That’s not fair!” Dom kicked his feet.

“I finally have something to hold over you,” Jesse said with a cackle. “This is great.”

“I don’t think it’s great,” Dom argued.

“It’s funny though,” Ezra piped up.

Jesse turned his attention to the other young man. “How are you doing Ezra?”

Ezra shrugged. “I keep waiting for them to barge in here.”

“Barge in? What are you talking about?” Lake asked.

Ezra’s eyes widened as he looked from Jesse to Lake. “You didn’t tell him?”

“Tell me what?” Lake demanded.

Dom shook his head. “Ezra’s asshole parents are here. In the hotel.”

“What do they want?” Lake demanded.

“We don’t know,” Jesse said gently. “I have William and security watching them.”

Lake growled. “They have to be here for Annabelle. What’s Eric say?”

“That they aren’t doing anything wrong,” Ezra said.

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“It’s bullshit,” Dom spat. “Why are you even allowing them to stay in your hotel. You’re the fucking owner. Can’t you get rid of them.”

“Dom!” Ezra exclaimed.

“It’s okay,” Jesse said. “I thought about denying their stay. Kicking them out.”

“You did?” Ezra asked.

“I would do anything to protect you,” Jesse said.

“Why didn’t you get rid of them then?” Dom demanded.

Jesse noticed that Lake wasn’t saying anything. He responded to Dom anyway. “Because if I kick them out, I lose access to them. I can get them away from the hotel or the casino but that doesn’t mean that they’ll leave town. If they’re here, then I know what they’re doing.”

“Oh.” Dom’s shoulders slumped forward. “That’s smart.”

“I thought so.” Jesse looked back at Ezra. “Can you make me a coffee and one for Mason?”

“Of course!” Ezra turned to the espresso machine.

“Can I talk to you for a minute?” Jesse asked Lake quietly.

Lake nodded and Jesse drew him to the entrance. He found a quiet corner and pulled Lake over.

“Are you mad at me?” Jesse asked. “I should have told you about Ezra’s parents. I’m sorry. I didn’t think about it. I figured Ezra told you.”

Lake shook his head. “I haven’t been home much.”

That hurt. “Because you’ve been with me.”

“What? No! I mean yes, but I’m not mad. At you or him. I was just surprised. I hate the idea of them stalking around. Trying to get to Annabelle,” Lake said.

“Something is bothering you,” Jesse pointed out.

“I was just thinking how much family can suck,” Lake said.

“Not all the time,” Jesse reminded him. “Justice promised to come back as soon as he could.”

Lake nodded. “He called and told me that he talked to Mom and Dad. They’re demanding that I come to Sunday dinner.”

“That’s not happening,” Jesse declared firmly.

“They’re tired of my little temper tantrum,” Lake shared.

“Fuck them,” Jesse said fiercely.

“That’s what Dom said. I’m not going but it could cause more problems. If Justice found me here, then so could my other brothers or parents.”

“I’ll alert security,” Jesse told him. “You have nothing to worry about.”

Lake pulled Jesse closer by his tie. “I love when you get all protective and growly.”

Jesse snorted. “Do you?”

“You were very sexy when you were getting all protective over me, declaring that I wouldn’t be going to family dinner.”

“I’m here to serve,” Jesse joked.

“Thank you,” Lake said. “For always taking care of us.”

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“Always, baby.”

Lake kissed him. Hard.

Jesse kissed him back before nipping Lake’s lower lip. “I need to get back to work. You’ll be okay?”

“I’m fine.” Lake waved his hand toward the coffee shop. “I’m going to hang out with my friends before I go to work. Will I see you later?”

“You can count on it.”

“One more kiss,” Lake demanded.

Jesse gathered his boy close again then kissed him, showing Lake how much he would miss him for the next several hours.

Whistles and catcalls sounded around them.

Jesse pulled away slowly. “That should hold you until we’re alone again.”

“Great, now I’m hard. Dom is gonna love that,” Lake complained.

“You can handle him,” Jesse assured him.

“Let’s grab your coffees so you can get to work,” Lake said.

Jesse threaded their fingers together, pulling Lake along with him. They reentered the coffee shop. Dom was still sitting on the counter but next to him were two to-go cups.

“So, Lake’s Daddy,” Dom called. “What are you bringing to our little celebration on Saturday?”

“Should you be sitting up there?” Jesse questioned.

“I make him move when a customer comes in and wipe down the counter,” Ezra said.

“You didn’t answer,” Dom butted in.

Jesse grinned as he approached Dom. He grabbed the two cups and leaned close. “It’s a surprise.”

“No fun!” Dom whined.

“Guess you’ll have to live with it,” Jesse told him. He turned and walked away, stopping to kiss Lake quickly one last time. He needed to stop and drop off his present for Lake to find at work.

* * * * *

Lake

There was something about pulling off his cotton T-shirt, revealing the lace bodysuit underneath, that made Lake feel powerful. Sexy. Even in the bland locker room of the club. Putting the shirt back on had the opposite effect.

He finished stuffing his things into backpack and slung it over his shoulder then slammed the locker before locking it back up. Lake picked up Zeb from the bench but

caught their reflection in the mirror.

Crossing the room, Lake stared at himself.

Was there something different about him? Lake couldn't help but wonder. He felt different. Like the pieces inside him were finally starting to click in place. Even if the pieces bent on the edges when Lake had to cover up his pretty clothes and hide that part of himself.

He hugged Zeb to his chest.

Lake's little buddy. His partner in crime.

Al was still upstairs in Jesse's bed but the two stuffies would be reunited soon. Lake would make sure that he grabbed Al before his next shift. Lake had debated packing a bag to stay with Jesse again but had decided against it. He'd spent two nights already.

In the mirror, Lake could see his own frown.

It didn't feel right anymore.

To say that Lake regretted his decision was an understatement.

Lake had made the wrong decision.

With a heavy sigh, he turned and made his way out of the locker room.

The servers, bartenders, and staff were in cleaning mode. Security didn't have the same responsibilities and were usually the first out of there. Lake especially got to leave earlier than the others since once the hall was clear and he'd checked all their nightly guests out, he was done.

He pushed open the door and stopped.

Jesse was leaning against the desk with Al in his hands.

"Hi," Lake said.

"Hey, baby."

"What are you doing here?" Lake asked.

"Turns out that this little guy was missing his brother." Jesse shook Al. "I might have missed you too."

Lake lurched forward. He buried his head into Jesse's chest.

Jesse wrapped his arms around Lake.

“I missed you too,” Lake said. “I’ve been with you for the last two nights. I know it’s crazy. I almost packed a bag to stay again.”

“You should have,” Jesse said.

Lake pulled back. “I don’t want to impose.”

“Or are you scared that I’ll get tired of you?”

Lake should have known that Jesse would know what he’d been thinking. What his concerns were. He nodded.

“It’s probably a good thing that the same didn’t occur to me.” Jesse bent and picked up a duffel bag.

“What’s that?” Lake asked.

“My overnight bag. So that I can go home with you.”

“You want to go home with me?”

“I called Remi and made sure that it wouldn’t be crossing any boundaries if I came home with you,” Jesse said.

“And he told you that it was fine,” Lake guessed.

“His exact words were that it was your house too. You can have whoever you want to stay with you.”

“And you’ll stay?” Lake asked.

“If you want me to,” Jesse replied with a smile.

“I want you to.”

“Then let’s get you home,” Jesse said. “I’ll drive.”

“What about my car?”

“I’ll drive your car,” Jesse offered.

“I can bring you back in the morning,” Lake offered.

“Or I can Uber and you can sleep in.”

Lake rolled his eyes.

“We’ll discuss it later,” Jesse said.

“Fine.” Lake really didn’t want to argue about it. He was just excited about having Jesse go home with him.

Jesse slipped Lake’s backpack off Lake’s shoulder to carry it. He passed Al over then grabbed his own bag again.

“Is this dumb?” Lake asked. “We could just stay here. In the penthouse. I can go home in the morning and grab some clean clothes.”

“Or I can take my boy home,” Jesse said. “Where all your pretty stuff is and where you’re most comfortable.”

“I’d really like that.”

“Me too.” Jesse waved Lake forward. “And the sooner we leave, the quicker we can get to bed.”

Lake giggled.

“What, baby?”

“The house isn’t as big as the penthouse,” Lake reminded him.

“Okay?”

“If Dom hears us having sex, we’ll never hear the end of it.”

Jesse paled and his steps faltered.

“Like I wouldn’t even put it past him to bring it up over breakfast,” Lake teased.

“He would totally do that.”

“So?” Lake asked.

Jesse huffed. “I’m not scared of Dom.”

“Aren’t you?” Lake taunted.

“He can be pretty evil. That’s why the aliens would return him,” Jesse said.

“Penthouse?” Lake offered.

“No, baby,” Jesse said. “We can handle Dom.”

“If you’re sure,” Lake said.

“I have an ace up my sleeve,” Jesse told him.

“Remi?” Lake guessed.

“Yep. I’ll text him from the car.”

“Sounds good to me, Daddy.”

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* * * * *

Jesse

“You’re supposed to be quiet,” Jesse peered up from between Lake’s legs and admonished.

“You’re trying to suck my brains out of my dick!” Lake replied. “How can I be quiet?”

“If you want Dom to overhear us, who am I to argue?” Jesse warned.

Lake flopped back to the mattress. “I’ll be quiet.”

Jesse grasped Lake’s cock and stroked.

“Your mouth,” Lake gasped.

“You want my mouth back on your pretty dick?”

“Please!”

Jesse stroked him again. “Only if you’re quiet.”

“I promise!”

Jess laughed under his breath before he went back to sucking Lake. He was

determined that the boy would break his vow. Wrapping his tongue around the head of Lake's shaft, Jesse played with the slit before sliding down.

Lake pushed up but with Jesse's hand wrapped around Lake's base, he was able to control how much of Lake's cock he took down his throat.

His boy gave a small whine of frustration.

Jesse enjoyed drawing out Lake's pleasure and teasing him. He dove down then slowly drew back, sucking hard.

Lake squealed.

They were almost there. Lake would be begging any moment.

Peering up between Lake's legs as he gently, very gently, nibbled on the thick vein that ran down the inside of Lake's cock.

Lake went crazy under him, kicking out one leg while shouting and trying to thrust.

Jesse wrapped his free arm around Lake's leg, holding the boy as he forced his mouth down as far as he could go. He swallowed around Lake's shaft and the boy whined loudly until he started to come.

Pulling back slightly, Jesse was able to drink down his boy's seed.

He popped off Lake's cock to grin up at his boy.

Lake was a vision as he panted with glassy eyes and flushed cheeks. God, Jesse loved Lake with all his heart.

Lake lifted his head. “That was...amazing.”

Chuckling, Jesse slid up Lake’s body. “It was.”

“What about you?” Lake asked. “I want to give you pleasure too.”

“Yeah?” Jesse asked with a smirk. “I bet I can even be quiet.”

Lake huffed. “That’s not fair. You knew what you were doing to me.”

“I did indeed,” Jesse replied.

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“What do you want?” Lake ran his hands down Jesse’s back.

“Why don’t you just kiss me, and I’ll take care of everything else.”

Lake smiled. “I can do that.” He lifted his head and they kissed.

Jesse rubbed his body up and down as he continued to plunge his tongue inside Lake’s mouth. He matched each thrust against Lake’s cock to how he was fucking his boy’s mouth.

Lake clutched at his back encouraging Jesse to move.

It didn’t take long for Jesse to reach climax. His release soaked into Lake and the sheet under him. Jesse continued to kiss Lake for several long moments before pulling away.

“Thanks, baby,” Jesse said with a wink.

Lake groaned. “You just wanted to get me all dirty.”

“I do love seeing my boy wearing my marks,” Jesse agreed. “Even if they are the kind that washes away.”

“Are you going to clean me up now?”

“It’s a good thing that you have a bathroom attached to your room.” Jesse rolled off Lake.

“But I’m tired!” Lake whined.

“If you want to sleep in the wet spot, that’s fine with me.”

Lake huffed. “There are clean sheets in the cabinet behind the bathroom door. I’ll start the shower.”

“You got it, baby.”

Chapter Ten

Lake

“This feels wrong,” Lake whispered.

“But is it?” Dom asked.

“I need a better look!” Brandon added.

“Oh, our view is very good. Too bad for you,” Dom teased.

“That’s not nice,” Ezra said.

Dom cackled. “Maybe not but oh! Look at him bend over.”

“I don’t like this.” Lake rubbed his stomach.

Dom nudged his side. “If he didn’t want us to watch, then he wouldn’t be wearing those tiny shorts.”

“I know TJ from the club,” Lake told him. “He’s an exhibitionist.”

“See!” Brandon’s voice from tinny from the speaker phone. “We’re helping him with his kink.”

“We’re good friends like that,” Dom said.

Shaking his head, Lake couldn’t believe his friends. As the pool was being cleaned, they really shouldn’t all be watching. Lake and Dom from the window in the dining room and Brandon and Ezra farther away out their kitchen window.

Of course, TJ was wearing the littlest shorts imaginable.

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Still TJ was their friend and Lake didn't want to objectify his friend.

"Relax, Lake," Dom patted his back. "When Remi and I interviewed TJ for the job, he asked if he could indulge in his kink here. He likes being watched. And this is a safe space for him."

That was okay then. And TJ was a very attractive man.

"I'm going to go see if Jesse is out of the shower—" Lake turned and squealed.

"What?" Brandon and Ezra shouted.

Dom turned and groaned. "How long have you two been standing there?"

"For quite a while," Remi replied.

Jesse was smirking.

"Busted!" Brandon giggled. "We'll call you later."

"Why don't you boys turn around," Remi suggested.

"Shit! Hi, Daddy!" Brandon said before the phone was disconnected.

"It's not what you think," Lake said, holding up his hands.

"You're not ogling your pool boy?" Jesse asked.

Dom snickered. “We have a pool boy.”

Remi growled.

“We were just looking!” Dom defended.

“That’s all you better ever do,” Remi told him. “Now come help me bring the breakfast dishes in.”

“Fine.”

Lake looked over at Jesse.

Jesse was still smiling as he strode forward.

His Daddy didn’t look mad. In fact, if Lake wasn’t mistaken, Jesse’s gaze kept going to the window.

“He’s attractive,” Jesse said. He threw his arms around Lake’s shoulders then turned them back toward the window.

“TJ’s a great guy too,” Lake said. “He has three degrees and loves to build things.”

“Baby. It’s okay to watch if that’s what he wants.”

“I know. I guess it just feels weird.”

Jesse turned Lake to face him. “You can just keep your eyes on me. I liked to be watched by my boy.”

Lake smiled. That he had no problem with.

“Breakfast!” Dom announced as he carried in a bowl.

The delicious scents had his belly rumbling. He’d worked up an appetite both last night and that morning. Being with Jesse was like living in a dream. Lake had spent so much time hiding and not being himself that he was ready to wake up and none of this be happening.

Even that morning Lake was wearing a bright blue-yellow shorts and camisole set that he’d never been brave enough to put on around anyone. Jesse had found it in Lake’s drawer and had dressed him in the outfit.

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Lake had bought the outfit on a whim, hoping he'd be a brave boy one day.

He was brave. Had been brave. He'd gone after what he wanted for the first time in his life. Lake didn't have doubts about him and Jesse. Lake just wondered how he'd gotten so lucky.

"You are beautiful," Jesse whispered to him. "Both on the outside and the inside."

Lake peered into Jesse's eyes. They were practically the same height. That had always bothered him in the past but as Jesse led Lake to the table being laden down with food, he found that he no longer cared.

His friends had been telling Lake that when he found the right partner, all the pieces would fit into place. That was how it happened for them. Lake had wanted to believe and yet it wasn't until that moment that he understood.

Lake had thought his pieces were bent on the edges because he was still hiding something that was vital to his true self.

Jesse pulled out Lake's chair and Lake slid into his place. Jesse sat beside him.

"I love that outfit on you," Dom said as he sat across from Lake.

"Me too." Lake smoothed out the bottom of the camisole.

"It's a very good cut," Jesse said. "Nice material. We should get some more."

This was what support felt like. Lake took a deep breath. “I think I would like to explore more clothes like this.”

“Of course.” Jesse rubbed the back of his neck. “Anything in particular?”

Lake looked over at Dom, who was smiling and nodding in encouragement.

“I wear the lace bodysuits because they’re easy to cover and I do like lace. I wanted to try some other materials though. Maybe more like the one I wore on our first date. I felt good wearing that.”

“This will give us so much to explore,” Jesse said with a smile. “And I know of a store on the way to my brother’s that has gorgeous custom pieces made for men.”

“I want to go!” Dom demanded. “I like to dress Lake up!”

“He’s not a doll,” Remi reminded his boy.

“But he’s so pretty,” Dom argued.

“And he’s mine,” Jesse declared. “I get to dress him up.”

“I can dress myself,” Lake offered.

“No, no,” Dom said. “Be my pretty doll!”

Jesse grabbed Lake’s chin and turned his head. He pointed to the hickies on Lake’s neck. “Mine.”

“I could bite him too,” Dom said. “As long as he promised not to squeal like he was doing last night.”

Lake gasped.

Remi dropped his head. "I told you not to say anything."

"And I'll never say anything ever again if Lake agrees to be my pretty doll so I can dress him up and paint his face."

Lake stared at his friend. "That's blackmail."

Dom grinned. "Is it? Oh, by the way, is Jesse spending the night again? If he is, I need to take a nap later in case I'm woken up again."

Jesse chuckled and leaned closer. "I did warn you to be quiet."

Betrayed, Lake snapped his head to Jesse.

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His boyfriend, his partner, and Daddy smirked at him. Okay, if Jesse wanted to play, then Lake was going to show that wicked side of himself that Jesse praised. He glanced over at Dom. “Three days a week.”

Dom frowned. “Huh?”

“You get to play doll three says a week,” Lake told him.

Jesse stiffened.

“But no biting.” Lake gave a mock shudder. “That’s just creepy to think about.”

“One bite? Remi isn’t into that!” Dom argued.

“No!” Jesse snapped.

Lake was pretty proud of himself. He grinned at Jesse, receiving a narrow-eyed look in response. Being a wicked little boy was kind of fun.

Remi grabbed the back of Dom’s neck. “You’re pushing your luck. I would shut up while you’re behind.”

Dom huffed and pouted.

Jesse was gloating.

Remi seemed like he was regretting all his life’s decisions.

Lake started to laugh. He chose this. This was the family that he'd picked. Maybe he needed his head examined.

* * * * *

Lake

His palms were sweating but Lake was not going to chicken out. Glancing at the hoodie sitting over his backpack in the passenger seat, he smiled.

"We don't need it," Lake told Zeb. "We look fabulous in our skirts."

Zeb didn't respond but Lake knew that his little buddy agreed. Lake picked up Al as well. "Daddy said that he'd find someone who will make you custom clothes. We'll get you a pretty dress in no time."

Al's different body shape made it hard for Lake to find the right clothes for him. Lake understood. Until the last several years, Lake had the same issues. It was getting easier to find pretty clothes for a man his size. He hadn't been able to cheat, substituting women's designs, since there weren't very many women his height or weight. Al was now having the same trouble. Al wasn't alone though. Lake, Jesse, and Zeb had Al's back.

"How about a sweet treat?" Lake asked his stuffie friends. "We can stop by and see Ezra. Uncle Dom is off today but Ezra loves you guys."

Zeb and Al thought that was a wonderful idea. They also knew that their uncle Dom was still at home since Dom had helped Lake get ready for work. Dom and his teasing and playing along with the whole doll theory.

It had actually been a fun afternoon. Ezra couldn't hang out with them but Brandon

had come over and sat on Lake's bed as Dom had picked out Lake's clothes and done his makeup.

Lake grabbed his backpack, hoodie, Zeb, and Al before he slid out from behind the wheel. He tried to insist on driving Jesse to work that morning but Remi had been heading into work so he'd dropped Jesse off.

He closed the door and hit the lock on his key fob.

The long champagne color silk skirt brushed his ankles. He wanted to twirl. Hell, why not? Lake gave a small spin.

"Gorgeous!" Clapping came close by.

Lake nearly peed himself as he yelled.

"Sorry!" Jesse's assistant, Mason, walked over. He had a laptop bag over his shoulder and was carrying a plastic bag that looked like it held food.

"I didn't know anyone was around," Lake admitted.

"Who cares if they are." Mason grinned at him. "And that outfit is fire."

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With his hands full, Lake had to resist trying to smooth down any wrinkles.

“And this must be Zeb and...?”

“Al,” Lake said. “This is Zeb and Al.”

“Well hello, Al. Nice to finally meet you, Zeb,” Mason said. “Want to walk in together?”

“Sure.” Lake followed along beside Mason. “You know about Zeb?”

“I was the one who suggested Jesse go to the store,” Mason said. “He showed me Zeb went he got back. He was worried whether you would like him or not.”

“I love him,” Lake said sincerely.

“I knew you would,” Mason said. “I keep catching Jesse buying clothes or accessories for him. I offered to order some stuff for him, but he wanted to do it himself.”

It was just like Jesse, taking the responsibility of giving Zeb’s gifts personally. The nightly surprises meant even more now that Lake knew that, even though he’d suspected as much. “He’s the best.” Even to his own ears his voice was dreamy.

Mason held his wrist up to the sensor beside the employee entrance.

Lake eyed the watch. Jesse had promised him one that would give him access to the

entire place. Everything that Jesse had built.

That was how much faith that Jesse had in them.

Lake would work every day to ensure that he lived up to that faith.

Mason held open the door for him and Lake slipped inside. The parking garage opened to the hall behind the stores and offices on this level. And Lake knew where the back door to the coffee shop was.

“That wouldn’t be lunch for my boyfriend, would it?”

“It is.”

“I’m stopping at the coffee shop. Want to come?” Lake asked.

“That was my next stop,” Mason replied.

“Cool. I know the shortcut.”

“There’s a shortcut?” Mason asked.

“And that nifty little bracelet will get us in.”

“Oh, you know about that? So, the one that Jesse ordered for you isn’t a secret,” Mason said.

“He told me. I have a card right now that gives me access to all the floors.”

“I have everything but the boss’s penthouse,” Mason said.

“That makes sense,” Lake agreed. He stopped by the back door of the coffee shop and nodded to the sensor. “Jesse promised Dom one as well, but he said there was no way that Dom could have access to the penthouse.”

Mason laughed. “Probably a good idea. He might wake up with googly eyes on all his stuff.” He held the door open once the light flashed green.

“Please don’t give Dom that idea,” Lake begged.

“Hopefully he won’t be staying in the penthouse that much longer,” Mason said.

Lake turned. “What do you mean?”

Mason grinned. “Didn’t you just move into a new house?”

“I did.”

“A nice big house,” Mason added.

Lake frowned. “He wouldn’t want to move in with me.”

“Are you sure about that?”

No, Lake wasn’t. But he lived with Remi and Dom. Friends. Jesse was rich enough to buy the entire neighborhood. Why would he want to live with other people?

“Look.” Mason stopped and held Lake’s arm. “He hasn’t said anything to me and I don’t want to overstep.”

“Okay.”

“But I’m sure you know that Jesse is close with his brother.”

“I’m aware.” Lake didn’t know where this was going.

“He was a mess after Jacob moved to California,” Mason said.

“Jesse told me it was hard.”

“I was really starting to worry about him, then something interesting happened,” Mason explained.

“What?”

“He met you,” Mason said. “The light came back into his eyes and he was a man on a mission. He was immediately smitten.”

Lake grinned. “He told me that too.”

“Good. Just don’t think that how you live would be a deterrent to him. He likes having those he cares about around him.”

Lake got it. What Mason was saying, and he had to agree. It worked for them. The found family, the communal living, all of it. Why would Jesse be any different? Jesse had gone home with him and loved every minute of it. Even the chaotic breakfast with Dom and Remi.

“Just think about it,” Mason told him.

Lake wouldn’t be able to think of anything else.

Shouting had both of them jerking.

“What the hell?” Mason asked.

Lake didn’t think. He dropped his stuffies, hoodie, and backpack before running for the front. Ezra was out there!

He hit the swinging doors hard, making them slam against the wall as Lake barreled through them.

An older man had Ezra pinned to the wall by his shoulders as an older woman had a finger pointed in his face, yelling awful things.

“Back off!” Lake roared. He raced over and pulled Ezra away from the couple.

“Lake?” Ezra’s voice shook as he sobbed.

Lake pushed Ezra behind him. “Stay away from him!” All Lake could see was red. This had to be Ezra’s parents. No one else would have the nerve to attack Ezra in such a public setting.

“Keep out of this you...weirdo!” the woman screeched at him. She was looking Lake up and down with disdain.

This woman was judging him? Lake would have laughed if the situation wasn’t so serious.

“I demand you move,” the older man said. “That is our son. We have the right to talk to him.”

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“No, you don’t,” Lake said firmly. “No one has the right to treat anyone like that. Family or stranger. You need to leave.”

“I called security and Jesse. They’re on the way,” Mason whispered.

“Take Ezra into the back,” Lake ordered.

“No! Lake.” Ezra grabbed the back of his shirt.

“Can you please check on Zeb and Al?” Lake asked. “I dropped them.”

“But, Lake—”

“Please, Ezra,” Lake murmured.

“You aren’t going anywhere!” the old man yelled. “We aren’t done here!”

“They’re never gonna stop!” Ezra cried.

Oh yes, they were. Lake stepped away from his friend.

“Come on, Ezra. Let’s go into the kitchen,” Mason said.

Lake waited until he heard the swinging doors move then he advanced. He headed toward the older man who had put his hands on Lake’s friend. “I warned you to leave.”

“What are you going to do?” Ezra’s father challenged. “You won’t do anything, will you? You might mess up your makeup. I’ve heard of people like you. If you’re my son’s friend, then we need to get Annabelle away from all of you.”

“Annabelle is Ezra’s daughter,” Lake said firmly. “You won’t take her anywhere.”

“She’s our blood!” the woman shouted.

“I’ve seen how you treat your blood,” Lake responded. He crossed his arms over his chest. “I also know that you tried to sue Ezra for custody and that your case was dismissed. You have no claim to Annabelle or Ezra. Leave now!”

The old man advanced.

Lake braced his feet. They would not get to Ezra. Not on Lake’s watch.

“They won’t be going anywhere.”

Lake’s shoulders stiffened and he didn’t dare take his eyes off Ezra’s parents.

Luckily, Jesse came to him. “The cops are already on the way.”

“Cops!” the woman shrieked.

“You have physically assaulted an employee of mine,” Jesse said.

He shifted enough that half of Lake’s body was behind him. The shaking started and Lake fisted his hands.

“Security will take you into holding until the cops have arrived,” Jesse stated.

Ezra's parents must have seen how serious Jesse was.

"That's not necessary," the old man said. "We'll go."

They couldn't go! Not with the threats that were made. Ezra was right. If they didn't do something, this wasn't going to end.

"You won't go anywhere but to jail where you belong," Jesse corrected.

"I didn't do anything!" the woman yelled.

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Jesse shook his head. "By attacking my employee here, we caught everything on camera. Security is downloading a copy of the recording now to give to the police. We have the threats you made to Ezra."

"So?" the woman spat.

"Do you know what a hate crime is?" Jesse asked.

The woman glared.

"We need to leave." The man tried to pull the woman toward the door but security stepped in their path.

Behind security, two police officers entered the shop.

"Officer Wright. Officer Glenbrook," Jesse said. "Thanks for getting here so fast."

"Just a warning," the female officer said. "We had to put the call over the radio."

"Which means Eric is already on the way," Jesse said.

"They all are," the male officer replied. "We better get this done fast before we have to arrest some of our own."

Suddenly he felt lightheaded. Lake grabbed Jesse's shoulder.

"Baby?" Jesse asked as he turned.

Lake opened his mouth, but nothing came out.

“Lake!” Jesse grabbed his arms. “You’ve gone pale. Stay with me.”

“Take him into the kitchen,” Officer Glenbrook ordered. “We need to get his statement. We’ll talk to him there. He doesn’t need to see this.”

“Come on, baby. Come with me.”

Lake let Jesse lead him to the swinging doors. The shaking was getting worse. Lake didn’t understand. He’d been brave. Lake had stood up for his friend. He’d protected Ezra and Annabelle.

He knew he was in the kitchen, but the room wavered.

“Sit down for me, Lake,” Jesse encouraged.

That was a good idea. Maybe his knees would stop going weak. Lake pressed his back to the wall then just slid down. Jesse kept hold of Lake’s arms until the cold tile was under him.

“Mas, can you get Lake some water?” Jesse asked.

Water sounded good. Lake’s throat hurt.

“Lake?” Ezra crawled over to him.

Oh good. Lake could see clearly again. “Are you okay?”

“I’m fine.” Ezra set Zeb on Lake’s lap while continuing to clutch Al. “Zeb and Al are fine too. They thought it was a game. They’re not mad at you.”

Tears filled Lake's eyes and he tried to blink them away.

"They're not mad," Ezra repeated.

"Not hurt?"

"I can check them over for you," Jesse said while crouching in front of him. "First you both need to drink some water."

Ezra leaned against Lake's arm.

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That helped the shakes. Lake nodded. “K.”

Jesse helped Lake drink before giving Lake the plastic cup.

Ezra began to move away but that wasn’t what Lake wanted.

“Stay,” Lake whispered.

“Are you sure?” Ezra asked.

“Helps,” Lake managed. It was taking a lot of effort to talk.

“Shh,” Jesse said as he sat on Lake’s other side. “You don’t have to talk. Just rest.”

Lake appreciated that. Closing his eyes, Lake leaned against Jesse and found comfort in being caged in by family.

“Is he okay?” Mason asked.

“Adrenaline crash,” Jesse responded.

Lake started to lift his head. Was that all it was?

“No, put your head back on my shoulder,” Jesse said.

“You’re my hero,” Ezra whispered.

“I’m so proud of you,” Jesse added. “You did so good protecting our friend.”

“I’ve never been that scared before. They just wouldn’t leave and then all of a sudden my father threw me into the wall. I couldn’t get away!” Ezra said.

The swinging doors banged open, making both Lake and Ezra jump.

“Ezra!” Eric shouted, running in.

“Daddy!” Ezra called.

Eric grabbed his boy from the floor and hugged him tight.

“You okay, Lake?” Remi replaced Ezra’s weight.

Lake wished Remi would scooch in closer though.

“I’m fine,” Lake managed.

“I heard you were the bravest boy ever!” Dom climbed into Lake’s lap, setting Zeb on his own.

Now that was perfect.

“He was awesome,” Ezra praised.

Jesse shook his head. “I’m sorry Ezra. I had security following them. I already spoke to them. There was a miscommunication during shift change. I failed to keep you safe.”

Ezra snorted. “I’m fine. I had my big protector to watch over me.”

“This might be the worst thing that could have happened. No one was hurt. Ezra’s parents are going to pay for this,” Remi said. “We will play this out all the way to the courts. They attacked Ezra. They are going to pay this time.”

“Finally,” Ezra said with a sigh.

“It’s all going to work out,” Dom declared firmly.

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Lake smiled as he was surrounded by family, love, and comfort. He had been a brave boy. It seemed he was able to claim that title more and more. Maybe one day he'd be brave enough to confront his own family like he had Ezra's.

Baby steps.

Or in his case, maybe he should say size thirteen little steps.

Lake giggled.

Once he started to laugh, Lake couldn't stop.

Tears fell from his eyes, but they were cleansing.

Dom started to laugh with him. Ezra soon followed.

"I have no idea what's happening," Jesse whispered.

That made Lake laugh even harder.

"Just roll with it, man," Remi advised. "Just roll with it."

"Sure," Jesse said.

He didn't sound sure. Lake tilted his head back to peer at Jesse. "Hi, Daddy."

Jesse smiled. "Hi, baby."

“I did good?” It was important. He was a brave boy.

“Bestest!” Dom told him.

“Are we regressing?” Jesse asked.

Lake giggled. “Not you, Daddy! You have to be big boy.”

“Gotcha.” Jesse winked.

“I’m going to talk to the officers and have them swing by the house to get the statements later. They’ll be plenty busy booking Ezra’s parents,” Eric said. He bent and passed Ezra to Remi.

“That sounds good,” Jesse asked. “Are Dane and Brandon home?”

“Dane went to pick Brandon up. They’ll meet us at the house,” Remi said.

“Yours or mine?” Eric asked.

“Ours,” Remi said. “Lake will be more comfortable there.”

“What about Ezra?” Lake asked.

“I’m good as long as I’m with you,” Ezra said before slipping his thumb in his mouth.

“K. I want to go home,” Lake said.

“Mas, can you make sure that Lake and Ezra’s shifts are covered? Then cancel my calls for the rest of the day, please,” Jesse asked.

“You got it, boss. I could order some food to be delivered. Your lunch is on the floor,” Mason offered.

“I’ve got the food handled,” Remi said. “Jesse might need some clothes though.”

“Slumber party?” Lake asked.

“Party!” Dom clapped.

“Yay!” Ezra said around his thumb.

“I’ll take care of everything,” Mason said.

“You wanna come?” Lake invited.

Mason grinned. “I have some work to do or I would.” He crouched in front of Lake. “But your Daddy has been trying to get me to take my vacation for a while. I think I’m going to start planning that.”

“About damn time,” Jesse grouched. “You work too damn much.”

His Daddy was being protective again. Lake loved it.

“I have a group of friends from high school. You guys remind me of them. I think I needed to see you together. To remind me that there’s more than work,” Mason said.

“They seem to be good at making people realize that,” Jesse said. He kissed Jesse’s temple. That sounded like praise.

“I agree.” Mason groaned as he stood. “You get them home and I’ll take care of everything here.”

“Home!” Lake demanded then yawned.

“They’re going to wear themselves out and sleep good tonight,” Remi said.

“Slumber party!” Dom declared.

Chapter Eleven

Lake

“Dance party!” Lake shouted as he started to move his hips. The skirt around his ankles swished loudly.

The music blared from the speaker.

“Not another dance party,” Jesse said with a groan.

Lake giggled as he spun around his Daddy. “Silly Daddy.”

“Not silly Daddy,” Jesse said as he wrapped his arms around Lake and twirled him. “We danced so much the other night that my leg started to cramp.”

“Getting old?” Remi asked as he danced with Dom in his arms.

“Daddy not old!” Lake defended.

“He’s become quite outspoken since the other night,” Remi complained.

“My wicked, brave boy,” Jesse replied. He kissed Lake before nipping his bottom lip.

“Celebrating!” Lake reminded them. Not only were they celebrating Lake and Jesse being together, but Ezra had been approved for a restraining order against his parents. Jesse also had a team of lawyers that would go after Ezra’s parents civilly just in case

the assault case didn't go their way.

Jesse danced him past Ezra, who threw confetti at them.

"That better not be glitter!" Eric called from where he and Dane were trying to fix the table that Brandon had broken by sitting on it.

"Paper glitter!" Ezra told him. "I make it."

"Daddy, can I come out of the corner?" Brandon called.

"No," Dane replied. "I told you not to jump on the table."

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“I just sat down.”

“You jumped two feet to land your little bottom on the table,” Dane groaned. “I don’t think this glue is going to work.”

“I’ll take it out to the dumpster,” Eric said. “I don’t want the boys getting hurt.”

“I broke-broke it?” Brandon asked. “I’m sorry.”

“Oh, baby.” Dane strode across the floor.

Lake grinned up at his Daddy and Jesse dipped him, then kissed Lake.

He giggled as he was yanked back upright. “Daddy is a good dancer.”

“Only with you, baby,” Jesse told him.

Lake nodded. Daddy should only be dancing with him ever.

The song ended and Remi moved to turn the music down.

“No more dancing?” Lake asked sadly.

“We’ll dance after lunch,” Jesse told him. “Why don’t you go back to playing with your blocks and dragons?”

Lake dropped down in front of the town he’d started to build earlier. “No fairies,” he

said, pouting.

“Fairies?” Jesse asked.

“I’ll text Eric and have him go grab them before he comes back to the house,” Dane said. He grabbed Brandon from the corner and was currently rocking the boy while Brandon sucked his thumb.

“Thank you!” Lake singsonged.

Jesse rubbed his back. “Would you like a drink?”

“Juice?” Lake asked.

“I’ll go fill sippy cups,” Jesse said.

“K.”

His Daddy rose.

“Daddy!” Lake called. “Kiss?”

“All the kisses.” Jesse bent again before peppering kisses over Lake’s nose and cheeks then planted one of his lips.

“Thanks, Daddy!”

“You are so very welcome, my love,” Jesse replied.

“Love?” That was even better than baby.

“I love you, baby,” Jesse said cupping his face.

“I love you too,” Lake said.

Jesse beamed at him. “Such a brave boy.”

“Yeah. Brave boy.” Being brave had gotten Lake everything he had always wanted. And Lake wouldn’t change a thing, not after finally hitting the jackpot, and finding the family of his heart.