



Silver Fox in Cedarwood

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Category: Romance, M-m Romance

Description: Can two lonely hearts find their way to each other despite the odds?

Dr. Isaac McLean knows he's not supposed to lust after a patient, but there's something about Len Connor that he can't forget. His laugh? His strong will? His sexy body. But will Len want to be with his former doctor? Len Connor wasn't looking to get back into the dating scene, but he's never been able to get Isaac off his mind. Isaac is sweet, funny and oh, so handsome. But he's also at least twenty years younger. Will this cougar get his cub and have a happy ending? Or will the relationship fall apart before it gets started?

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Chapter One

Len Connor moved the last box of clothes into his new condo and sighed. He hadn't planned on moving to Cedarwood, but after his stroke and Ross leaving, he wanted a fresh start near his son, Aiden. Since Aiden lived in the quaint little town, so would he. It seemed rather silly to live so far from his only remaining family member and, since he liked Cedarwood, the move seemed simple.

"Dad, you're sure you want to live here?" Aiden asked. "It's not like you to want to live alone."

"I've got Cissy," Len said. He'd never be alone as long as he had his dog.

"That's not the same. You've always been with someone," Aiden said. "Keye, Ross, there was Norman... It's not bad, but it's different to live alone. Plus, you loved Springdale."

"I did." He shrugged to hide his momentary wince. He'd loved the town of Springdale, but everywhere he went, he was reminded of things he'd done and places he'd gone with Ross. Sure, Ross hadn't been the one, but the relationship had failed, and Len hated to fail. "Keye loved Cedarwood, so it's okay. I needed a new start and you're here. I don't want to miss things with you and Matt. Now that you've got three dogs, I want to see my grandpups and Cissy wants to play with her...cousins? I don't know the hierarchy in family dogs." His Irish setter loved playtime with other dogs and he couldn't wait for them all to have another play date.

"Dad." Aiden frowned. The crease between his eyes, the one that deepened when he

thought too hard, seemed etched into his face.

Len smoothed the line on his son's forehead. "You're right. I hate being single. I'm better when I'm with someone, but there isn't anyone and I'm not settling. I did before and it got messy. The right one is out there looking for a silver fox—me." He'd had the one back when he'd been married to Keye. Losing his partner sucked and he'd never find another man like Keye.

Aiden stared at him for a moment before shaking his head. "I know you've had boyfriends, but I didn't need to know the silver fox thing."

"Suit yourself." Truth be told, he enjoyed embarrassing his son. Age didn't matter. His son could be a hundred and he'd still give him hell.

"Your bed has been assembled," Matt said. He wiped his brow. "All you have to do is add the linens. When is the rest of the furniture set to arrive?"

"Tomorrow. I scheduled the appointment with the movers for then so I could have all day to arrange my things." He clapped Matt on the shoulder. "Thank you for putting that together. I'd have it all messed up. Give me a legal brief and I'm good. Parts for a bed? Yeah, it'd be a disaster."

"It's all good." Matt chuckled. "I don't know my ass from a legal brief, so we're equal."

"Do you have everything to get through tonight or do you need us to put anything else together?" Aiden asked.

"No, I'll be fine." Len folded his arms. "Do you have to work tonight?"

"I do." Aiden rolled his shoulders. "I agreed to take a night shift to help out Dr.

Carson. It's just one night, but I'm not looking forward to it."

"Neither am I," Matt said, then kissed Aiden. "But we'll get through it." He turned to Len. "What are your plans for tonight?"

He loved that his son was happy. Matt was the best partner for Aiden. Where Aiden could be wound tight, Matt was loose. Len wanted that kind of love again. "There's a mixer here at the complex. Everyone brings food, but since I don't have anything to bring, I thought I'd just stop in for a moment." He followed Aiden and Matt to the front door. "I don't want to leave Cissy alone for too long, but I'd like to meet some of my neighbors."

"And if someone happens to be there who's handsome and single..." Aiden arched his eyebrow. "Or he's hot, rich and single... Or those moving men will be hot."

"I'm not interested." He wanted a relationship, but wasn't looking for a lover.

"Right," Aiden said.

"Going to a mixer does sound like you're starting to move on," Matt pointed out.

"I want to be on my own a while. It's been forever since I was independent," Len said. "I'm enjoying it. I take Cissy for walks, only practice law when I want to, I've got the condo layout I want and I don't have to tell anyone where I'm going. It's nice." He'd spent so much time catering to Ross, his ex-boyfriend. Now he could focus on his needs.

"You're not lonely?" Matt asked.

"No." He shook his head. "If I'm going to find someone, he'll find me. I'm tired of looking and only finding dead ends."

“Ross was terrible,” Aiden said. “I’m glad he’s gone.”

“Me, too.” He’d thought Ross might be his forever man, but once Len had had his stroke, he’d found out just what kind of a money-grubber Ross could be.

“Well, you’re better off.” Aiden tugged his keys from his pocket. “Just think before you dive into anything, and if you meet someone, make sure they’re out. No closet guys.”

“Make sure he’s clean,” Matt said.

“I know.” He’d listen because his son and son-in-law cared, but he knew the rules. “I’ve been around the block a few times.”

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“Make sure he’s got his own form of income,” Aiden said. “That he’s okay with pets, that he’s not trying to move in on day two...”

“Son, I know.” He loved Aiden’s protective streak.

“I know you do.” Aiden’s brow furrowed. “I can’t help it. I’m a worrier.”

“And I appreciate it.” He hugged his son. “I’ll ask the appropriate questions when I meet someone. Not earlier.” Who’s the parent and who’s the child now? He hugged Matt. “Be good. Both of you. Come over whenever you want. Cissy and I are always open.”

“Thanks, Dad.” Aiden waved. “Call if you need help.”

Matt waved and followed Aiden out to the sports car.

Len stood on the porch and watched them leave. He’d had a decent relationship with Aiden, but when he’d dated Ross, he’d pushed his son away. Things were back on track and he had no desire to screw up again. He petted Cissy. “Well, Ciss, it’s just us. Think this is a good place? I do.”

Part of him enjoyed his freedom, but part of him preferred to be in a relationship. Having someone around was safe, comfortable and reliable.

Kind of like a dog.

Except a dog wasn’t there to warm the bed or kiss him good night.

“I’m going to the mixer,” he said. He wasn’t sure why he’d declared it, other than to force himself to follow through with his decision. Cissy didn’t care and wouldn’t answer him. As long as he returned, she’d be happy.

Len massaged his forehead and closed his eyes. Maybe he’d stay home. He could meet the neighbors any time. When he opened his eyes, a man was strolling up the front lawn.

“Hi,” the man said. “So you bought six-seventy-two. My name’s Brandon Newsome. I’m in six-seventy-six. It’s a good neighborhood. We’re all cozy.” He stuck out his hand. “How are you? Are you going to the mixer?”

Jesus. The guy talked a lot. Would he be able to get a word in edgewise? “I’m Len and yes, I bought this place.” Cissy growled and he scratched her head. He wasn’t sure if she thought Brandon was too chatty or a threat. Either way, if she wasn’t happy with him, then Len wasn’t either. “This is my rescue, Cissy. She’s very protective.”

“I can tell.” Brandon didn’t lean in to offer his hand or act like she existed. “So, the mixer, you should attend. People go there to meet, talk...some date. It’s a good time.”

Len’s pride flag waved on the porch. He nodded to the rainbow. “You do realize I’m gay? Is that going to be a problem?”

“No. I’m gay, too. Cleve, Devon, Sam and Norton are, too,” Brandon said. “The mixer is to get to know our neighbors. It’s a good time and while some date, most just have long chats.”

“I might attend.” He’d said he would, but wasn’t convinced. “Thanks for mentioning it.”

“I hope to see you there.” Brandon paused. “So you know, David will get with anyone who asks, Patrick has a thing for silver foxes, so be advised, and Devon only dates younger men.”

“I see.” He’d never remember who did what, but that didn’t matter. He wasn’t looking for a partner.

“Come and have a fun time,” Brandon said. “I’ll be there. See you.” He waved and walked down the lawn to the sidewalk.

Len pinched the bridge of his nose. Cissy trotted into the house first. He followed her, then closed the screen door. Part of him wanted to attend the mixer. He’d like to meet the others in the condominium development. But part of him wasn’t sure. He’d forgotten how tricky the dating game could be and didn’t want anyone to think he was on the prowl. Maybe no one would ask and he’d be able to fly under the radar.

Maybe.

At eight-thirty, he headed to the community room in the administration building. People were already milling about. Many stood together chatting. Len wished he’d brought Cissy. Since he’d left the courtroom full time, he’d realized he wasn’t much of a people person. Cissy relaxed people and encouraged conversation. He’d rather stay quiet and observe.

Brandon rushed over to him. “Oh, my God. I’m glad you arrived. I hoped you’d be here. The party is so dull. Come over here and I’ll introduce you to everyone.”

“I’m fine. I’m only staying for a moment.” He hadn’t brought a dish to share.

“Don’t worry about it. You need to meet people and we need your fresh face.” Brandon linked arms with him. “Let me introduce you to the guys. You know we

really should get together some time. I've got a great wine selection."

"Whoa." He stopped in his tracks. "Are you asking me out?" Sure sounded like it.

"Yes." Brandon held tight to Len's arm. "You're hot, young and we're sexy together. It'll be good."

"How old are you? I'm probably old enough to be your father," Len said.

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“I’m fifty-two. You’re what, fifty-three?”

“I’m fifty-nine. Aiden’s thirty-nine. See?” He wasn’t ashamed of his age, but he wasn’t looking to date a man younger than his son. The age difference wasn’t too bad between him and Brandon, but he wasn’t interested in him. Brandon was too forward for his taste.

“Who says we have to be exclusive?” Brandon asked.

“Maybe once I’m all moved in, we could have coffee together.” He’d put getting together off as long as possible. Maybe Brandon would forget.

“Sure, sure.” Brandon ushered him over to a knot of men. “So, guys, this is Len. He lives two doors down from me. He’s middle-aged, fit and looking for a good time. Len, this is Terrence, David, Patrick and Clyde. Oh.” He paused. “And Elise.”

“Elise?” He spotted the lone woman in the group. “Hi.” He nodded. “Nice to meet you, but I’m not looking for a good time. I’m still getting my legs under me here in the development. Brandon assumed he knows what I’m thinking.”

One of the men ushered Brandon aside. Len stayed out of the way. He refused to get involved in a spat.

Elise bumped shoulders with him. “I’m sorry.”

“It’s okay.” He smiled. “As you can guess, I’m new.”

“I figured it out by the way Brandon held on to you.” She laughed. Her blue eyes sparkled and she had pale streaks of lavender in her hair. She sighed. “What brings you to Cedarwood?”

“My son. He’s a doctor.” Oh God. He sounded like an old person. “I wanted to be close to him and his husband.” Yep, he sounded old.

“Nice.” She tucked a lock of her hair behind her ear. “Is he at the hospital?”

“He works in the emergency room. Dr. Connor. Aiden.” He had to learn to talk to people again.

“I don’t know him, but I try not to visit the ER.” She bobbed her head. “I try not to get hurt, either.”

“Smart.” He hated small talk. “Since Aiden and his husband, Matt, live here, I thought I’d come back. Cissy doesn’t care where we live as long as there’s a big couch and space on the bed.”

“Is Cissy your wife?” She crinkled her forehead. “I hope she’s actually a dog. Making someone live on the couch sounds odd.”

“My dog. I met her when I volunteered at the shelter in Springdale. She was there for a long time and I couldn’t pass her up.” He loved talking about Cissy. “She’s older, but you’d never know it looking at her.”

“The older ones, the ones with nuances, are the best. I met my cat, Grover, that way. He’s missing an eye. Almond, my dog, came from a breeder,” she said. “I adopt, but she was going to be put down because she was too old to breed. Made me mad, so I adopted her on the spot. Been the best decision ever.”

“Good for you.” And the dog.

“She’s twelve and going on six. I’ll bet she’d love Cissy,” Elise said. “Almond and I volunteer at the shelter here in Cedarwood. Stone, he runs the shelter, doesn’t turn any animal away and doesn’t put any one down. I’ll give you his number if you’d like to volunteer. We can always use more people.”

“I’d love to help out.” He nodded. Cissy would love having new dog friends to visit.

“Really?” she asked. “We get a lot of people who claim to love volunteering, but once they do it a while, they realize they don’t really love it.”

“I volunteered for five years in Springdale. I used to go over to the shelter when I had rough days in court and after I split from my then-boyfriend.” Len stuffed his hands into his pockets. “The dogs are great therapy animals—even if they don’t have the label. They helped me get through the rough times. Cissy has been the best.”

“Good.” She handed him a card. “Call Stone. He’ll like you.”

“Thanks.” He’d call on the next day the shelter was open. He yawned. “I’m heading out. It’s been a long day of moving and we’re not done.”

“We’re? Is there a boyfriend in the mix?” She grinned. “I hope so.”

“No. My son and Matt helped. The hired moving men will come tomorrow with the majority of my stuff,” Len said. “I didn’t want to burden Aiden and Matt with everything. They’ve got enough on their plate.”

“Understandable,” Elise said. “Since it appears you’re single, don’t let Brandon fool or spook you. He’s always on the prowl. He can’t settle down and doesn’t want to. He wants a good time. If that’s not what you want, then don’t even try with him.”

“Noted, but I hadn’t planned on it. He sort of attached himself to me.” He had his eye on someone else, but that someone wasn’t interested, so he’d be happy being single.

“As long as you know what Brandon’s up to, you’ll be fine.” She patted his arm. “If you yawn again, I’ll get a complex. Go home and rest. You deserve it. See you around.”

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“See you and thanks.” He left without looking back or hunting for Brandon. He’d rather not have contact with him again. Bone-deep weariness had set in and Cissy probably wanted to go out.

Len walked back to his condo. He’d said he didn’t mind being alone—save for the dog—but it wasn’t the truth. He missed having a boyfriend. The nights were still chilly, despite the change in the spring air, and he hated having an empty bed.

One day, he’d find Mr. Right. Hopefully, Mr. Right would turn into Mr. Forever.

* * * *

The next morning, Len willed the dull ache behind his eyes to go away. The movers had arrived and he directed traffic. He’d planned out every aspect of where he wanted things, yet he wasn’t happy. Once the truck had been emptied, he headed out to the front lawn for a breath of fresh air and to clear his mind. He’d have to buy a few things to round out the design he’d prepared for the condo, but he’d ask Aiden to help choose the new end tables.

“Having a garage sale? Those are only on Thursdays, Fridays and Saturdays during the months of May through August.” Brandon strode up to him. “You should really read the by-laws.”

“I’m sorry?” Len massaged his temples. “I’m moving.”

“How silly of me. Of course you are.” Brandon folded his arms. “So, Cedarwood and the Majestic Complex are gay-friendly. Sometimes it doesn’t seem like it, but they

are. If you want to straight troll, go to Club 51. It just opened three months ago, but it's good for picking up dates. The cowboy club—I forget the name—is good if you have a cowboy fetish. The Steakery has the best beefy guys, but it's five miles out of town. I prefer Purple. The club scene there is the best.”

Len let Brandon chatter on while he pointed to the chart and directed the movers. He didn't need advice on where to troll. Jesus. He didn't want to hunt for a date. Not today or in the near future. Besides, he knew Cedarwood. He wasn't versed in the club scene, but it didn't matter.

“Where do you go to get guys?” Brandon asked.

So high school. “I'm still getting adjusted after the move, but I know Cedarwood. My son lives here and I used to years ago. My son is a doctor at the hospital and his husband owns a body shop.”

“Body shop?” Brandon's eyes lit up. “Is that a new club?”

“No, he works on cars.”

“Oh.” This time, Brandon frowned.

“Thanks, though.” He should concentrate on helping the movers.

“Want to get together? Wine? My place?” Brandon asked.

This guy wasn't letting up. “How about coffee some time? Not soon. I'm still getting the condo together, but I hear the Brew is good.” It was a nice, safe public place, too.

“How about eight tonight? I'll see you then.” Brandon, seemingly placated, strolled away without giving Len a chance to argue.

Len gritted his teeth. What a strange guy. He craved attention and seemed nice enough, but was a tad too needy for Len's taste. Brandon probably wouldn't get along with Aiden and Matt, either.

Oh well. He had a job to do—arranging his home.

Len spent the next six hours moving his things and unpacking.

"It's starting to shape up, Ciss." He petted the dog. "I miss our old condo, but I see potential here."

She barked, then climbed onto the bed. Len sighed. He loved the dog, but he missed having someone to hold him. Someone to listen when he wanted to talk. The dog was good company, but he needed a man.

"I need to run to the store or we won't have dinner. Hold down the fort?" He petted Cissy. "I'll be right back."

Len locked up, then drove to the supermarket. As he walked through the aisles, he picked up items he and Cissy would need for the week. He turned down the spice aisle and stopped short. The man at the other end sure looked like his doctor and crush. Isaac? No. Isaac McLean couldn't be there. He'd moved practices, but Len wasn't sure where to. He busied himself with choosing a brand of cinnamon, but watched the man. If he wasn't Isaac, then he sure looked like the family doctor.

Len ignored the pull toward him and forced himself to the register. Part of him wondered if Isaac would ever look at him as anything besides a patient and the friend of his son.

He headed out to the car and tried to clear his head. Maybe he needed sex. Maybe he needed a date. What did he know? If he got laid, he'd forget his crush on Dr. Isaac

McLean.

Maybe.

Chapter Two

Isaac stood at the end of the aisle and watched Len leave the store. He should've spoken to him, but damn, he couldn't shake his case of the nerves. He knew Len. He'd seen the man naked and taken care of him for the last five years. But when he needed to be strong, he hesitated. Damn it.

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He wished he'd spent more time with Len over the years and talked about his desires. He'd have crossed one hell of a line, but Len had seemed interested and worth it. Len, despite having had a stroke, had aged well, looked good, was handsome and, while he might be a little older than Isaac, age was just a number. The electricity between them had been strong. Maybe it could be again.

Dorian, Isaac's friend and former housemate, tugged on his arm. "Hey."

"Yeah." He focused on his friend. "Yes."

"Are you okay?" Dorian waved his hand in front of Isaac's face. "Did you see a ghost?"

"No." He pushed the cart. "I'm okay." He wasn't, but he didn't want to discuss his crush with Dorian. Not right now.

"Are you sure?" Dorian walked beside him. "You seemed spooked."

"I'm fine." Liar. God. Why couldn't he be honest? If he had, maybe he'd be with Len right now, not ogling him.

"Right," Dorian said, drawing out the word. "You don't fib well."

"What?" He continued to push the cart. "I'm okay." He was lonely, but that wasn't a shock. Now that he lived in Cedarwood, he was living alone for the first time in four years. He'd opted to move forward when he'd been offered a partnership in the Cedarwood Family Practice. He liked the new staff and building so far.

“Are you sure you want to live here? This town is odd,” Dorian said. “We’re getting stared at.”

“We are?” He hadn’t noticed.

“Yeah. There was that older guy, then a couple and the silver fox. That guy was hot.” Dorian selected a box of baking soda. “Do we stick out that much?”

“No—well, you do. You’ve got pink hair and nail polish.” Dorian loved to gender bend. He worked his look well, though. He knew how to pair pink with combat boots and make it seem effortless. “I’ve always envied your ability to wear polish and makeup with a beard.”

“It’s a gift.” Dorian read the back of a package of chocolate chips. “I’m happy and that’s what matters. Are you happy here?”

“Sure.” He drummed the handle of the cart. “I wanted to move here.”

“Well, whatever. If you’re happy, then I am, too.” Dorian picked up one of the bags of chocolate chips.

“Of course you’re happy. You’re the one with the boyfriend and no cares in the world.” He hated to be jealous of Dorian, but he’d been single for too long. “How is Aziz?”

“Good. He’s still working on his doctorate, but he loves his politics.” Dorian sighed and picked invisible lint from his leather jacket. “I wish he’d finish. When he ever graduates, he’ll be up to his eyeballs in debt, but he’ll be able to work. I can’t imagine how he’ll ever get out of that student loan debt.”

“I’m guessing he doesn’t know, either.” Isaac pushed the cart to the refrigerated

section. “You said you needed butter.”

“I do.”

“Is he going to be upset you came over tonight?” Isaac asked. Aziz could be clingy and jealous when he thought Dorian might be stepping out. Isaac and Dorian would never be more than friends, but that hadn’t stopped Aziz from worrying.

“No. He’s doing a radio show tonight in Lexington. I wasn’t invited and didn’t want to go,” Dorian said. “I don’t care about political opinions.” He held up his hand and waved the box of stick butter. “I take that back. I care, but I don’t want to debate political opinions. I have mine and I’m willing to listen to yours, but I don’t want to argue about it. He loves to argue.”

“Well, you care about him.” He steered the cart to the registers. Once there, he placed the items on the belt. “Here. You ring these and I’ll bag. I brought bags.”

“Sure.” Dorian pinged each item. “I care about him, but he’s been pulling away.”

Shit. He didn’t want to hear that. He’d thought Dorian and Aziz were tight. “I’m sorry.”

“It’s not good, but it’s okay. He still won’t move in with me and I’m not sure it’d work if he did. We’re good on paper and in bed, but he’s not marriage material and he’s not interested in focusing on one relationship.”

“Ouch.” He’d thought they might tie the knot. “I missed those signs.”

“He’d rather live at the college,” Dorian said. “I’d love for him to teach, but he thinks he could make a career out of being on those political shows. He wants to say he’s a professor and live on campus, so he can look important. I think he won’t live with me

because he's got a slew of guys on the side."

"He knows politics, but if he's sleeping around..." He tapped the screen. "Done?"

"Done." Dorian placed the bags in the cart. "Aziz wants to be famous. Ever since that guy told him he was a fan, all Aziz could talk about was being on television."

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“I suppose that’s good for him, but it’s not for a relationship.” He paid the bill. “Do you want a break? From him?” He wasn’t a good person to give dating advice, but he could listen.

“I want a break from Aziz, sort of. I love him, but I can’t do the drama.” Dorian pushed the cart through the sliding doors. “Why can’t guys we find want to settle down or at least sleep with just us, not everyone at the same time?”

“Luck of the draw?” Isaac followed Dorian to the car. “You can stay over tonight.”

“I’ll be okay—if you will.” Dorian elbowed him. “I’d like to meet a lawyer—not you—or maybe a banker. Someone with a good job, steady home life, and he has to be hot. What do you want?”

“I don’t know any longer.” He had an idea. Isaac loaded the bags into the trunk. “Do you ever wonder if you made the right choices?”

“About?”

“Life.” He pushed the cart into the cart return. “I thought coming here would be good for me. A new start. All I can think is that I made the wrong decision.”

“So meeting Aiden was a bad thing?” Dorian joined him in the car.

“No.” Maybe. “He’s married. There isn’t a chance I’d get with him ever.”

“Okay, so nothing’s possible with him. Big deal.” Dorian fiddled with the radio as

Isaac left the parking lot. “Don’t you want to work at the new place? It’s bigger and you have your own receptionist. That’s huge.”

“I do.” He worried his patients wouldn’t follow him. He’d let them all know he’d moved, and a few had scheduled appointments, but that didn’t quell his nervousness. “I’m scared I’ll realize I should’ve stayed where I was.”

“Because it was a rut.” Dorian selected a radio station, then turned to Isaac. “Honey, we go where we go for a reason. Even when we think we’re in control, we aren’t. We’re where we should be because we’re supposed to be there.”

“Are you done being a motivational poster?” He sped across town to his apartment. “I don’t need that much of a pep talk.” Okay, maybe I do.

“I’m done,” Dorian said. “But that pep talk was for me, too. I’m over here worrying about a man who doesn’t give a shit about me. We’re apart for a reason. He knows what he’s doing and I’m letting him do it. I need to stick up for myself.”

“Dorian.” His friend was right. Dorian needed to stop being a doormat for Aziz.

“I’m not interested in worrying about him. Let’s go to your awesome apartment that could be bigger and make cookies. I’m at my best when I’m baking.”

“And yet you’re an accountant.” He turned in to his parking garage. “But you’re good at baking.” Part of Isaac worried about Dorian. His friend wasn’t good on his own. No matter how many times he told Dorian he was a perfectly good catch, Dorian chased after the next guy to come along.

But Dorian was an adult and could handle himself.

As Dorian left the car, Isaac considered his own situation. He had no boyfriend, a

good job, no relationship prospects, no real desire to look for a partner, but a lot of energy for complaining about his nonexistent relationship status. He did have a burning crush on an older man and the confounding need to snag him instead of settling for someone else.

Not good.

Maybe alone was his best bet.

* * * *

Two nights later, Len managed to suffer through the coffee date with Brandon. He had better things to do on a Monday evening, but he couldn't get Brandon to give him space otherwise. The more Brandon talked, the more Len lost interest. He wasn't big on chatty, needy men.

Tuesday morning, he sat on the front porch of his condo and sipped his coffee. He read through the paper and basked in the first warm morning of the spring. He loved coffee on the porch.

A man jogged down the sidewalk and Len considered the scene. He needed to get back into running. He'd let his exercise regimen get slack during the move. Cedarwood had a swim park. He'd have to get a membership and get back into swimming laps.

His thoughts turned from swimming to Isaac. His doctor had told him that swimming and running were good for him. For a moment, he wondered if the jogger could be Isaac. Nah. Isaac wouldn't live in this kind of development. He'd have a big house and a hot boyfriend. Still, that didn't mean he couldn't ogle the jogger's ass. He admired the bit of jiggle with each step. He had enough to grab and looked hot in those running pants. Heat rushed to Len's groin. Shit. He needed to rub one off or have a

one-nighter. No, he needed a lover, not a fuck buddy.

Another jogger came down the sidewalk. As soon as Len spotted the second runner, he knew the man.

Brandon.

“Hi.” Brandon jogged up his lawn. “Didn’t expect to see you out this morning. We were out late last night.”

“I was home by eight.” He should be nice. “How’s the run?”

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“Good. I need to get in one more mile.” Brandon stretched and twisted in front of Len.

“Better get it done.” He smiled. “Good luck.”

“I’m due for a break.” Brandon rolled his shoulders. Sweat trickled down his neck. “Are you done moving?”

“For now.” He’d make changes. He always did. Ross would’ve thrown a fit and claimed Len was never happy. So I’m picky. So what?

“You should come with me for a run.” Brandon opened the top on the little water pack he’d wrapped around his hand. He drank a bit and smacked his lips. “Do you run?”

“I do.” He needed to get back into it, but he’d rather have a different partner.

“Why don’t you join me?” Brandon asked. “I’d love a new running partner.”

“I’m more of a lone wolf.” He stood on the porch. Cissy came to the door and barked. “I should go. Cissy wants out and she’s still not sure about you. Better get that last mile in.” He waved. “Besides, she wants to go for a walk and I need to clean up the porch first.”

“She can come along.” Brandon downed more water. “Did you enjoy the mixer? Our date last night? I had a great time.”

“It was nice.” How else could he say he wasn’t interested, and be delicate about it?

“Are you planning on going to any of those clubs?” Brandon asked. “Want a tagalong?”

“I’m still settling in.” He wasn’t interested in clubbing.

“Ah, well, when you do, I should warn you. There were things I didn’t mention last night.”

“We talked about a lot.” Well, Brandon had talked and Len had done a lot of listening.

“Well, first thing...I’m debating starting a dating group for the LGBTQ community. There is an LGBTQ support group. Why can’t there be one devoted to dating? I think it would be nice to know who’s looking for a partner and who wants to play,” Brandon said.

Len wasn’t a fan of the idea, but some might get positive aspects out of it. “If it makes you happy.”

“It does,” Brandon said. “There are so many pitfalls to dating. That’s the other thing. There are some great people in Cedarwood, but there are also some real duds.”

“Duds?” Weren’t those kinds everywhere?

“Yeah. One of the duds is Sidney Taylor. He’s a nice guy, but he’s not interested in settling down. He’s been engaged four times to three different guys,” Brandon said.

“I see.” He had no idea who Sidney was, but he let Brandon continue talking. The more he thought about it, the name did sound familiar, but he wasn’t sure where he

remembered it from.

“Then there’s Patrick Smoot. Sweet man, but the tattoos. He’s inked all over. He’s so handsome, but the art is everywhere and he’s pierced. Why do people do that to themselves? Why ruin your body?” Brandon flicked his empty hand. “I don’t understand it.”

“My son-in-law is tatted and it looks distinguished on him,” Len said. “But to each their own.” He wasn’t a fan of ink, but that was his preference. On someone else, tats looked nice.

“Uh-huh.” Brandon narrowed his eyes. “You said your son is a doctor? Yes?”

“Dr. Connor.” So?

“Does he know Dr. Isaac McLean? He’s the new doctor at Cedarwood Family Practice. Just got his name on the sign. I heard he’s taking patients,” Brandon said. “He’s out and handsome, but aloof. He’s been in town for three or four months, but doesn’t date anyone. He’s always got that guy with him.”

“I know Dr. McLean. He’s a nice man and a good doctor,” Len said. “He helped when I had my stroke.”

“A stroke?” Brandon’s eyes widened. “No way. I can’t tell you’ve had problems.”

He hadn’t had many, but when he opened his mouth to correct him, Brandon continued talking.

“Well, Isaac has been seeing that man, Dorian, who is involved with a guy named Aziz. Any man who has to date guys who are already in a relationship is bad news. He’s not worth my time,” Brandon said.

Ah, so he must've rejected Brandon or ignored him. "You know, it could be a threesome." He doubted that very much, but he liked confounding Brandon.

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“Threesome? Jesus Christ. You’re more progressive than I ever thought.” Brandon clicked his tongue. “I didn’t think you’d know what a threesome is.”

“I’m old, but not ancient.”

“You’re open-minded.”

“It happens.” Len shrugged. “So what?”

“Well, I’m not dating someone who sleeps with someone who’s already attached.” Brandon shook his head. “Anyway, Isaac is bad news, so keep your eyes open.”

“Will do.” He smiled and stepped back toward the door. “Better get that mile in or you won’t do it.”

“Good idea. I should go.” Brandon waved. “I’ll find you so we can run together.”

He nodded but said nothing. Good God. He waited for Brandon to round the block before he went inside with Cissy. He needed to go to the bank and talk to the loan officers about making a balloon payment on his condo loan. He’d finally sold the house in Springdale and could almost pay off the new loan. “Ciss, I’ll be right back. I might even bring you home a surprise.”

He tucked his keys, phone, wallet and papers for the bank into his leather case. He should stop by the hardware store for lightbulbs. The one on the front porch had burned out and he preferred to bathe the front yard in light after sundown.

He checked the doors were locked and Cissy had a chew bone, then headed out to the garage. He crawled behind the wheel of his compact car. Once the garage door opened, he backed down the driveway. He closed the door, then drove through the development to the main drag of Cedarwood. He didn't see Brandon and relaxed. Holy shit, the man can talk. Five minutes later, he pulled into the lot behind the bank.

Len gathered his things and headed inside. He spotted Rachel, his favorite teller. "Hi. I'm here to see Mr. Taylor about my loan."

"Yes." Rachel nodded. "I saw you on the schedule. He's finishing up with another account, but it shouldn't be much longer. Can I do something for you while you wait?"

"I'm fine, thank you." He tapped his keys on the counter. "Is Mr. Taylor running behind?" He hated when people overbooked themselves.

"Sidney? I'm not sure." She rounded the counter and held up her hand. "I can't tell, but it shouldn't be too long. How's Aiden?"

"Good. He and Matt helped me move. I'm so glad because I never realized how much stuff I have," Len said. "Oh, and they got a new puppy. They're up to three dogs. Can you imagine? All three of them get along, though." He chuckled. "I'd love to get another dog. I think Cissy is lonely when I go away."

"Then take Cissy to the shelter and have her help you pick out a companion."

"I have an appointment to visit the shelter later today. Stone wants to meet me before he lets me volunteer. I don't mind," Len said. "I'd rather be safe than sorry. Cissy never got along with my ex, but he was hard to deal with anyway."

“I’m sorry to hear that,” Rachel said. “She’s a sweet dog.”

“She’ll like knowing you said that.” He glanced over his shoulder and spotted the people leaving Mr. Taylor’s office. His heart lodged in his throat. He knew one of the men—Isaac. He turned away. If Isaac was there with someone, then he must be the boyfriend. It wasn’t Len’s business to be nosy. Besides, he didn’t want to see them together. He hated himself for lusting after his damn doctor.

The sound of Isaac’s voice sent shivers down Len’s spine. He shouldn’t be drawn to Isaac. Oh well. He’d have yet another unrequited love. Not the first time.

Isaac was too young for him and wouldn’t be interested in dating one of his former patients. So why punish himself?

Because I like Dr. Isaac McLean.

Chapter Three

Isaac clapped Dorian on the back and followed him out of the office. His friend had finally created his own financial plan. Dorian deserved to be happy and not feel guilty for being single.

He scanned the main room of the bank before he left and noticed the man at the counter.

Len Connor.

Len was in Cedarwood? He’d thought he’d seen Len at the store, but now he knew for certain. His former patient was in town. He stared at Len. Part of him wanted to talk to him. They’d had chemistry—even if only through conversations. He wanted to have another chat with Len and see if the electricity could happen again. The rest of

him didn't want to torture himself if Len wasn't interested. For all he knew, Len had been acting nice until he left the doctor's office and hating him behind his back.

He followed Dorian out of the bank. If Len was in town, he didn't have to speak to Isaac. Yes, he'd gone to him as a patient, but Isaac was Aiden's age. Len might want someone closer to his own age.

He strolled over to Dorian's car. He had to get Len out of his mind.

"It was him," Dorian said. He slid behind the wheel. "I know it."

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“What?” He joined Dorian in the front seat.

“That was Len. I heard the teller say his name. She told Sid there was a Mr. Connor waiting to see him.” Dorian turned to Isaac. “I heard Len mention something about the animal shelter. You might try going there and accidentally running into him. Whatever you do, you need to decide soon. If you like him, then tell him. Tell Aiden. If either guy is stand-up, then they’ll talk to you, too. I know things with Aiden didn’t happen the way you wanted, but that’s not a loss, is it? He might be upset that you never said anything, but he’s married. He might encourage you to date his father.”

He doubted those things, but whatever.

“You’ll never know what could happen if you don’t try.” Dorian left the parking lot. “Since you’re not listening to me, do you need me to take you to the office?”

“I do.” He’d heard everything, but he didn’t want to think about Len for a moment. His heart ached too much. Each heated glance, the conversations that had lasted too long, the innocent touches that had sent electricity through his veins and the desire that had blossomed in his chest were too hard to ignore. He sighed and scrubbed his hand across his mouth.

“Do you want me to park next to your car? Or are you going inside?” Dorian asked.

“I need to head inside.” He rubbed the space between his eyebrows. “Thanks.”

“I appreciate you being a reference. I’m terrible at financial decisions,” Dorian said. “You saved my ass.”

“No problem.” He said nothing as Dorian pulled up to the staff door of the office.
“Thank you.”

“Welcome, but for what? I didn’t do anything but drag you to the bank.” Dorian stared at him a moment. “For what it’s worth, you need to stop beating yourself up. Aiden moved on. Nick, your ex, moved on. You deserve to be happy. Why don’t you give this guy a chance?”

“Because Len is Aiden’s dad.” He hadn’t told Dorian that.

“So?”

He and Aiden hadn’t dated, but that didn’t mean he’d want Isaac to date his father.
“It’d be awkward.”

“How do you know? You’re an adult—not a kid. You’ve matured and you should be happy. You should give this guy a chance,” Dorian said. “You might be missing out on your happiness.”

His faith in himself waned, not that he had much to begin with. “Thanks. I’ll keep that in mind.”

“Since you won’t listen to me, why don’t you find a boy toy for an evening and fuck his brains out?” Dorian shrugged. “Or find me one.”

“You have no trouble finding boyfriends or guys to fuck.” He opened the car door. “I need to get to work. If you need help again, just holler.”

“I will,” Dorian said. “If you don’t tell Len you’re interested, I will.”

“Thanks. Bye.” He closed the car door. He loved Dorian like a brother, but Jesus, the

man could push.

Isaac walked into the office and debated what to do next. He needed to check in with his receptionist, look at his calendar for the next day and learn how to use the apps on his new tablet. He'd never done his appointments via an app, so he had a lot to learn. He stopped in his office first and turned on the light.

Elise, his receptionist, strolled down the hallway. "Dr. McLean. Good. I needed to speak with you." She stepped into his office. "You've got your tablet, yes?"

"The one connected only to the records and charts, yes." He shuffled through his bag and produced the tablet. "Ready."

"Good." She tapped the screen. "All of your appointments are here. You can check the schedule at any time—whether you're here or not. You can only access the patient records while on the property. The charts are here along with the records. You can also access them on the laptops in each exam room, too. If you type information into either the laptop or the tablet, it all ends up in the same place."

"Very good." At least the programs were easy to understand.

"Your first patients are lined up for the morning. I've given you some of Dr. Earle's former patients as well, since they're wanting to stay with the practice. Your first appointment is at nine," Elise said. "I have a couple questions."

"Sure." He sat on the edge of his desk. "I'm an open book."

"I'm told you're gay."

"I am." He stared at her. In the dim light, the streaks in her hair weren't as visible, but her eyes sparkled more. He liked her and her forthright approach. "Will that be a

problem?”

“No.” She shook her head. “Actually, I heard you’re single, too.”

Jesus. “I am. Does everyone know and is it that big of a deal?”

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“You’re the topic of gossip around the front desk. Everyone wants to work for you because you’re young, handsome and new.” Elise shrugged. “I don’t care who you love or what you do.”

“Oh.” He frowned. “Thanks?” Should I be thrilled?

“I’m not being catty.”

“Just blunt,” he said. “Are you planning on fixing me up? That seems to be a theme in my life. Everyone wants to fix me up with someone. I don’t need a date.”

“Oh, God, no.” She snorted. “I was going to suggest you visit the animal shelter and adopt a dog or cat.”

“Adopt...uh, why?” He hadn’t considered bringing a pet into his household.

“First, you’re a nice guy and handsome, but you seem lonely. If you got a dog, then you could work him into the conversation with the patients. If you walk him around town and are seen doing so, then people will feel less threatened by your somewhat cold attitude. Plus, having a dog means people want to chat. It opens the lines of communication.”

“This is the first time I’ve ever been nudged into adopting a pet—for my career.” Although he wished he’d figured it out before now. People liked dogs. He liked them.

“A pet will give you something to focus on when you aren’t here. I know it’s not my business, but I’ve seen enough doctors and practitioners come through here that

aren't focused on their job," she said. "They're scattered."

"You're right." He hadn't thought about his life as scattered, but she'd pegged him correctly. He had no direction beyond going to work. "I appreciate the suggestion."

"Well, good." She patted his arm. "As for the people in Cedarwood, most of them don't care if you're gay, but they sure as hell want to know you're an animal person. Cat, dog, bird. Doesn't matter."

"I see." He rubbed his chin. She made a lot of sense. He preferred not to be lonely and this was a good reason to consider adopting a pet.

"But if you happen to meet a cute volunteer there..." She elbowed him. "It wouldn't be bad."

"Cute volunteer? I'm not a kid." He didn't need her setting him up.

She rolled her eyes. "I bet you're a catch."

"Now you're trying to fix me up—the one thing I didn't want you to do."

"No, I'm one of the volunteers at the shelter and I want to see a shelter pet adopted." She paused. "And no, I'm not looking for a husband. I had one and he passed. I don't want to train another."

"Smart." He respected her even more for her honesty.

"If you need any help, let me know. I've got to get back to the desk. See you tomorrow?" she asked. "I'm your lead receptionist, but that desk is always swamped."

“I’ll bet.” He walked her to the door. “Thank you. If I have questions, I know where to find you.”

“You bet.” She patted the door, then left.

He sank onto his office chair. He’d moved his stuff in the week before, but still hadn’t wrapped his head around his choice to switch practices. He wasn’t young and inexperienced. He needed roots. Christ. He was thirty-nine years old and still looking good, but not involved with anyone. He had his hair—no grays and no extra pounds on his frame. He considered himself smart and he had a steady career. He loved Springdale, but there had to be possibilities in Cedarwood, right?

He checked his patient roster. Len’s name wasn’t on it. God, he had to get a hold of himself. He’d seen Len in town. Maybe Len would want to be his patient again. They’d have the chance to talk.

He scrubbed his hands over his face. He needed to get a grip. If he didn’t want to be lonely, then he needed to either go out to the clubs or adopt a dog and live his life. Something had to give and he swore it had to be him.

* * * *

“Time for walkies.” Len opened the dog kennel and fixed the leash on the collie. He patted her head. “I have the feeling you’re going to be adopted soon.” He led the dog out to the walking yard and made ten laps through the grass. He loved his new volunteer job at the Cedarwood animal shelter. He’d been there as a volunteer for the last month and loved every second. There weren’t a bunch of dogs currently in the kennels, but there were too many cats. He wished he could adopt all the animals, but he wasn’t in any position to be the crazy dog and cat guy. Cissy stood at the doorway to the building and watched him.

“Sorry, Ciss. I’ll walk you next.” He led the collie back into the shelter and to her kennel. “Sorry, girl,” he said to the collie. “Your forever parents will come. I know they will.” He patted his hip. “Come on, Cissy. Time to make the rounds.” He marveled at her ability to mingle with the dogs at the shelter. She seemed to come alive when she visited, with an instinct for which dog needed comfort. He wished he could be as much of a busy bee as his dog.

He rounded the corner to check on the dogs in the last row and noticed a man walking down the corridor between the kennels. Isaac. If he didn’t sac up, he’d never speak to his former doctor. “Isaac? Hey...good to see you.” He sure hoped the man was Isaac or he’d just made an ass of himself. He’d spent a fair amount of time with Isaac, but he still wasn’t sure of himself around the doctor. He’d seen him at the store and the bank, but what if Isaac didn’t want to talk to him?

“Len.” Isaac grinned. “How are you? You look good. How are you feeling? Are you taking care of yourself? You look like you are.”

Man, the guy had used the word you a lot. He chuckled. “I’m great. I’m eating right and exercising. I volunteer here and at the library. I started swimming again.” He puffed out his chest, proud of himself. “I feel ten years younger.”

“Are you seeing anyone?”

“Isaac?” The question knocked him for a loop. He hadn’t expected to hear it from Isaac. Was he interested? Nah. Isaac probably had a boyfriend. A handsome doctor like him shouldn’t want for a date. Still, the question sounded genuine. Would it be bad if Isaac was serious?

“I remember you were seeing a man I thought wasn’t good for your health.” Isaac leaned on the doorway to the kennel area. “He seemed to stress you out.”

“Ross, and yes, he was a pain in my ass. He’s also history.” He laughed. Less stress meant less of a chance of having another stroke. Perfect for him. He swept his gaze over Isaac. Len had always thought the good doctor was handsome, and his son, Aiden, should’ve snapped him up. He’d never asked why they hadn’t gotten together. It wasn’t his business to know.

“Why are you laughing?” Isaac asked.

He gathered his breath. “For a second, I thought you were asking me out. Like you were interested in me.” He laughed again. “Wow. I laughed too hard. My ribs hurt.” And he was hiding his true feelings. Part of him wanted to be asked out by a handsome younger man.

“Oh.” Isaac’s cheeks reddened and he pushed off the doorframe. “Yeah, I’m just checking on your health.” He chuckled.

If Len wasn’t mistaken, he’d just offended Isaac. Shit. He had to fix the situation but

wasn't sure how. "I'm glad someone cares about me." Did that sound silly? God. At fifty-nine, he still wasn't good with dating.

"Aiden doesn't check?" Isaac's eyes widened.

"No, he does." Fucking hell. Now he'd really stepped in it. "He and his husband, Matt, make sure we get together every weekend. We have dinner and take the dogs out for playtime. I hooked them up with the perfect dog from the shelter here." He toyed with the door of the closest empty kennel. "If you're looking for a dog, then follow my pup, Cissy. She knows how to pair people with dogs. Plus, she's good at finding the one dog who needs someone most. She's a sweet girl and loves everyone."

"That's cool. She's pretty." Isaac petted Cissy. "You're a pretty girl. I'm surprised no one has tried to adopt you."

"Oh, they do. Every other day, I have to explain she's not available."

Isaac wagged his head. "I've got a cat, but Ollie needs a friend."

"Is he a dog kind of cat?"

"He thinks he's a dog." Isaac's blush faded a bit. "I think he'd like a medium-sized dog to play with. I adopted him from one of the receptionists. He didn't get along with her other cats and he's not a bad guy. He's just misunderstood. Personally, I think he's lonely. I've had him about three weeks and he's a clingy cat. I'm not home much, so I thought a smaller dog—something that won't intimidate him size-wise—might be good."

"It might." He toyed with Cissy's leash. He hadn't hooked it onto her but he should. Instead, he thought about the dogs in the shelter. Who would be good for Isaac? "I've got an older boy back here... We've named him Stan, but I'm guessing you'll come

up with something better. He's probably who you're looking for. Let's see who Cissy picks."

She led Isaac over to Stan's kennel. The dog whimpered. Len opened the door and petted Stan. "This guy is a sweet older man who needs a caring owner to love him. Stan is Cissy's buddy. She knows how to comfort him." He turned his attention to Stan. "Hey, guy. Did you miss Cissy?"

She scooted around Len and cuddled up to Stan. The hound dog stayed beside her, but sniffed Isaac's hand.

"Want to go for a walk?" Len asked. He'd already walked Stan for the day, but hey, freedom was freedom. Cissy perked up and Stan wiggled. Len offered the leash to Isaac. "Might as well get used to him. I think he likes you."

Isaac held out his hand. Stan sniffed him again and didn't back away.

"That's a good start. He's not cowering." Len smiled. "Let's walk." He patted his hip for Cissy, then navigated through the shelter to the fenced-in run. "Let Stan get used to being with you on the leash. Since there aren't any other dogs out here, you'll be allowed to let him run with Cissy after a bit."

"He doesn't strike me as a Stan, but I kind of like the name." Isaac petted Stan. "It seems right, but I'm not sure."

"I don't know. It would be cute with your cat, Ollie. Stan and Ollie?" He laughed. "It's kismet."

Isaac brightened. "Yeah. I guess so. I thought he was more of an Elvis, but I like Stan and Ollie."

“Then try walking him and see how he reacts.” Len stood back while Cissy romped around Stan.

Isaac allowed Stan to take the lead. They walked well together, and the more the dog moved, the happier he seemed to be. The spring had returned to his step, and his tongue lolled. Isaac chuckled. He met Len’s gaze. He seemed at ease with Stan too.

“What breed is he?” Isaac asked.

“We think he’s beagle, but we don’t have any idea what he’s mixed with. His longer fur makes me think his parents weren’t both beagles.” Len folded his arms and beamed. He loved putting animals and people together.

Isaac walked Stan over to Len. “I can’t leave him here. He seems so much happier since I sprung him.”

“I agree.”

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“You should bring Cissy over to play,” Isaac said. “I bet they’d have a ball.”

“I will.” He nodded. If he didn’t know any better, he’d think Isaac was using the long way to ask him out. Nah. “If you’re sure about Stan, we can go inside and do the paperwork. I’ll get his things and meet you in the conference room. The girls will take you and Stan in there to go over the papers and such. It gives you more space to play with him too.”

“No one is going to give me a hard sell to adopt the dog?”

“Nah. The conference room is laid out so you can play with the dog or cat while we’re getting your papers together.” Len shook hands with Isaac. His skin tingled from the touch. He sucked in a ragged breath and hoped he didn’t look nervous. He hadn’t felt giddy and confused like this with anyone in a while. Was it just Isaac? Or Len’s nonexistent libido finally coming out of hibernation?

“Oh. Sounds good.” Isaac stayed beside Len. “Thanks. You made this so easy. If I were left to my own devices, I’d end up adopting everyone.”

“I know. I’m the same way. That’s why I volunteer. I can see them all and make sure they go to good homes.” Len nodded, then opened the door for Isaac, Cissy and Stan.

“Smart.” Isaac ducked into the building. Stan happily trotted beside him.

Cissy followed them, leaving Len behind. Pride swelled within Len. He loved his volunteer jobs and the critters at the shelter. He made a difference. Being there kept him busy and healthy. Plus, he didn’t have to think about being lonely. “I’ll meet you

up front.”

Isaac waved. “Thanks.”

He stood just inside the building with Cissy. He shouldn’t look at Isaac with such longing, but he couldn’t help himself. He watched the sway of Isaac’s ass as he walked and the pull of the denim on Isaac’s hips. The T-shirt pulled across Isaac’s back like a second skin and showcased the muscle on his taut body. Oh, shit. Len couldn’t help how he felt—lonely, aroused, confused and longing for someone. Christ, he was too old for this. He had at least twenty years on Isaac. Besides, Isaac was probably with someone.

He shook his head. He needed to think about someone or something else besides Isaac and his luscious ass.

Chapter Four

Isaac filled out the last of the paperwork. Good grief. He’d dealt with less red tape and confusion at his office. Most of the questions could be done on a tablet and answered faster if they could be typed. The shelter would use less paper and maybe save money.

A girl strode into the room. “I’m glad you’ve adopted Stan. He’s been here a long time,” she said. “I thought Len would end up taking him home. Len must like you if he recommended Stan. He’s protective of the dogs...and cats.”

“He’s good with personalities,” Isaac said. Good with personalities? Oh boy. Who was he kidding? He’d wanted Len to notice him and wanted Len to see the veiled come-on as a blunt one.

“Uh-huh.” She finished the paperwork. “Let me get your tags and the file on Stan.”

She left him alone in the conference room.

He scooped Stan into his arms and petted the dog. He was glad he'd stopped at the shelter. Finding Stan was a boon. The dog was a good boy, and he needed someone as much as Isaac needed Stan.

He could imagine Len adopting Stan. The guy had a big heart. Len...He sighed. He should've been blunt with him. Should've come right out and said he liked him. They had chemistry. They fell into conversation easily, and the heat in his belly wasn't a fluke. He knew Len's age. For fifty-nine, the guy looked hot. Len took care of himself and kept busy. With the color back in his hair, he appeared easily to be ten years younger than his age.

But Len didn't seem remotely interested.

"Here you go." The girl returned and handed Isaac an envelope. "The tag, the veterinarian files we have, his shot records and your proof he's up to date on his rabies vaccinations are in there along with the license. You're ready." She patted Stan. "Good luck, pup. You've got a good one." She smiled, then turned her attention to Isaac. "You've got a good pup too."

"Thanks." He placed Stan on the floor. "Let's go, Stan." He stood while Stan shook and wagged his tail. He danced around Isaac's feet.

"He's so happy." She clapped. "I didn't think he'd ever brighten up. I'm so glad." She waved. "Bye, guys!"

"Thanks," he said again. Isaac led Stan through the building out to the parking lot. Len stood by his car and helped Cissy into the back seat of the compact vehicle.

His heart leaped and he ogled Len's ass. The jeans fit him well, and from a distance,

he seemed younger.

“Hi,” Isaac called. “Best decision ever.”

Len grinned. “Told you.” He rolled the windows down in the car. “It’ll be a little chaotic settling in, but it’ll work out.”

“I’m sure.” He wanted to say more, but he didn’t know what. “Do you ever go to Bark Place? The coffee shop for pets and people?” He’d never been to the coffee establishment, but that didn’t matter.

“Have you been there?” Len asked.

“No, I usually get my coffee from the hospital, and they never have good coffee. It’s strong and will keep you awake, but it doesn’t taste good.” Was he rambling? “Would you want to go tonight? Cissy and Stan seem to like each other and would enjoy going there. It might be a nice place to just talk.”

Len smiled. He didn’t speak right away and instead scratched Cissy behind the ears. He chuckled. “Why not?” He met Isaac’s gaze. “I’d like to. How about right now?”

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“Cool. I’ll meet you there in a little bit.” He placed Stan into the back seat of his car. He groaned. He should’ve bought one of those things that allowed him to buckle the dog in and keep him from getting hurt. But he hadn’t planned on getting a dog today. He’d thought he’d just look and think about it, then come back another day. So much for that plan...

Isaac drove to the coffee shop and kept glancing back at Stan on the seat. The dog stared out of the window and panted. Should he put the windows down more? What if Stan was a jumper? Damn, dogs were hard work. Not that being a doctor was easy. He pulled into a spot in front of the coffee shop. Within seconds, Len parked beside him.

Isaac left his vehicle and helped Stan out of the back, then met Len beside his car.

“I’ve always wanted to try this place.” Len clapped Isaac on the shoulder. “It’ll be a good way to end the day. Thanks.”

“Welcome.” His skin, despite the shirt in the way, tingled beneath Len’s touch. He fought the urge to lean in to Len.

Len ventured into the shop first. “Oh good, they’ve got tea.”

He almost asked what Len was talking about but didn’t. He couldn’t see the signboard or what the shop had on special... The only thing he saw was Len.

“What’ll you have?” Len elbowed Isaac. “Hey.” He waved his hand in front of Isaac’s eyes. “Are you in there? I was going to buy your drink.”

“Sorry.” Shit. He’d been caught not paying attention. “I’ll get a coffee. Don’t worry about it, but thank you for the offer.” He waited for Len to place his order, then stepped up to the counter. “Coffee. Black. Regular size.” He handed over the bills. “For Isaac.”

The guy behind the counter winked. “I’ll have it right up, hon.” He lowered his voice. “You’re sweet to bring Dad out for coffee.”

“Dad?” he blurted. “He’s a friend.”

The barista’s eyebrows rose. “Uh-huh. I’ll bring the drinks to your table.”

“Thanks.” He stuffed a couple of dollars into the jar, then went right to the table. His mind wandered. Would he have to deal with this kind of treatment if he dated Len? Would he have the courage to ask Len out? Christ, he wasn’t sure.

“Problem?” Len toyed with Cissy’s leash. “The kid behind the counter is spirited.”

“That’s one way to put it.” He sat opposite of Len. “He thought you were my father.”

“Damn.” Len snorted. “I thought the stuff I use to wash the gray away was working. Guess not.”

“It’s working, but I don’t think you have to use it. The silver fox look is very in and sexy.” He wasn’t ashamed to admit the truth.

“Isaac.” Len chuckled. “Aiden said I’d taken a few years off.”

“He’s right.” He wanted to run his fingers through Len’s hair and see if it was as soft as it looked.

The barista brought the cups over. “Enjoy.”

“Thanks,” Isaac muttered. He still wasn’t thrilled with the punk.

“Appreciated.” Len held up his paper cup. “Thank you.”

“Enjoy your date,” the barista said as he winked and turned on his heel.

“Date?” Len laughed and placed the cup back on the table. “Jesus. I’m twice your age.”

“No, you’re not.”

“You’re my son, Aiden’s, age,” Len said.

“I’m older. I’m thirty-nine.” His hands shook. Why was he so nervous? He glanced down at Stan. The pup was so comfortable, curled up with Cissy. He wished he could be so relaxed.

Len sipped on his tea. He watched Isaac. “You dated Aiden, didn’t you?”

“No, we were just friends.” He wasn’t ashamed to admit it. “We wouldn’t have worked out if we’d tried dating. Two doctors under one roof? You can’t have both people in charge. It doesn’t gel.”

“Aiden does like to keep things under control.” Len held on to his cup. “I’m too old for you.”

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“You’ve mentioned that, and I disagree. Chemistry doesn’t lie,” he said, unabashed. “I like you. I’d like to go for a date or three and see if the chemistry is real.” Holy shit. He’d done it. He’d admitted what he wanted.

“With me?” Len’s eyes widened. “I’m a little older than you. If we keep this going, you’ll get bored with me. You’ll want someone else.”

“We won’t know until we try.” He gripped the leash tight. “We might be great for each other.”

“But Aiden...what about him?”

“He won’t care.” He wasn’t sure about Aiden, but he doubted his friend would care if he dated his father. So Isaac and Aiden were around the same age... Aiden was happy with Matt. Why couldn’t Isaac be happy too?

“I don’t know.”

Isaac bit back a sigh. “It’s fine.” He should’ve guessed Len would be against them getting together. Isaac wasn’t awful, but not young. Why be with a forty-something when you can still score with a thirty-something?

“I’m not sure.” Len finished his tea. “Speaking of doctors, how are you doing? Since I don’t see you, I haven’t kept up on what you’re doing.”

“I moved into private practice and am specializing in geriatric medicine. You probably saw the building.” He sighed. Yeah, Len wasn’t interested. “Cedarwood

needs a few doctors who can service the older generations. I work with lower-income folks mostly.” This time he grinned. Working with the elderly made him happy, and he was proud of his growing practice.

“Nice. I hadn’t seen you at the hospital the last time I went in for a check-up.” Len smiled. “I try to stay away from the hospital, though. I like being healthy.”

“It’s a good thing to be healthy.” He swirled the coffee around in his cup. “Well, I should go. I want to get Stan acclimated to the house. Thanks for coming with me for coffee.” He stood, then paused. He embraced the streak of courage within him. “Look, I like you. I have since I first met you. I want a guy with experience. One who has been through life a bit more than me and knows what he wants. The salt-and-pepper look is sexy to me and those crinkles around your eyes are hot. Talk to Aiden. I have no idea what he’ll say, but I don’t care.”

“Wow. Okay.” Len sagged in his seat. He half-smiled. Instead of looking at Isaac, he averted his gaze.

Isaac sighed. His courage dipped, and now he knew the score. The interest wasn’t reciprocated. Damn. “Come on, Stan. We’re going home.” He hated the hasty retreat, but putting his heart out only to be stepped on wasn’t his idea of fun. He kept his head high and left the coffee shop. His dating skills were rusty. The nurses at his office reminded him of that daily. They’d laugh if they knew he’d tried and struck out. He helped Stan into the back seat, then left the lot. A man could only take so much and being stared at like he’d stepped off a Martian rocket sucked.

Isaac flipped through his good points on his mental list. He had a good sense of humor, liked people, wanted a companion rather than a date for the night...and loved sex. Now he even had a dog. Besides, he was a doctor. Didn’t that make him a catch?

He glanced at the reflection of Stan in the rear-view mirror. “Well, bud, it’s just us

and Ollie tonight. We're going to have a freaking blast."

Isaac groaned. He should've given Len time to answer, but he couldn't. He didn't want to listen to the explanation or rejection. He drove to the closest big box pet store and, with Stan beside him, purchased supplies for the dog. He tossed so many things into the cart... Stan probably didn't need all of them, but fuck it. Isaac didn't care.

"I've got my dog, my cat, and that's all I need." He scratched Stan behind the ears. Too bad he didn't believe his own words. He wanted the dog, the cat and the relationship...and to not be lonely.

* * * *

Friday night, Isaac paced the length of his living room. Ollie lay sprawled on the sofa and Stan was working on a bone on the floor. Although he had the animals, Isaac needed a diversion. He'd seen nearly fifty patients over the course of the week. His brain required rest. His body wanted recreation. The dog and cat were settled and getting along. If they were happy, why couldn't he be, too? He dialed Dorian's number. He'd had his share of eating cookies alone and working off the calories on his elliptical machine. He'd spoken with Len at the shelter and the sparks were still as strong as before. But he wasn't sure how to connect with Len. He couldn't keep adopting animals. Should he really ask Len if the dogs could get together for a pup playdate? Would that make him look odd for asking?

"Hello and yes, sir?" Dorian said. "What's happening? Are you bored?"

"Kind of." He sat on the arm of the overstuffed chair. "I'm getting cabin fever."

"It's only Friday night and you worked all week," Dorian said. "How could you get cabin fever if you're out and about?"

“I want to go out. Music, dancing. That’s what I need.” Anything without the sterile antiseptic scent.

“Or do you want to meet a new man?” Dorian asked. “Let me guess. You need a wingman.”

“No. I don’t want to go alone, though.” He hated clubbing solo. Every time he went out on his own, he made bad choices. Dorian knew how to rein him in. “You keep me out of trouble.”

“I try to.”

“You succeed. Please?” He’d only picked up his ex-fling, Alan, because he’d been on his own. He’d heard every one of Dorian’s protests, but he’d been determined to do something out of his ordinary. He scratched Ollie behind the ears. “We’ll have fun.”

“What time do you want me to pick you up?” Dorian asked.

“In an hour? I’ll drive.” The music and gyrating bodies had to keep his mind off his troubles.

“Fine. I’ll be ready,” Dorian said. “But I’m not hooking up with you.”

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“No? I never asked you to.” Dorian was like a sibling, not a lover.

“Aziz isn’t coming back. He went to Seattle with a man named Cliff.”

“Cliff?” Holy shit. “Which one is that?” He couldn’t keep Aziz’s boyfriends straight. No wonder Dorian seemed down. “I’m sorry.”

“It’s okay. He was just another man in the paddock,” Dorian said. “I should be okay with it. Jesus. He cheated on me all the time, but it sucks because I like him. I thought we were tight.”

“He acted like a jerk,” Isaac murmured. “You deserve better.” He stood, then paced the length of his living room.

“You sound like a broken record.” Dorian groaned. “He played me and I let him.”

“You’re human. We’ve all done what you did. Remember when I dated Ron? It lasted six months longer than it should’ve and he wrecked my car. I thought he needed me. He wanted my money.”

“I remember.”

“We’ll find the right guys,” Isaac said. “I know it.” He’d found the right dog in Stan. Could Len be the perfect guy for him?

“But I’m not sleeping with you. No matter how drunk and desperate we get.”

“I should be hurt.” He wasn’t, but he should’ve been. “What’s wrong with me?”

“You can be self-centered,” Dorian said. “You demand a lot. You hate failure. I’m a fly-by-the-seat-of-my-pants kind of guy. I’m artistic and that drives you nuts. We’re friends, but we can’t be lovers.”

“You’re right.” He still hadn’t asked Dorian to sleep with him, but he understood. He wasn’t about to take advantage of his friend after this break-up.

“We’ll both be miserable tonight.”

“Nah.” If nothing else, he had his dog and cat at home when the night ended. Someone cared about him and that was enough.

“I’m sure of it. I’m hurt and you’re bored. It’s a bad combination,” Dorian said. “Still, I want to go out. You’re paying the cover charge.”

“I’ll be over in an hour.” Isaac wanted to say more, but Dorian hung up before he could. He tossed the phone onto the couch. He should dress for a night out, but he hated club clothes. Fuck. If he couldn’t hide in a button-down and dress slacks or scrubs, he didn’t know what to do with himself. He headed into his bedroom and selected a blue V-neck shirt with grommets on the collar and a pair of his softest jeans. Where were his ankle boots? He dug through his wardrobe for the footwear, then caught sight of himself in the mirror.

Shit. He needed to do something with his hair. He’d let it grow out too much and the curls had begun to show. He stood and appraised his reflection. Did he look old? Tired?

His phone rang. He checked the number before answering. Jake. His heart hammered. He hadn’t heard from his ex-boyfriend in forever. “Hello?”

“Hi, baby. Are you going out tonight?” Jake asked. “Or are you going to be home?”

“I thought I might go out.” He and Jake had split on decent terms and he didn’t mind seeing him again. He wasn’t interested in rekindling the relationship, but a conversation wouldn’t be bad. “Why? Did you want to meet up? I’m heading out with Dorian in a little while.” He’d rather touch base with Len, but he still wasn’t sure Len would be interested. Stan climbed onto the bed and stared at him.

“No.” Jake laughed. “I haven’t seen you at the clubs. I worried you’d dropped off the face of the earth. Are you still in Springdale?”

“No, I moved.” He ran his fingers through his hair. No matter what he did with it, he’d still look frazzled. Damn it.

“I’ll be at Club 51 in Cedarwood. Sweet. Find me.”

“I’ll let Dorian know.” He petted Stan, appreciating the dog’s calming presence.

“Dorian? You’re still palling around with him?”

“Yeah, why?” What was wrong with Dorian?

“He’s not into you.”

Ah, now he remembered the jealousy. Jake hated Dorian and his relationship with him. “I know.” He continued to pet Stan.

“He’s too flashy.”

“So?”

“You’re trying too hard with him.”

“Stop.” He’d had enough and didn’t want to see his ex. So much for going to Club 51. “I’m not going out with Dorian as a date. We’re friends.”

“You wanted to date him.”

“I’m not taking the bait on this.” He gathered his jacket, ID, credit card and keys, then put on his boots. He filled Ollie’s food dish, then took Stan out for a quick walk and potty break. Before he left, he ensured Stan had his chew bone and access to the bedroom. Satisfied, Isaac walked out of the apartment and locked up before heading downstairs to his car.

“You could have me,” Jake said. “We’d have fun. Are you listening to me? Who are you with right now?”

“I put the dog out for a walk, then fed both him and the cat. I’m still listening to you.” He slid behind the wheel of his car. “I need to go. If we head there, I’ll see you.” This time, he hung up without giving Jake a chance to respond. He drove across town to Strausburg to pick up Dorian. He didn’t want to think about his exes or his workload. He refused to consider his crush.

Fifteen minutes later, he stopped in front of Dorian’s apartment building. Dorian strode out of the foyer.

“Hi.” Dorian settled on the seat. “Did you know where you wanted to go?” He adjusted his smoking jacket and ran his fingers through his hair. He’d muted his usually wild style and almost didn’t look like himself.

“I haven’t decided.” Club 51 was out. “Why? Do you have a suggestion?”

“How about the Cedarwood Gentlemen’s Club?” Dorian asked. He donned a set of black-rimmed glasses. “I want to find a rich boyfriend.”

“Isn’t that a strip club?” He drove back to Cedarwood. “I could swear it’s a strip joint.”

“No, it’s a place for men of high character and wealth,” Dorian said. “Hence, I toned myself down and am wanting to find a rich boyfriend.”

“Well, if that’s the kind of joint it is and we can get in, then I hope you do.” He drove through town to Country Club Drive. He’d passed the gentlemen’s club many times and wondered what the inside was like. Now, he’d know. He pulled into the parking lot and joined the line of cars. “Is there a valet or can I park myself?”

“Over here.” Dorian pointed to a nearly full lot. “It’s just a longer walk to the building.”

“I don’t care.” He found an empty space and pulled in. Dorian led the way to the door.

A tuxedo-clad man at the entry stopped them. “The fee to enter is forty dollars each, gentlemen.”

Isaac pulled out the required bills from his wallet. “I’ve got it. Thanks.” He’d agreed to pay the cover, but he hadn’t expected it to be quite so high.

“I’ll pay for drinks,” Dorian said and strolled into the club. “Let’s go.”

The doorman rolled his eyes, but stepped out of the way.

Isaac elbowed Dorian. “Where do we go? This is fancier than I thought it’d be.” He wasn’t sure what he’d expected, but granite pillars, deep maroon carpet, drapery and candlelight wasn’t it. Should he whisper? Where was the throbbing music? The gyrating bodies? Shit, he was over his head.

“It’s a freeform kind of place.” Dorian squeezed Isaac’s arm. “You go where you want to.” He walked away from Isaac, leaving Isaac in the middle of the expansive room.

Isaac sighed. Compared to some of the men, he was underdressed. He ducked out of the throng of male bodies to the edge of the room. He’d become a doctor because he loved medicine—not the money. He wasn’t good in convention situations and only clubbed because he stood a chance to find a partner for the evening. He didn’t know what the hell he was going to find here.

Isaac spotted a hallway. According to Dorian, he had free rein in the building. The corridor offered less noise—no chamber music like in the main room. He noticed a door off to the side. Law Lounge. He scrubbed the back of his hand across his chin. Interesting. He’d never practiced law, but he’d watched a lot of crime shows during college.

Dorian sashayed up to him. “Where are you going? You’re not allowed in the Law Lounge.”

“Why not?” Other than the obvious—he wasn’t a lawyer.

“It’s boring and stuffy,” Dorian said. “That and you’re a doctor.”

“So? You’re not a lawyer.”

“No, but I was with Lewis, who is and he got me in.” Dorian shrugged. “Speaking of, I see him. I’ll be back.”

Dorian strolled away a second time, leaving Isaac to his own devices...again. Isaac ventured over to the bar and ordered a rum and cola.

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“Well, Dr. McLean. How are you?” Dr. Arlen Gates stood next to him. “What brings you here?”

“The conversation?” He sipped his drink and left a tip in the jar. “You?”

“I needed to get away from the wife.” Dr. Gates laughed. “I love her, but I’m suffocating.”

He nodded and smiled, but said nothing. He wasn’t wild about airing relationship grievances to anyone who listened.

“What about you? When are you going to settle down?” Dr. Gates asked. “You’re the most eligible bachelor at the office.”

“Nah, but I’m enjoying my single status.” The right guy had to find him.

“You’re too good to be single.” Dr. Gates wandered away with his glass of wine.

Well...okay. Isaac finished his drink, then abandoned the glass on the bar. He spotted Dorian deep in conversation with a dark-haired man. Isaac ventured back to the general area of the Law Lounge. He appreciated the classy elitism of the club. His ex would never fit in at the club. Which was good, since he didn’t want to see his ex.

Isaac wandered past the Law Lounge and stopped when he detected the collection of voices. He recognized Len’s voice. He and Len kept turning up in the same places. Should he venture in and speak to Len? Keep his distance? Every time Len spoke, he got the shivers.

“Len, what are you going to do now that you’re in Cedarwood?” a male voice asked.

“Preferably volunteer. I don’t want to go back to the courtroom,” Len said. “I’m good in retirement.”

Isaac nodded. He looked damn fine in retirement.

“When are you going to settle down?” the male voice asked. “Keye’s gone. Ross left. You need to find someone.”

“I’ve had my eye on a person, but the timing hasn’t been right,” Len said. “I want to say something to him, but he isn’t into me.”

Shame. Isaac shook his head. If he knew the guy, he wanted to think he’d encourage the man to be with Len. Nah. He’d try to keep them apart so he could have Len instead.

“Len, tell the guy,” a second male voice said. “I would.”

“I just moved and I’m settling into my routine. I’ll get there,” Len said. “Besides, I’m good with my dog. She’s loyal, more than some of you bastards.”

Isaac laughed. Len could be so candid and funny.

Dorian strode up to Isaac. “There you are.”

His cheeks burned. He’d been eavesdropping and could be found out at any time. Dorian talking so loudly didn’t help. “Hush.”

“Why?” Dorian sighed. “Why are you standing outside the Law Lounge? Is your boyfriend in there?”

Fuck. Isaac steered Dorian away from the doorway. "Keep your voice down."

"If the guy is in there, go get him," Dorian said. The scent of rum swirled around him and he slurred his words.

"How much have you had to drink? We haven't been here that long." If Dorian wasn't careful, he'd get them thrown out.

"I did shots with Lewis." Dorian swatted at him. "I thought he liked me."

"I'm guessing he didn't?" Damn. Dorian had the worst luck with men.

Dorian threw his arms around Isaac. "He wanted me for the night. Said I'm not worth longer." His voice cracked. "I'm worth more than one night."

"You are." He spotted people leaving the Law Lounge. Len met his gaze for a moment. Isaac tensed. He didn't want to be caught with a sloppy, weepy Dorian and give Len the wrong impression. "Let's go."

"Do you love me?" Dorian asked. He sagged into Isaac. "Do you?"

"I do." Time to go. He hoped Len didn't remember what he'd seen.

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“Isaac?” Len inched up to him. “Are you okay?”

So much for getting out without being remembered...He forced a smile. “I’m fine. My friend just got dumped.”

“Friend?” Len swept his gaze over Dorian. “Do you need help getting him out to the car? Or a ride home?”

“I drove.” Isaac allowed Len to take some of Dorian’s weight. “Thanks.”

“No problem.” Len glanced over at him and smiled. “I didn’t know you visited this club.”

“We opted to tonight.” He walked Dorian down the steps toward the parking lot. “Thanks for the help.”

Len hesitated. “Do you need more?”

Yes. Love, craving...his kiss.Isaac regained himself before he blurted something he couldn’t take back. “We’ll be okay.”

“You’re sure?” Len let go, but followed Dorian and Isaac to the sports car. Once Isaac deposited Dorian in the passenger seat, Len touched Isaac’s arm. “If you’re not okay or you need something, tell me.”

The honesty in Len’s eyes, combined with the sparks from his touch, were almost too strong for Isaac to ignore. Still, he needed to answer. “I will.”

“Promise?”

“Yes.” He’d do just about whatever Len wanted. God, he needed to find his confidence and tell Len how he felt.

“Well, I’ll let you get your friend home.” Len dipped his head. “You’re in Cedarwood now?”

“I am.” He walked around the car with Len and longed to grasp his hand. “You?” Duh. Len volunteered at the shelter. “Sorry.”

Len smiled, then shook his head. “Be good to yourself, Doc.”

What? Was he leaving? No. The words ‘come back’ teetered on his tongue. “Sure. You, too.” Damn it. He’d wanted to sound more eloquent. He watched Len walk away. So much for having a night to forget my troubles. He’d never get Len Connor out of his head.

Chapter Five

For the next two days, Len threw himself into his exercise and volunteering. He’d dared to go to a club and wasn’t thrilled by what he’d seen. Isaac had been there, but not alone. Of course. Isaac had said they were friends, but he’d heard the question. Did Isaac love his friend? Yes. Damn it. Isaac was handsome and he’d waited too long to decide how he felt about him. Isaac deserved to be happy. Do I?

Len swam another lap at the main pool in the swim facility, then surfaced. Despite his best attempts, he’d never gotten Isaac out of his mind and couldn’t forget how Isaac had said he liked him. The age gap weighed on Len. Could he date a man nearly the same age as his son? Wouldn’t Isaac get tired of him sooner than later?

“Len.” Steve Baker-Moore swam up to him. “You’ve done a crazy number of laps. Why don’t you take a break?” He tipped his head. “The better question would be, who are you running from?”

Len gripped the edge of the pool. He liked Steve. The guy had his head screwed on straight and was in a committed relationship with a solid man. Farin was a good guy too. He’d helped Steve raise Steve’s sister and had a happy family—the kind of family Len had had with Keye and wanted again. If Steve hadn’t been involved and Aiden hadn’t met Matt, he might have encouraged Aiden to date Steve.

“Well?” Steve climbed out of the pool. He sprayed water droplets all over. He sat on the edge and kicked his legs in the rippling water. “What’s on your mind?”

“Farin’s older than you, isn’t he?” Len asked.

“Only by a year or so,” Steve said. “I like to tease him about being an old man, though. It’s our stupid joke. He’s the ancient one and I’m not. Genie likes to get his goat with it. Why? Do you have your eye on someone?” He grinned. “I noticed you’re here in Cedarwood frequently. I’m going to assume you’re avoiding someone and working out your frustration. Whoever the guy is, he must be hot.”

Len pinched the bridge of his nose. Hot. Gossip. Damn it. He wasn’t a kid and shouldn’t be acting so immature. He was probably twice Steve’s age at least.

“He’s cute then.” Steve shook his head. “Whoever he is, you’re caught up.”

“I am not.” Liar. “I’m deciding if I want to get back into the dating pool. I’m so old compared to most of the guys at the nightclubs, and I don’t know if it’s worth it.”

“Old, eh?” Steve folded his arms. “You don’t act your age. Besides, if the guy really likes you, then the years you’ve been on the earth won’t matter.”

Steve wasn't helping, but then Len hadn't given his friend the full story. Did he want to tell Steve everything? Not really. He prided himself on keeping his business private. Except now when he needed help or at least someone else's advice.

Steve shrugged. "Do what you want, but I have the feeling you've already got your eye on someone. I say get out there and try. It might work, and if it doesn't, hopefully he's a good lay and it'll be hot."

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“Are you supposed to be talking like that? Here?” Len shrank down in the water as if someone would see them.

“There isn’t anyone else here,” Steve said. “You’re the only one using the pool. If the swim team were practicing, then no. I wouldn’t.” He waved his hand. “Now tell me the truth. What’s this all about?”

“What if the guy is the ex of someone you know?” Len asked.

“I know you. Is that a problem?” Steve paused. “What are you getting at?”

“Would you be willing to date someone you’re close to?” He still wasn’t explaining himself well, but tough.

“Maybe if you’d just spit it out, I’d have an answer.” Steve grinned again, then sighed. “I’d have to think about it.”

Jesus. He wasn’t getting anywhere. “This guy is friends with Aiden. He told me he liked me.” Saying the words out loud made them finally seem real. His heart lodged in his throat. Why did making the potential of a relationship real seem so scary but kind of exciting too? Because he liked Isaac.

Steve laughed. He rocked in his seat and kicked the water. “Likesyou?”

“You’re not doing me any favors,” Len bit out. “Not at all.”

“I’m sorry. Now you’re acting archaic. No one sayslikesany longer. There are a

hundred terms for it, and I can't remember any of them." Steve suppressed his chuckles. "If the guy likes you, then feel him out."

"What about Aiden?"

"What about him? He's with Matt." Steve folded his legs beneath him. "They're happy and married. I doubt something like this would faze him. He's got lots of friends, and who cares if one of them wants to date you?"

"Wouldn't it be strange? The guy is a few years older than Aiden." If he were Aiden and saw his father with one of his friends, he'd feel odd about it. But his father wasn't gay and hadn't been thrilled when he'd found out Len was homosexual. His father only had guy friends and they drank together. No dating...ever.

"I don't know how Aiden will take it, and neither will you if you don't ask him. Talk to him. What if he says ride that stallion? Then what will you do?" Steve asked. "Ride the stallion?"

"He wouldn't." Aiden wasn't the type to tell anyone toride a stallion.Christ.

"Oh?"

"He doesn't say things like that." Aiden was too reserved sometimes for his own good. Len wrestled with the idea of asking Isaac out. He'd already kind of turned the guy down. The look of pain in Isaac's eyes stuck in his memory.

"Oh, well, you knew what I meant." Steve shrugged. "Give the guy a chance. He might be good for you."

"Steve." Len groaned. He shouldn't be irritated with Steve. The guy had given him permission and encouragement. All Len wanted was to hear Aiden do the same.

“You asked and I gave you my two cents.” Steve stood and shook his hair. He sprayed Len with water droplets again. “Do what you think is best, but don’t push the guy away and not talk to Aiden because you think Aiden will be upset.” He walked away, leaving Len to himself.

Len dunked his head under the water. The chill shocked his system but didn’t help him decide what to do. Maybe Steve was right. He’d never know if he didn’t give Isaac a chance. He liked Isaac, and he just might be worth the shot.

* * * *

Monday afternoon, Len parked outside Isaac’s office. He needed to set things straight. What did he want? A date. With Isaac. He sat in his car and stared at the building. If Isaac wanted to be with him, then he’d make the first move. Why not? A thought occurred to him. Should he talk to Aiden first? Ross was only a year younger than Len, but he’d treated Aiden horribly. The ill will between Ross and Aiden had been mutual, and he hadn’t asked Aiden’s permission before dating Ross. Maybe he should’ve.

Jesus. Dating hadn’t been this hard when he’d met Keye. Back then, the process had been easy. He’d seen Keye, wanted him and made a move. They’d met up at the nightclub until they’d decided they belonged together, then fucked whenever they had a chance. Easy. And now he was in front of Isaac’s office, acting on impulse. Oh fuck.

His phone rang, jolting him out of his thoughts. He read the ID screen. Aiden. Of course. He fortified his nerves and answered. “Son.”

“Hey, Dad.”

Aiden always cheered him up, but not today. “It’s not Saturday, and I’m not due for an exam.” He didn’t mind his new doctor, Dr. Gates, but he’d rather see Isaac again.

“I know. I saw your car at the swim complex when I ran to the sandwich shop to get lunch for the nurses today. When I went back, you were gone,” Aiden said. “I’m off today and Matt’s working. Thought I’d catch you and we could spend the afternoon together.”

“What’d you have in mind?” He stared at the building, a normal doctor’s office type of place with a gray stone facade and white trim around the windows. He went there when he needed to see Dr. Gates.

“I didn’t.” Aiden laughed. “I’m not on-call and I don’t have to be anywhere. I have no idea what to do with myself.”

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“Sounds like.” Did he sound distracted? “Cool.”

“Are you okay? Dad?” Aiden’s voice rose. “Where are you? How are you feeling? Where are your meds?”

“Aiden.” He’d screwed this all up. “I’m fine. I’m parked and the engine is off.” He wasn’t sure why he’d mentioned that. “I’m current on my meds, and I’m not overheated. I feel fine enough.” Boy, he needed to stop talking.

“Enough? I’m coming to the house,” Aiden said. “Let me call Matt and I’ll meet you.”

“Aiden, stop.” He had to explain the situation to Aiden. “I’m at the doctor’s office.”

“For? You weren’t showing symptoms of anything when I visited you last.”

“Because I’m not sick.” He winced. “I’m here for a date.”

“Wait. What?” Aiden asked. “One more time. I could swear you said you were there for a date.”

“I hit it off with a doctor, sort of, and I’m here to see him—not as a patient. I’m fine and healthy.” He paused. “It’s okay.”

“Do I know this doctor?”

He’d lied, sort of, about hitting it off, but he couldn’t fib about the who. If he went

out with Isaac and they decided to take things to the next level, Isaac would want to come around to family gatherings. He'd be expected at them and Aiden deserved to know. "You do." He winced again. "You're friends with him." Christ, he was putting the cart before the damn horse.

"Doctor Raji? You're dating a dentist?" Aiden asked. "If that's who makes you happy, then great, but I never thought you were interested in dentists." He paused. "It's a joke because I know how you hate to visit the dentist. Go for who you want."

"No." Dr. Raji had a wife and three kids. He wasn't dating material. "Not him."

"Dr. Soules? The clown from the outpatient clinic? Dad, he's a lousy doctor and he's not my friend."

Aiden was so defensive. At least it was nice that Len had someone in his corner. "Not him either," Len said. "He and I had a falling out when he tried to tell me I needed a pacemaker. I had a TIA, not a heart problem, and he's not my regular doctor. That's Dr. Gates."

"Then who? Not Dr. Gates. He's married."

He massaged his forehead. Either Aiden would be pissed beyond belief or mildly okay with the situation, but he had no clue as to how his son felt. "Dr. McLean."

"As in Isaac?" Aiden's tone was flat. "Isaac McLean?"

"Yeah." He still couldn't gauge Aiden's reaction. He groaned. He should've done this in person.

"Isaac?" Aiden repeated. "My friend and almost coworker, Isaac?"

“What? You’re angry, aren’t you?” Len groaned again. He sagged in his seat and closed his eyes. “I know. It’s irresponsible. He’s not in my league, and plus, he’s your age.”

“No.”

“But you’re hurt.” Fuck. An answer that wasn’t cryptic would be nice. “I should’ve thought this through before I even considered what I was doing. I’m sorry. You’re right. Forget I said anything. I don’t think through my actions sometimes and this has repercussions beyond me having a date.”

“I can’t exactly forget, Dad. You just told me you wanted to see a guy I know.”

Len sighed. “What are you thinking?”

Aiden didn’t speak for a long moment. His end of the line was so silent, Len could’ve sworn the call had been dropped. He checked the screen to ensure he still had Aiden on the line. When he heard Aiden sigh, he blew out a ragged breath. At least his son hadn’t hung up on him.

“Dad, I love you,” Aiden said. “I do.”

“But?” There had to be a catch.

“I have no buts.”

“Right.” He wasn’t sure what was happening. No catch? Really? “What’s the rest?”

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“That’s all of the story,” Aiden said. “I’m happy. Isaac is a stand-up guy.”

“Who is too young? Right? And too handsome for me? He’s your age, which is worse. I’m... I should have my head examined.” He closed his eyes. Yep, he’d made a big mistake by even thinking he might want to date Isaac.

“Who says you’re not good enough or hot enough? So he’s younger. Be a proud silver fox. If he’s who you want, then go for him. He’s better than that clingy guy from your housing development.”

“Brandon? He’s harmless.” For the most part. He stared at the fabric on the inner roof of his car. “Aiden.” He wanted to say so many things, but couldn’t form the words. He needed Aiden’s approval.

“What? I want you to be happy. He might be nearer to my age than yours, but if I were picking people for you to date, he’d be on the list,” Aiden said.

Len couldn’t speak and wasn’t sure what to say. Was Aiden being honest?

“If that’s the earth-shattering news Steve told me to ask you about, then it wasn’t that big of a deal. We’re cool. Tell Isaac I said hi and to be good to you. He might be my friend, but you’re my dad. No one breaks my dad’s heart and gets away with it.”

“Thanks, Aiden.” He’d raised a good son. One with a big heart and lots of compassion.

“Welcome. See you Saturday? Dinner? Matt’s cooking,” Aiden said. “Bring Isaac

and Cissy. It'll be weird at first, but that happens. Cissy wants to visit the pups."

"Pencil me in because she does. I don't know about Isaac, but I'll be there." He paused. "Love you, kid."

"Love you, Dad."

Len hung up and tapped the phone against his lips. Aiden would've had a fit and chewed him out about the million germs on the phone touching his mouth. He didn't care. He had his son's blessing. The germs couldn't harm him now.

He left the car and headed into the building. Len wasn't sure what he'd expected, but the waiting room full of elderly people caught him off guard. He wondered if this was how Isaac saw him...as a geriatric individual? He hoped not.

Len marched up to the receptionist's window.

"Name and appointment time," she said and didn't look up from her computer.

"I don't have one." He should've thought this plan through a little better. When he'd visited Aiden at the hospital, he'd been able to stroll in and see him. Isaac being at an office proved a little more difficult. He could pretend he was there for Dr. Gates, but the lie wasn't good.

"What time do you need?" she asked.

"I don't." Yep, should've planned ahead.

She froze, then glanced up from her computer. She shook her head and resumed typing. "Picking up a script? You can call that in now or use the Internet. It's faster, especially for refills."

“I don’t need any refills.”

“Are you here for Dr. Gates? This isn’t your normal time, Mr. Connor.” She frowned. “I’m missing something.”

“I want to leave a message for Dr. McLean. I’m a friend.” Len gripped the small counter. He’d made the wrong choice by visiting the office on a day when he didn’t need to be there.

She frowned, then rolled away from her desk. Another girl, a nurse if Len had to guess, smiled at him. She didn’t speak but also didn’t stop staring. The first girl returned to the counter. He tensed. Where was Elise? She’d understand. Hell, she might put him with Isaac without a second thought.

“Doc will see you, but make it quick. We’re behind.” She slammed the glass window shut, effectively ending the discussion.

The door to the left opened, and the smiling nurse waved. “This way.” She directed him past the scales and two exam rooms to what Len suspected was Isaac’s office. “I’m really excited you’re here. He needs a friend. He’s stressed,” she whispered. She nodded once, then shut the door.

Len hooked his fingers into his belt loops. He’d acted on impulse. His mind filled with questions and doubt. If he abandoned the plan now, he’d really screw himself over.

The door opened. “I’ll be there in a moment.” Isaac caught Len’s gaze and held on to the knob. “Hi.” He pushed the door shut. “What brings you by? Are you okay? Can’t you get in to see Dr. Gates?”

“That’s a very popular question today.” He rocked on his feet. “But no, I don’t need

to see Dr. Gates.”

“Oh?” Isaac flipped through the paperwork on his desk. He didn’t seem excited to see Len. Annoyed was more like it.

Christ, he’d acted like a lovesick teenager by coming to the office.

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Isaac settled on his chair. “Then what brings you by?”

“You.” Saying the words out loud settled him. It felt right to admit he liked Isaac.

“Me? If you need to make an appointment, I’ll have the girls work you in.” Isaac opened his laptop. “How about seven tonight? We’re closed, but I’ll help a friend.”

“Friend?” A glimmer of hope flickered in his brain. If they were platonic, then a romance could happen.

“You’re here to check on my adoption of Stan? He’s doing great,” Isaac said. “Dorian was a little drunk the other night at the gentlemen’s club, but black coffee and sleep sorted him out.”

“I wasn’t worried about him. He had you as a nurse.” He’d been jealous, but he understood helping a friend when he was down.

“Oh.” Isaac paused. “Okay, I’ll bite. What’s going on? Did the nurses put you up to this? They’re pranking me, aren’t they?” He hopped up from his seat. “They would. They think I need a date or a freaking stripper or something. I’m not in a funk.” He started around his desk. “I’m not in the mood for a joke.”

Len caught Isaac in his arms. Being this close to the doctor was so inappropriate, but he couldn’t help himself. Holding Isaac felt right. He tried to speak, but the words came out in a jumble. “I’m here to ask you if you’d like to go out with me.”

Isaac’s eyes widened. “What?”

He forced himself to calm down. For all he knew, one of the nurses could barge in at any second. “You asked me if I wanted to go on a date and I didn’t answer. Now, it’s my turn to do the asking. Do you want to try a date—whenever it ends up being? I acted on impulse and looked you up online. I should’ve called, but showing up in person seemed like a better idea at the time.” He didn’t let go of Isaac. Up close, he noticed the flecks of sapphire in Isaac’s blue eyes. He longed to run his fingers over the bit of scruff on Isaac’s cheeks and the fullness of his lips. What would it feel like to kiss him?

“I...” Isaac shrugged away. “This is so wrong.”

“I’m too old. I get it.” He should’ve guessed, but he wasn’t irritated. Following his heart, rather than keeping to himself, was a good first step. Besides, Isaac and Dorian might be closer than friends now.

“No. You’re here.”

He frowned. “I’m embarrassing you?” He wasn’t going to change himself for anyone, but he’d leave if that made Isaac happy.

“No. Here. I—” Isaac locked the door. “I’m thrilled you’re here. Thrilled you want to go out.”

“But?” Len sounded like Aiden.

“I so want you to do me on my desk.” Isaac blushed and pressed his lips together. The muscle in his jaw twitched.

“Do you?” If Len had thought the situation through, he’d have changed his mind, but he wanted to spread Isaac out on the desk and fuck him senseless too.

“That’s very wrong and inappropriate. I have patients,” Isaac said. “I won’t lie, though. I’d rather see you.” He threaded his hands into his hair. “That’s the problem. I feel like a hornball when I look at you and I can’t do that right now. I have to be a professional. I can’t walk in on poor little Esther and her head cold with a damn hard-on. When I saw you at the club, I wanted to run into that lounge and talk to you.”

“Why didn’t you?” He’d have loved to have been wanted, especially in front of his friends.

“Dorian got drunk trying to impress a man.”

“It happens.”

Isaac rolled his eyes, then focused on Len. “I’m not dreaming, right? My blurted statements and Dorian aren’t putting you off? You’re really here?”

“I am.” If he wanted to be with Isaac, he had to invite him over and on a date. “Come over tonight. Bring Stan. I’ll make mocktails, and we’ll try a date. Nothing fancy, but if it goes well, then we can try something in public.” Besides, if he had some private time with Isaac, maybe they could explore the desire to fuck like rabbits.

“I won’t get out of here until after seven-forty-five,” Isaac said. “Plus, I’ll need to get cleaned up and change.”

“Doesn’t bother me. I want to see you.”

Isaac smiled. The dimple showed in his cheek. “I’d like that. Where, and is eight-thirty-ish okay?”

“Eight-thirty-ish is perfect. I’m on Delaney Drive. Six-seventy-two. I’m the only blue house on the north side of the street.” He wanted to reach for Isaac and smooth the

wrinkles in his shirt.

Isaac grasped Len's hand and grinned. "I'll see you as soon as I pick up Stan." He darted in and kissed Len.

The connection was quick, but damn. His knees wobbled and his lips tingled. Len wanted more. Lots more. "Until later." He nodded to gather his wits. "I'll see myself out."

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“This way.” Isaac pointed to a door at the back of the office. “It’s my private exit.” He lingered another moment. “You made my day.”

“I’ll try to make your night too.” He’d been suggestive and loved every second of it.

“Naughty.” Isaac opened the door but didn’t kiss him. “I’m late and I need to behave when the staff can see me. Until later.”

“I’ll be waiting.” Len strolled out of the office. He could’ve been walking on air, he felt so free. He had a date with a hot guy. Not a pity date or something last-resort. An honest-to-God date. Dorian wasn’t an issue and Isaac was interested. How lucky could one guy be?

Chapter Six

After a quick trip home at lunch to let Stan out, Isaac returned to the clinic and managed to get through the remainder of his day, but his thoughts never traveled far from Len. He hadn’t seen the surprise visit coming. If he had, then it wouldn’t have been a shock, but still. Len was Dr. Gates’ patient and could be at the practice. Still, he wondered what had changed Len’s mind. Did the reason really matter?No.

He drove home at ten minutes to eight. As soon as Isaac walked through the door to his condo, Stan darted across the living room. Ollie licked his paws on the back of the sofa.

“Hiya, guy. I wasn’t gone that long, but I’m sorry I left you cooped up for the last couple hours.” He scooped up Stan and carried him through the living room to the

kitchen. “We’ve got a date tonight. You’re going to visit with Cissy, and I’m going to see Len.” He placed Stan on the floor, then opened cans of dog and cat food for the pets. Ollie left the couch, strolled across the counter and sat beside his dish.

Isaac filled both bowls. “Sorry, Ollie. I’ll feed you first.” He scooted the bowl over, then put Stan’s on the floor. “Did he bother you too much today?” Like the cat would answer him. Instead, Ollie glared at him with his yellow cat stare, then resumed eating.

Isaac shrugged. He left the kitchen and made the rounds of his condo, looking for accidents. “You’ve had a good day, Stan. No messes.”

He strolled into the bedroom and stripped out of his button-down shirt. The disinfectant scent from the office seemed to cling to his skin. He loved his job and helping people, but sometimes he wished he didn’t have to smell like chemicals. The bone-deep weariness from being at work hit him hard. He finished removing his clothes and stood naked in the middle of the bathroom. When he glanced over his shoulder, Stan sat in the doorway, watching him.

“I know, I know,” he mumbled. “I need to run some more.” Isaac rolled his shoulders. He hadn’t thought about his looks much, other than that he’d hoped to be good enough for Len. Now he didn’t want to see himself in the mirror. The lines around his eyes would be deeper, he’d have forehead crinkles, and he probably could use a shave. Oh well.

He stepped into the shower stall and turned on the water. The icy spray hit him, jolting him out of his half-sleepy state. “Damn.” He opened his eyes wide and waited for the water to heat up. He’d needed that cold rush from the showerhead.

Water sluiced down him. He lathered a washcloth, then scrubbed his body. His thoughts turned to Len. He wondered what Len looked like naked. Probably chiseled

and sexy, although Isaac wouldn't know. He hadn't peeked while Len was at the hospital. Plus, it hadn't been a good time, being that Len was with someone and he was a patient. Sure, Len had let Aiden know he was interested in him, but hadn't said a word about possibly dating Aiden's father.

Christ, he was fucked in the head. Wanting a damn patient. Okay, so Len was a former patient and now said he liked Isaac. There was a whole lot of wrong in desiring a man that much. Isaac rested his head on the tile wall. He'd never done anything reckless in his life. Never drank to excess...no drugs, cheating... He even dated safe guys, ones he knew wouldn't want commitments but wouldn't hurt him. Now he wanted Len.

He smoothed his hands down his chest to his groin. His cock stood out from the thatch of blond curls. The soap slickened his way as he stroked himself. His insides heated and water slid down his face. He panted. Part of him swore he should stop, but the rest of him didn't give a shit. He needed to climax to relax for the date. Plus, he wanted to envision Len there with him.

He could almost feel Len's hands on his sides, then up to his ribs. You're a beautiful man.

Isaac groaned. He stroked himself faster, mashing his thumb across the tip of his dick.

So hot. Len's breath warmed Isaac's neck. Faster. He kissed along Isaac's pulse, then reached around and pinched Isaac's nipples. Isaac shivered and closed his eyes. What would it feel like to kiss Len during sex? Probably fucking awesome. Dear God, he wished Len were really there. He widened his stance and braced his free hand on the wall. Each stroke nudged him closer to coming apart. His knees buckled, and the heat in his belly spread through his body. He panted and rocked into his fingers.

He closed his eyes. "I need to come," he said out loud. His steady rhythm, in and out of his fingers, turned feral. Nothing held him back. He embraced the raw need and excitement in his veins. His throat ached, and he jerked forward into his hand. Cum splattered onto the wall and down to the floor. He leaned on his arm as the water prickled on his back. Although his legs wobbled, he managed to curl into a sitting position. His breathing turned steady and he opened his eyes. Now he could face Len. He sighed.

Isaac stood, then rinsed off. He breathed in the scent of his shampoo and washed his hair. Before, he'd dreaded meeting up with Len because he'd thought Len might change his mind. But playing with himself energized him, and he lost his concerns. He couldn't wait to get there and give whatever they were building a chance. He washed the suds from his hair and rinsed again.

Once he toweled off and righted the bathroom, he stood in front of his closet. Shit. What was he supposed to wear? He selected a pair of jeans and boxer briefs. Something Len had said came to mind. He was making mocktails. What a gentleman...thinking about them both having to get up in the morning and not needing a fuzzy head. Isaac loved a courteous man. He picked out a pullover shirt. Something soft but which showed off his physique. He wanted to be perfect for Len.

Isaac checked his look in the mirror three times. Christ. He hadn't been this nervous in forever. What was he worried about? Not looking good enough for Len, that was what. His worries and fears collided with his desire to please Len. If he talked himself out of going to Len's, he'd never get anywhere. Fuck it. He stuffed his bare feet into his loafers, then forced himself to leave the bedroom.

"Ready, Stan?" He picked up the dog's leash.

The rattle of the leash caught Stan's attention. He abandoned his food bowl and danced around Isaac's ankles. His claws scraped the tile floor in the kitchen. Isaac

clicked the leash onto the ring on Stan's collar.

"We'll do a pit stop in the front yard. Then we're off to see Cissy." He led the dog out of the front door. After a few moments, Stan held up his end of the deal. Isaac locked the condo, then opened the car door for Stan. "Cissy will love seeing you."

Isaac made the short trek over to Delaney Drive. His heart hammered the entire way. He couldn't wait to see Len. As he pulled onto Len's street, he remembered the neighborhood. He'd looked at houses in the area, but didn't need more than one bedroom, and at the time hadn't wanted the heftier price tag. The single-unit condo he'd found had been perfect.

When he parked in front of Len's garage, he paused. Would it be terrible to live here? Giddiness slid through his brain. He was here. He hadn't chickened out.

He turned off the engine and helped Stan out of the car. Should he have brought along a bottle of wine or something? Shit. He hated to be empty-handed.

Len opened the front door. "You made it. Hi, Stan."

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The dog perked up and darted away from Isaac to Len. He barked until Len moved out of the way.

“I thought you’d gotten lost,” Len said. “I see Stan found Cissy.”

“He does like her.” He stepped into the townhome and brushed Len’s chest as he passed. His arm tingled. Damn. “I, uh, had to take a shower.” To take the edge off. “I smelled like the office. Plus I wanted to change.”

“I like.” Len closed the door, then swept his gaze over Isaac. “I have to admit, I wasn’t sure you’d show.”

“Why?” He unclipped Stan from his leash. The dog chased Cissy.

“I was a dick the other day. Then today I go and change my mind. I teased you without realizing it.”

“Sometimes you need the chance to come around.” He stuffed his hands into his pockets. Every cell in his body urged him to snag Len in an embrace, but he held back.

“I suppose.” Len gestured to the kitchen. “I’ve got mocktails mixed. Sangria. I knew you had to work tomorrow and figured you wouldn’t want the booze in your system. Aiden says I’m not supposed to drink anyway, but I have a beer from time to time.” He offered Isaac a goblet. “Enjoy.”

“So it’s juice cocktails?” He sipped the dark juice. Whatever was in it tasted good.

“Yeah.”

“Perfect.” He grinned. Len had thought of everything. Isaac wondered if he had condoms and lube in the other room too...just in case.

“I’m volunteering at the library tomorrow, and I can’t read to the little ones if I’m hungover.” Len laughed. He’d shaved and combed his hair back. The crinkles around his eyes weren’t so deep, and red infused his cheeks.

“True.” Isaac clinked glasses with Len. “Here’s to working and reading with a clear head.” Because God knew his brain wasn’t clear right now. All he could think about was getting time alone with Len. Naked time with Len sounded good too. He swept his gaze over Len. The shirt clung to his upper body and showed off the muscles in his arms. The shorts were a tad on the baggy side and gave him a surfer look. Isaac licked his lips. Len swam and probably looked hot as hell in those trunks. What was he hiding under the baggy shorts?

“Cheers.” Len sipped the juice. “Make yourself at home. The dogs already have.” He nodded to an oversized dog pillow. Cissy was stretched out on the pillow, and Stan had tucked himself in against her belly.

Isaac sat on the couch and placed his glass on the side table. God help him—if he wasn’t careful, he’d spill the juice on the sofa. Wouldn’t that make a great impression? He noticed photos of Aiden and Matt on the mantel. A guy he didn’t know was with Len in many of the pictures. Another friend of Aiden’s? He looked a tad old for Aiden. The guy could be one of Len’s exes, but he wasn’t Ross. A twinge of jealousy started in the pit of Isaac’s belly. Not only did he want the kind of relationship that Aiden and Matt probably had, he also wasn’t fond of seeing Len with anyone else. Len had a past, but that didn’t mean Isaac wanted to see it. Was he jealous? A little.

Len put his glass down. "I see you noticed Keye."

"Who?"

"Keye. He was my first husband." Len left the sofa long enough to retrieve one of the pictures. "I guess he's my only husband, but since I was married to Aiden's mom, it's my second marriage." He shrugged. "We had a good time together, Keye and I. I miss him."

"What happened?" He didn't want to know and hadn't ever asked Aiden about his father. But now he felt obligated. He stole glances at the photo. Len and Keye looked too happy together. Too perfect. He bit back a groan. Yes, he was definitely jealous.

"AIDS. He had the virus before we met, but I didn't contract it. He had the disease under control until he didn't. We were monogamous, and every three months I got tested in case he passed it to me. It relieved him when I came back negative." Len caressed the edge of the frame. "He helped me raise Aiden. He was a good man and I miss him."

"I'm sure." He hated himself for the streak of dislike aimed at Keye. Len's husband was handsome and perfect-looking. "He seems nice. Aiden never really talked about him."

"Aiden wouldn't. He prefers to be private." Len's smile wobbled. "Keye told me when he neared the end of his life that he wanted me to keep living. I was supposed to find someone new. I'm guessing Ross wasn't who he had in mind. He was a bad decision made from loneliness."

Isaac nodded. He'd hated Ross from the second he'd met him. "He was bossy, I'll give you that, but we all make mistakes."

“He was sneaky too. He didn’t want to tell Aiden I was in the hospital or the ICU after the TIA. I certainly learned my lesson.” Len finished his juice. “I know what kind of man I want to avoid now.”

Isaac frowned. “Why’d he leave Aiden in the dark?”

“He didn’t like Aiden. The feeling was mutual, and I know Matt told him off at least once.”

“Good.” Someone had needed to give Ross a piece of their mind. The guy hadn’t helped Len recover at all—not with his horrible attitude.

Len smiled and put the photo of Keye down. He slid Isaac’s hand into his. “You don’t look well. Is that the green-eyed monster I detect? Or are you allergic to my sangria?”

“Maybe I’m a tad jealous.” Embarrassed was more like it. He’d been caught. He met Len’s gaze. “Although I liked Aiden, there was something about you... I never could look away. That’s probably why Aiden and I stayed friends. We weren’t love material.” He exhaled and clutched his glass. Getting those words out helped to calm him.

“He’s perceptive.”

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“And?” Oh fuck... Len was touching him, but nothing good could come of Aiden's response.

“He's fine with us—well, if there is anus. He said he wanted me to be happy.” Len shrugged. “He's not going to get upset if we're together. He worries about me, but he trusts me. He knows I won't try to date someone he tried to hook up with.”

Talk about the best news ever... “Are you serious?”

“Uh-huh. The age thing still seems strange to me, but I can deal. The biggest issue we've got to face is if the dogs keep getting along and if you're good in the sack.” Len scooted closer to Isaac. Their thighs touched. He rested his hand, still holding Isaac's, on his leg. His breath warmed Isaac's cheeks. “I'm pretty good between the sheets—or so I'm told.”

“You are?” Isaac sagged into Len. “I guess I need to find out.” He faced Len and feathered his lips over Len's. The man tasted good—like juice and sin. Was sin a taste? Isaac didn't know. He slid his fingers into Len's hair and massaged the back of his head.

Len swallowed Isaac's moan. He palmed the growing bulge in Isaac's pants.

Heat surged through Isaac's body and centered in his belly. He scooted down in his seat and spread his legs. Being touched pleased him. His cock hardened beneath his jeans. The pressure from the zipper helped to keep some of his libido in check, but not much. He stopped touching the back of Len's head and caressed Len's cock through his trousers. When he opened his mouth, Len sucked on Isaac's tongue.

“Yes,” Len said, then resumed kissing Isaac.

A shiver ran the length of Isaac’s spine. He needed more from Len but didn’t want to push. Who was he kidding? He craved everything from Len. He massaged Len’s dick through his pants. If he opened Len’s khakis, he’d find nirvana.

Len pulled away from Isaac for another moment. “Shit, that’s good.”

“Can be better.” He tugged the zipper on Len’s shorts down, then parted the fabric. Instead of finding underwear, he freed Len’s erection and stroked Len’s shaft. “Commando? Nice.” He hadn’t expected Len to be bare. He wrapped his fingers around Len’s cock and resumed kissing Len. His brain refused to function, but he knew what he wanted to do—drive Len wild. He gave in to the bliss.

“Isaac.” Len rested his forehead on Isaac’s. He closed his eyes. “I need to touch you.” He tore open Isaac’s jeans and freed his cock from beneath his boxer briefs. He moved in time with Isaac’s strokes.

Isaac panted. He rested his head on the back of the sofa. He couldn’t speak or breathe—not when all he could do was focus on caressing Len. A moan bubbled in his throat. His restraint thinned and he gritted his teeth. He wasn’t new at mutual masturbation, but damn. Len blew his mind. Wasn’t he supposed to be doing that to Len? He shuddered as the orgasm built within him. He’d passed the point of no return.

“Fuck.” Len growled. He jammed his dick into the circle of Isaac’s fingers. “Jesus.” Cum dribbled down Isaac’s hand.

The warmth on Isaac’s skin and the thrill of giving Len pleasure was more than Isaac could handle. The climax hit him hard and overwhelmed him. He trembled as he came on Len’s hand. He’d thought the orgasm in the shower had been enough, but

this one rocked him to his core. He met Len's gaze and tried to speak, but no words came out.

"Wow." Len brushed his fingers over Isaac's cheek. "So good."

"Damn." He sagged against the couch. "I don't want to leave. Don't think I can." He chuckled. "My knees are weak."

"Then stay." Len rested his head on Isaac's shoulder. "The dogs are good. We're good. Stay tonight."

He sighed. He hadn't wanted to go anywhere anyhow. "You had me at the dogs are good. I should've tucked work clothes into the trunk."

"I'll set an alarm."

"You're dangerous," Isaac whispered. He'd fallen for Len. Even after a short time, he'd lost a piece of his heart. He hadn't planned on falling in love, but he didn't care.

"Why?" Len dragged his fingers down Isaac's arm. The move lulled him.

"You're smart, concerned, sweet and compassionate. Plus you're handsome. I might be in over my head." More like completely immersed and not interested in surfacing any time soon.

"Would you laugh if I said that was all part of my master plan?" Len kissed the side of Isaac's neck. "I didn't think I was going to want anyone after Keye passed. I know, bad time to mention it, but that's the truth. I was on my own for a long time. Then I met Ross. I knew he wasn't great, but I thought I could change him. I couldn't."

"You shouldn't have to accept less than you deserve." Considering Isaac had pushed

away most suitors up to this point, he had no room to talk. Instead of not accepting less, he hadn't wanted anyone.

"I wasn't in a good place." Len held Isaac tight. "I hate to admit it, but the TIA was a stroke of luck." He groaned. "Horrible pun, but it's true. My eyes were opened, and I realized I didn't want to accept less. I bet that sounds corny."

"Nope. I hadn't plucked up the courage to ask you out before the other day because I thought you'd tell me I was too young."

"Unless you've got plans to go somewhere, you're right where I want you. With me." Len chuckled. "I don't need to look around. You're here and I'm great."

"Then we date and see where things go?"

"Yes."

He sighed, but his thoughts soured. “Damn.”

“What?” Len asked. “What’s wrong?”

“I want to stay, but need to go. I have patients at eight tomorrow and I need to get some sleep. It’ll be better if I head home.” He caressed Len’s cheek. “Whenever you want to go on that date, I’m ready.”

“How about dinner tomorrow night? I’ll cook and you can stay over then.” Len rubbed his cheek against Isaac’s palm. “We can watch a movie or sit on the back porch and talk.”

“Yes.” He nodded. He had to go, even if he didn’t want to. Another sigh bubbled in his throat. He buttoned his pants and sat up. “Stan?” The dog trotted over and Isaac scrubbed his face with the back of his hand. “Time to go home.”

Stan sat beside him and waited for Isaac to leave the sofa. Isaac stood, then wished he could hang around. “Tomorrow. Same time? I’m done at six.”

“Come right over after work and pick up Stan.” Len stood. He left his pants unbuttoned as he walked with Isaac to the door.

“I’d love that.” He kissed Len. Damn, he’d never get enough of that. “I’ll be over.” He forced himself to affix Stan’s leash to his collar. He patted his pockets for his keys, wallet and phone. “See you tomorrow.”

“Yeah.” Len stood in the doorway as Isaac went to his car. He waved when Isaac

backed down the driveway.

A piece of his heart already belonged to Len. He scratched Stan behind the ears, then drove home. He'd found the missing chunks of his life in Cedarwood—Stan, the practice...Len. Tomorrow couldn't come fast enough.

Chapter Seven

Isaac pulled into Len's driveway and parked. He'd thought about their dinner date all night. No one knew he was there—except Len. He hadn't told Dorian, despite knowing that Dorian would've encouraged him. Giddiness slid through Isaac's veins. He'd never thought he'd see the day he'd be at Len's like this. Again.

He adjusted his sport coat and checked his look in the mirror. Stan barked beside him. Strands of Stan's fur stuck to his lapel. Damn. He wanted to look presentable for their date, not covered in pet fur. On second thoughts, he didn't mind. Len wanted him to bring Stan along. Score one for Len.

Isaac left the car and helped Stan out of the passenger seat, then locked the vehicle and strode to the front door. When he reached the porch, Cissy barked. Stan chattered back to her. If Len had any doubts that Isaac and Stan were there, the dogs carrying on had to have alerted him.

"Hi, Cissy." Isaac hesitated, then grasped the door handle. Should he have brought wine or something? Probably. He groaned. Forethought on dates wasn't his strong point.

Len strode into the living room and up to the door. "Hi." He stood aside as Isaac and Stan ventured into the condo. "Sorry. I wanted to set the right mood and keep things light, but I'm frazzled and didn't get the pineapple chopped in time."

He unclipped Stan's leash, then caught Len in his embrace. "Honey, slow down. I won't bite."

Len sighed. "I know."

"It's us. We're no different from before." He rubbed Len's back, loving the feel of Len in his arms. "Nothing changed, so you can relax."

"Things changed," Len said. "You're not my doctor any longer and we masturbated together. A lot is different from before."

"I still am your doctor—I'm here with you and I'm a doctor. I'm officially a doctor and we're a couple. Besides, I loved every minute of our time together." He couldn't help himself and leaned in for a kiss. He noted the chips of amber in Len's eyes and his smooth skin. The streaks of silver in his hair caught the light. Silver worked for him and added to his appeal.

"You make me nervous," Len whispered.

"Why?"

"I don't believe we're here. Things like us don't happen to me."

"You showed up at the office and took what you wanted," Isaac said. He swayed with Len. "That's ballsy and flattering. Hell, I felt wanted for the first time in forever."

"Oh." Len blushed. "I'd love to say it was my plan, but I wanted to sort things out. If we ended up like this, then fine, but I wasn't sure we would."

"I wasn't positive," Isaac said. "But I had a feeling. You make me want to try harder." He kissed Len again. The sizzle increased and his heart hammered. He

wanted to forget dinner and learn every inch of Len.

Len broke the kiss and panted. His eyes widened and pink infused his cheeks. “I liked that.”

“Yeah?” He continued to sway. “We can do it again.”

“I want to,” Len murmured. “Yeah.”

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He kissed him a third time. But instead of just light touches, he nibbled on Len's bottom lip, and when Len opened to him, he sucked on Len's tongue. He slid his hands over Len's ass. Damn, he needed more. He ground on the bulge in Len's jeans. A rumble vibrated in his throat.

Cissy barked and Stan pawed at Isaac's leg. Len tensed as Isaac broke the kiss.

"What's wrong?" Isaac asked. "Is she okay?" He turned his attention to Stan. "What's wrong, guy?"

Len shook his head and let go. "Someone is knocking on my door. I'm not expecting anyone." He strode across the room to the front door. "God. No wonder she's having a fit."

"What?" He joined Len at the door and spotted the man on the porch. "Who's that?" Not his business, but he wanted to know.

"That is my neighbor, Brandon." Len paused. "I'm sorry. Let me get rid of him and we can finish making supper."

Cissy growled again and Stan joined in on the noise.

"Is she okay?" Isaac knelt to pet both dogs. "It's okay, sweetheart. Stan, it's fine. Hush. No one will hurt you."

"She doesn't like Brandon. I don't know what it is about him, but she's not a fan." Len blew out a long breath, then answered the door. "Brandon."

“Hi, baby. We’re late for coffee.” Brandon pulled on the screen door handle. “Don’t you remember? It’s our weekly coffee date.”

Weekly, eh? Isaac stayed out of sight for a moment and reassured the dogs. Brandon’s pushiness bothered him.

“We had coffee once,” Len said. “And I didn’t plan on making a recurring event.”

“You said to stop over any time,” Brandon said. “I’m stopping over.”

Isaac stood and inched over to Len. “Honey, we should check on the roast. It’ll burn if we’re not careful.” He wasn’t good at lying and had no idea beyond pineapple as to what Len had made for dinner.

“Yes.” Len rubbed his forehead. “I need to take it out. Shit. I’ll be right back. I need to change the temperature.” He left Isaac at the door.

Brandon stared at him. “I know you.”

“Do you?” He didn’t recognize him.

“You’re a doctor, aren’t you?” Brandon narrowed his eyes. “You clubbed, too...with that guy.”

“I’ve clubbed many a time with a few people. So?” Why was his private life any of this guy’s business? “You’re upsetting my dog.”

“I danced with you at Club 51,” Brandon said. “Got all hot and sweaty together.”

He didn’t remember dancing with this man and he rarely visited Club 51. “You’ve got me confused with someone else.”

“No, I don’t, Isaac McLean.”

He paused. The guy knew his name. Big deal. His name had been splashed all over the television and the newspaper when he’d moved to Cedarwood and joined the practice. Anyone could see his name and know it.

“You told me we’d be good together. We’d have a great time,” Brandon said. “But you’re up Dorian’s ass.”

“He’s my best friend.”

“Does Len know? You won’t ever settle down. You’ll go back to Dorian.” Brandon shook his head. “You’ll screw Len over.”

“I’m done talking to you.”

“I’ve heard the rumors. You’ll fuck anything that walks and want to try all the flavors before you slow down. Well, guess what, I see through your bullshit. You want Len because he’s a former lawyer and has money. He’s older and you want his money when he dies. I’ve seen your kind before,” Brandon growled. “Just don’t.”

“Damn. You think you know me.” He snorted. “You’re clueless.”

“Don’t hurt him. He’s a good man,” Brandon said. “Don’t hurt him the way you did me.”

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“We’ve never been an item, so I can’t have hurt you.” He grasped the door handle. “Good evening.” He closed the door and engaged the lock. Damn it. He didn’t know when he’d ever hurt Brandon or seen him before, but he refused to argue with him. He had better things to worry about.

Len rubbed his hands together. “The salmon is ready for the grill. Is he gone?”

“He’s gone.” He didn’t look back. “Salmon? What kind?” His mouth watered. He’d devour whatever Len made.

“Maple glazed spicy salmon with a pineapple salsa and blanched green beans.” Len beamed. “It’s one of my favorites.”

“Sounds delicious.” He followed Len to the kitchen. “Did you hear our argument?”

“No.” Len picked up a spatula and fiddled with the flames on the grill built into the kitchen island. “Why?”

If he didn’t address what was said, the worry would eat him alive. “He thinks I’m with you because you’re a former lawyer and I want your money.”

“Damn.” Len added both salmon fillets to the grill. “Little does he know, I’m giving everything to Aiden. I dumped a lot of money into the shelter and the library, so there isn’t a ton there.”

“I’m not here because of money.” He wasn’t sure why he’d said that.

“I know.” Len smiled and cut lemon wedges. “You don’t realize it, but I know you. Getting together was the hard part. We weren’t sure of each other because we didn’t give each other the chance to speak up. Now that we’re on this road, we’ve got the same plan.”

Isaac relaxed. “We do.”

“Here. Carry this to the table. The fish will be done in moments.” Len nodded to the green beans and lemon wedges. “I’ve got glazed almonds for the beans. Just a second.”

“I’ll get them.”

“In the fridge.” Len plated the fish. “Perfect char.”

“Looks delicious.” He carried the bowl and plastic container to the dining room. His breath lodged in his throat. The candles, the wine and formal silverware...damn. “You’re too good to be true.” Isaac placed the food on the table. “Thank you.”

“You’re welcome, but I’m very human.” Len offered one plate to Isaac. “Sit. We’ll eat. Wine?”

“Sure.” He hated to admit he was overwhelmed. He’d dated a few men and none had been as nice or considerate as Len.

“You know me, but I’m a wolf when I want to be.” Len sat opposite him. “I’ve got a temper, too.”

“It’s okay,” Isaac said. “You’re a sexy wolf.”

“I’m old.”

“No.” He reached across the table and held Len’s hand. “Age doesn’t matter and you don’t look your age.”

“Sweet talker.”

“Of course.” Electricity shot from Len’s hand to his. Isaac suppressed a groan. He didn’t want a hand job this time around. He needed more. He held hands with Len, but ate in silence and debated his next move.

“What made you get into medicine?” Len asked.

He hadn’t thought about that in a long time.

“Aiden loved helping people and enjoyed anatomy—if I remember right.” Len laughed. “He loved his toy doctor set and giving people a shot.”

“I believe it,” Isaac said. He wiped his mouth. “My grandmother developed cancer and I thought I’d cure her. I didn’t, but I was also twelve at the time. I couldn’t do much for her, but it was the catalyst to do more for others. If I could save someone else from losing their grandmother that soon, then I wanted to do it. I went into medicine to help people. By working at the family practice, I can’t cure cancer, but I can see my patients through their life and know what they’re dealing with as they age.”

“Makes sense.” Len finished his salmon. “You helped me.”

“I try.” The tips of his ears burned. “What about you? Why law?” He’d never asked Len about that before.

“I liked to argue. I’m good at it and I enjoyed trying to fight the good fight,” Len said. “I used to be angrier and the rush of the courtroom helped curtail my temper. I

stayed in the game because I liked the money. I wanted to raise Aiden well and pay for my ex-wife. In some ways, it was a curse, but in others it helped.”

“Keye?”

“He came after my marriage to my ex-wife. The situation with her was contentious because she hated my being gay. Keye understood.” Len shook his head and stacked his silverware on his plate. “But that chapter of my life is closed.”

“Understood.” Everyone had things they wished to never discuss again.

“I was a different man back then. So angry and confused. But I got Aiden out of the marriage, so it was okay.” Len nudged his empty plate away. “I’ll have to do a ton of laps in the pool, but this was so good.”

“I’ll have to run a little more.” Isaac chuckled and finished his dinner. “It’s been delicious, so I’m not complaining. Thank you.”

“Welcome.” Len stood. “I forgot to pour the wine. Shoot. I should’ve served it when we ate.”

Isaac collected the empty plates. “It’s fine. I’m good with water now and wine when we’re done.” He picked up the empty glasses. “We can have wine during the movie.”

“Good idea.”

He glanced down at the dogs. Cissy and Stan had curled up on the gigantic dog pillow. Neither slept, but they were both watching them. Isaac grinned. “We have an audience.”

“Oh yeah. She knows everything I do and follows me everywhere.” Len headed into the kitchen. “She needs to know what I’m doing.”

“So does Stan.” He helped place the plates and silver in the dishwasher.

“See? You get it.” Len added the pan and plastic cutting board to the dishwasher. “It’s nice because I’m not lonely, but not when I want to shower. She doesn’t understand I can use the restroom or shower on my own.”

“Stan’s afraid of the water. He was hell when I tried to bathe him.” He shuddered as he thought about the disastrous attempt to bathe his dog. “We got water everywhere but on him.”

“Aww.” Len finished loading the dishwasher. “I’ll turn this on when we’re done. Do you like the red I put on the table? Would you rather white?”

“Red.” He didn’t care what they drank. He’d take whatever Len gave him.

Len returned to the dining room table with the corkscrew. He opened the wine and paused. “We’re supposed to savor this. I got this bottle in New York. I haven’t tried this brand, but I’m told it’s supposed to be good. I thought I’d wait until a special occasion. You’re special.” He offered up the bottle. “Want to smell it?”

“Pour. I don’t need to be fancy.” He held both wineglasses. He appreciated wine, but not enough right now to waste minutes on it.

“Then okay.” Len finished pouring the wine. He placed the bottle on the table, then clinked glasses with Isaac. “To us.”

“To a new relationship turning into something lasting,” Isaac said. “Sorry. I want this so much.” His cheeks heated.

“I want it too, so we’ll go slow and figure things out. I’m where I want to be,” Len said.

Isaac sipped the wine. The tart taste exploded on his tongue. He’d only had a little bit, but his head swam. Can’t be from the wine. From Len? Probably.

“I’m glad you’re here.” Len put his glass on the table, then slid his hands over Isaac’s chest. “I never thought this would happen.”

“Me, either.” He kissed Len. The taste of the wine remained on his tongue. He swallowed Len’s groan. Who needed wine right now anyway?

Len threaded his arms around Isaac. He deepened the kiss and brushed his nose along Isaac’s. He rubbed the bulge in his jeans against the one in Isaac’s trousers.

He broke the kiss and panted. “I need you.” He dragged Len to the living room and abandoned his wineglass on the side table.

“The scene of our initial crime,” Len murmured.

“Not to me.” He snagged Len in his embrace again. “It’s the start of us.”

“And now we continue.”

“Yes.” He nipped Len’s bottom lip.

“Not in the living room,” Len said. “Come with me.” He checked the lock on the front door, then headed through the house to the back.

“Dogs?” Isaac asked.

“Will follow.” Len opened one of the doors into a spacious master bedroom.

Isaac paid little attention to their surroundings. All he saw was Len. He kissed him and pinned Len between his body and the door. He touched Len all over, learning each curve and ripple of his hard chest. Len’s nipples beaded. He kissed him and needed to feel everything. He massaged the bulge in Len’s jeans. He knew his lover’s cock and he wanted to play with him even more.

Len moaned. “Isaac.”

He pushed Len’s shirt up over his head, exposing his boyfriend’s chest. Isaac loved the view. So sexy. He kissed the ripples and planes of Len’s body.

Len tensed and threaded his fingers into Isaac’s hair. “Need you.”

“Where?” Isaac sank to his knees. “Here?”

Lust burned in Len’s eyes. He panted. “Yes.”

His pulse throbbed in his ears. Perspiration glittered on Len’s chest. Isaac traced the thin line of fuzz between Len’s pecs down his body to the darker outcropping of hairs leading from his navel to below his belt. His moans were music to Isaac’s ears.

Isaac popped the button on Len’s pants. The denim loosened and Len’s abs flexed as he sucked in a ragged breath.

“My prize.” Isaac tugged Len’s zipper and the pants slid down Len’s legs. Len’s briefs slid down as well, exposing his groin. Isaac wrapped his fingers around Len’s shaft. The pale curls at the base glimmered in the light. Len’s balls tightened and pre-cum shimmered on the tip of his erection.

Isaac met Len’s gaze. “For me?” He knew damn well he turned Len on, but he needed the reassurance.

“Always.” Len guided him. “Need you.”

Isaac loved being pushed. He nibbled on the inside of Len’s inner thigh as he stroked his lover’s cock. The heat radiating from Len spurred him on.

“Damn.” Len tugged on Isaac’s hair. “You’ll wear me out.”

“Nah.” He kept stroking, but slid his free hand along Len’s abs to his chest. He pinched one of Len’s nipples. He wanted Len right at the edge before he’d even sucked him off.

“Jesus Christ.” Len pumped his hips. “Please?” More pre-cum shimmered on his cock. “Need more.”

He nudged Len closer and switched nipples as he increased the pace of his strokes. He nuzzled Len’s balls. His lover wasn’t where he wanted him yet.

“Fuck me, yes.” Len ground on Isaac’s face. He moaned.

Now he had Len at the edge of coming. Isaac chuckled around Len’s erection and sucked him to the back of his throat. He bobbed his head, taking Len deep before letting him slide most of the way out. He flattened his tongue along the underside of Len’s cock and hummed.

Len groaned. “Yes.” He pushed himself to the hilt inside Isaac’s mouth. “Oh my God.”

Lust and desire filled Isaac and he licked his way along Len’s dick. He loved when he pleased his boyfriend. He needed to be craved and Len did with him.

Isaac continued to bob his head. He caressed Len’s balls and ventured back to his lover’s hole. Len was a natural top, but that didn’t mean he wouldn’t like the special attention.

Len’s movements turned jerky. He fucked Isaac’s mouth faster and his actions increased in speed. A shudder rocked through Len as Isaac toyed with his ass.

“No. Need to be inside you,” Len said. He pulled out, stopping Isaac.

Len’s commanding tone sent a shiver through Isaac. He let go of Len’s dick with apopand sat back on his heels. He stared up at Len.

“On the bed. On your hands and knees and show me your ass.” Len shoved his pants the rest of the way down his legs. He stepped out of the tangled denim and underwear.

The lack of tenderness in Len’s voice didn’t bother Isaac. He needed his boyfriend to be frantic. Isaac stood long enough to strip, then crawled onto the bed. He embraced the freedom in being nude before his man.

Len slapped Isaac’s ass. “Do you want me in here?” He stroked Isaac’s hole.

He moaned. “Yes.” He thought he’d been happy to lick Len’s cock, but having Len inside him was better. He wiggled his ass. “Fuck me.”

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“Here?” Len tapped Isaac’s ass.

“Yes.” He dug his fingers into the bedding. His skin prickled and fever spread across his body. He closed his eyes and basked in the thrill of being with Len.

“Christ, you have a nice ass.” Len massaged Isaac’s butt. “I need more of you.” He left Isaac for a moment.

Isaac missed Len’s warmth. He opened his eyes and glanced over his shoulder. Len stood with his back to him at the dresser. In moments, Len withdrew a bottle of lube and a condom. Giddiness washed over Isaac. Soon, he and Len would be one body moving in perfect rhythm.

Isaac spread his legs wide. He wanted to stroke himself but held back. A chill ran down the crack of his ass. He knew the cool sensation—lube. His excitement increased. He dug his toes into the blankets.

Len flattened his hand on Isaac’s back. “Breathe for me.”

“Too excited.” He buried his nose in the sheets, breathing in the scent of Len.

“Naughty.” Len swatted Isaac’s ass. “All mine, though.” He toyed with Isaac’s pucker without penetrating him.

Isaac moaned. He loved the teasing.

Len eased one finger into Isaac’s body and the move blew Isaac’s mind. He bore

down on Len, needing more. “Jesus,” Isaac murmured.

Len curled his finger, stroking Isaac’s prostate.

A rumble filled Isaac’s chest. He writhed. Christ, he needed to jerk himself off.

In and out, Len moved in a rhythmic motion. He caressed Isaac from within, yet pushed him, too.

Isaac rocked into Len’s finger and groaned when Len added another digit. He couldn’t take much more, yet he’d accept whatever Len gave him.

“You love it,” Len murmured. “You’re stretched and used, but you crave this.”

He panted. “I do.” He wasn’t going to last much longer. Isaac propped himself on one hand and his knees, then reached between his legs and stroked his cock. “Fuck me.” He couldn’t think straight. “Do it.”

Len increased his speed and added more lube. The burn from being stretched seared Isaac to his core, but morphed into pleasure in seconds. Passion overwhelmed him. Len scissored his fingers in Isaac, pushing him to the edge.

“Oh, God,” Isaac whimpered. “Fuck.”

“Now?” Len asked. “Isaac?”

“God, yes.” He continued to ride Len’s fingers and stroke himself. The combination was too good. He’d never be able to hold back. He whimpered again. The snap of the condom wrapper opening relieved Isaac. Soon, they’d be one soul together.

Len withdrew. He added more lube down Isaac’s ass. “I’m making you mine.”

“Yes.” His senses were on high alert. He exhaled as Len breached him. Despite the prep work, Len being inside him was still a snug fit. He groaned. The burn increased with each thrust, but the pain subsided in moments and turned to pleasure. Len added a few swats as he pushed in and out of Isaac’s body.

Isaac moved in time with his lover. One heart, one body, one soul. Len touched parts of him he’d thought were buried. He’d never be the same.

“Fuck,” Len bit out. “So tight.”

He wanted to answer, but the words weren’t there. He basked in the perfect rhythm of being with Len. He moaned and his thoughts blurred again. Nothing mattered except Len and the present moment.

Len moved faster and pushed harder. He filled Isaac to the hilt before pulling almost all the way out. The slap of skin on skin and Isaac’s moans echoed in the room.

A shudder rippled through Isaac. How in the hell was he supposed to hold back now? It wouldn’t be much longer before he lost control. His balls tingled as the orgasm pushed him. The sizzles started in his belly and spiraled through his body. “Fuck, I’m coming.” He couldn’t keep the climax at bay if he tried.

Len groaned. “Let go.”

He couldn’t argue. Isaac embraced the orgasm. For a few seconds, he swore he floated. He came hard as Len pushed to the hilt again. He didn’t care if he made a mess. When Len’s cock throbbed deep within him, his control shattered again.

“Christ.” Len collapsed against Isaac’s back and added three more thrusts. “That’s hot.” He kissed Isaac’s shoulder blade. “My knees are going to give out.” He sprawled on Isaac, sending them both onto the bed in a heap.

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Isaac laughed. His heart lightened and his worries melted away. Life was good and he'd been changed. He wasn't the same man. He'd grown stronger and his connection to Len was deeper. He couldn't go back to the way he'd been, but why would he want to? Now he had the man he'd always wanted.

Len was still panting. "Why are you laughing?"

"I'm happy," Isaac said. "That's it. I'm good. I've been loved well."

"You have and I'm dying to do this again." He kissed Isaac's shoulder again. "Feels so right."

"It does." Isaac sighed. His ass hurt in a wonderful way.

"Stay tonight." Len tucked Isaac to his side. "I want to wake up to you beside me."

"It just so happens I don't have any early appointments, so I can." He draped his arm across Len's taut belly. "Been looking forward to this."

"Good."

"We should put the dogs out before we get too comfy and fall asleep." He hated to break the moment, but Stan tended to need one more trot outside before he was in for the night.

"I'll get you some pajama pants." Len left the bed. "Next time, tell me I'm not so good. That way you don't have to use the dogs as an excuse."

Shit. That went sideways fast. “No.” He sat up. “Len.” He accepted the pants, but didn’t put them on. “Len.”

“Yeah?” Len kept his back to Isaac. “It’s okay.”

“No, it’s not.” He left the pants on the bed and crossed the room to Len. He stood naked before his lover. “Stan still has accidents if it’s too long since the last time he went out. I’m just trying to save your carpet from an oops. You were good. Better than good. Forgive me for being practical.”

Len blushed. “I’m sorry.”

“Don’t have to be.” He trailed his fingers down Len’s chest. “We’re both out of practice with relationships. We’ll get this figured out. I know it.”

“After Ross...” Len shook his head. “Be patient with me.”

“I will.” He donned the pants and tried to push thoughts of Len’s ex-partner from his mind. He hated Ross and the stress the man had caused. “I’m not him.”

“You’re not.” Len reached for Isaac. “I’m still learning, but I’ll get better.”

“We’re together. That’s enough.” He followed Len to the back of the house. Stan and Cissy raced past him into the yard. The flood lights bathed the yard in white light as the dogs did their business. Cissy kept an eye on Stan and herded him back into the house.

Isaac admired the animals and the situation. Both dogs were a lot like their masters. Cissy was adventurous but cautious. She needed to be in control—like Len. Stan was more skittish, but grew more confident with a partner. He was a happy dog, but quiet and more reserved—like Isaac. Both fit well together.

Cissy kept up behind Stan as he headed into the house. She directed him back to the bedroom.

“I guess she’s in charge,” Len said and locked up. He lowered the lights in the yard. “She’s pushy.”

“They’ll probably be curled up together by the time we get to bed.”

Len picked up the bottle of wine. “Where are those glasses? We’ve got an open bottle and a movie. Ready?”

“More than ready.” He snagged the wineglasses, then returned to the bedroom. He had everything he wanted—the dog, the guy and something strong. He’d never been this excited for the next step in his life. Bring it on.

Chapter Eight

Len pushed the book cart across the second floor of the library. In the last two weeks, he’d seen Isaac almost every night. He’d never be the same, but in so many good ways. He’d fallen for Isaac McLean.

Isaac was such a unique man. An old soul, smart and oh, so handsome. Len shelved the books and ran his fingers over the spines. He loved the smell of books, pages and ink. He’d always thought paper was better than electronic books, but he had a reading device, too.

He pushed the cart to the health section. The books reminded him of Isaac and Aiden. He’d been mighty lucky to have both in his life. Aiden was a great young man. Isaac was a fantastic lover. He’d accepted Len’s need to control the situation and hadn’t balked when he made mistakes.

He spotted his friend, Martin White, at one of the study tables. He'd battled Martin many times in the courtroom. In the courts, they were the worst enemies, but friends on the outside. He pushed the cart aside and parked it at the end of one of the stacks.

“Hi, Marty.”

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Martin put his newspaper down and nodded once. "Len." He folded the paper. "How are you?"

"Good. You?" He turned the chair at the next table and sat beside Martin.

"Are you working here?" Martin asked. "I thought you'd keel over in the courtroom." He folded his arms. "I heard you had a stroke. Doesn't look like it."

"I did." He lowered his voice. "A couple of years ago. It wasn't as bad as it could've been, but it woke me up."

"I'll bet." Martin frowned and his bushy eyebrows knotted. "Is that why you retired?"

"I retired right before, but I'm not sure why the stroke happened," Len said. "My boyfriend at the time didn't make it easy to recover."

"Not Keye."

"No. A man named Ross." He wasn't about to go into details, but he couldn't prevent himself from blaming his ex.

Martin's frown increased and he sighed. "I don't remember him."

"You didn't miss much."

"You look good," Martin said and brightened. "Who is he? Whoever you're with is a good man and influence."

“I’m seeing Dr. Isaac McLean.” He sat up straighter as he said those words. He’d never get tired of talking about his current boyfriend.

“The doctor? He’s young, you sly dog. I’m proud. I’ll bet he keeps you young, too,” Martin said. “Looks like it anyway.”

“He makes me happy.” He hadn’t thought about the relationship as being so obviously good for him, but he wasn’t about to argue. “How’s Katie?”

“Good. We’re grandparents now to six kids. Anna had four and Steven had two. I never thought either of my children would settle down. Then again, Anna always thought she’d marry Aiden.”

“No kidding?” He’d never known she was interested in his son.

“She had a huge crush on him.” Martin laughed. “She married a lawyer—one that never came up against you. His name is Campbell Cook. Nice guy. He treats her well and she loves him, so it’s good.”

“I don’t know him.” He didn’t recognize many of the newer lawyers, but he’d been out of the game for a while.

“He works for the DA.”

“Ah. Good for him.” He should get back to shelving the books. “Tell them all I said hello. I miss seeing Katie and you at Wagoner’s Place.”

“That joint closed three years ago,” Martin said. “Jimmy Wagoner passed and Coral didn’t want the stress of running a restaurant. The kids didn’t want to run it, so it closed. I hear rumbles that people are considering opening it again, but I don’t know who.”

“I hope someone sees the potential.” He enjoyed the little restaurant just outside Cedarwood. “What brings you to the library? The paper?”

“Yeah.” Martin blushed. “I come here and read them. I suppose I could buy a subscription, but I figure this is better for the environment. Why are you shelving books? Do you need the money?”

“I volunteer.” Martin could afford the paper, but if he was truly about saving the environment, then fine.

“I never thought about that.” Martin shrugged. “Whatever works.”

“It does. Books get shelved and the library doesn’t have to spend the money on me. They can focus on the rest of the staff and the collection.” He prided himself in his volunteer work.

“Gonna get Dr. McLean to cough up a big donation?” Martin asked. “You decided to sleep with him to get the library some dough?”

“I don’t mix business and pleasure.” Besides, it wasn’t Martin’s business if he did.

“You’re no fun.” Martin laughed again. “Oh well. I should go. Katie’s getting her hair done and I’m supposed to pick her up.”

“I’ll see you around then. It’s been good to catch up.” He pushed the chair back to its table and nodded. “See you.”

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Martin winked, then wandered off without pushing his chair in.

Len eased the chair up to the study table, then resumed his place behind the cart. He mulled over his conversation with Martin. A donation. He wasn't with Isaac to garner donations for the library. What did Martin know?

Len finished shelving books and returned the cart to the storeroom. The girls at the counter waved as he clocked out. He'd put in three hours. Now he needed to grab some lunch and Cissy before he headed to the shelter for his afternoon volunteering hours.

As he strolled out to his car, his phone rang. He waited until he was behind the wheel before answering. He left his keys on his lap. "Hello?"

"It's Stone. Hi."

"Stone," Len said. "How are you?"

"I've had better days," Stone said. "I'm calling because I need you to purchase a couple bags of dog food before you come in for your shift. I'll personally reimburse you, but we're out. I put a request on social media, but we need the food right now. Donations will come through, I'm sure, but if you can help me, I'd appreciate it."

"I'll do it right now and you don't have to reimburse me. Consider it my donation," Len said. "My pleasure."

"Thanks. It means a lot."

“No problem. I’m leaving the library when I get off the phone with you. I’ll pick up the food and Cissy, then be over in less than an hour.”

“I appreciate it more than you know,” Stone said. “I hate that we got this low.”

“No problem. I’ll see you in a bit.”

When Stone hung up, Len engaged the engine and sped out of the lot. He drove right over to the store. A thought occurred to him. He’d planned on having lunch with Isaac. Shit. He hurried through a text to Isaac.

Need to get dog food for the shelter. They’re out. Will have to cancel lunch. Sorry. Call me when you get out of work.

He wasn’t sure why he’d added the heart to the end of the text, but oh well. It felt right.

Within seconds, a reply text showed up on his phone screen. From Isaac.

Dog food? How much? I’ll contribute. Meet me at the store.

His heart warmed. He could be in love with Isaac. Len paused. Love? Damn. He’d never thought he’d touch that emotion again. But Isaac was different. He didn’t need Len’s money or status. Isaac could handle himself. He was handsome, stable and kind. He was the type of man Len could spend forever with and be happy. He should answer Isaac.

Already here. Waiting for you.

Back to the heart stuff. He shook his head. He’d lost his heart to Isaac, so he might as well advertise it. He tucked the phone into his back pocket and waited by his car.

Moments later, Isaac pulled into the lot.

“Hi.” Isaac left his vehicle in the spot next to Len’s. He rubbed his hands together. “You’re standing me up to buy dog food?” A grin spread across his face. “Is the need that big?”

“Unfortunately, it is,” Len said as he fell into step beside Isaac and entered the store. “Stone wouldn’t call and ask me to pick up supplies if they weren’t in dire need. Once he asked, I couldn’t turn him down.”

“You know that’s sexy.” Isaac bumped shoulders with Len. “Is there a specific brand?”

Len pulled one of the carts from the rack. “It’s a green bag. Cissy eats the kind in the purple bag, but the green one is more economical.”

“Then green it is.” Isaac opened his coat. “I’m glad you texted. I wanted to get out of the office for a little while. I’ve had nonstop appointments today and some have been tough. I don’t like sending patients out for tests, but we don’t have a lab on premises. It means they can’t have the test done right now and we can’t get the results right away.”

“It costs too much for one?” He didn’t know how the labs worked. All he knew was that he hated having blood drawn.

“It’s cost and the staffing. We don’t have to have urine tests done every day, but we do need a phlebotomist on staff. It’d make the nurses happy. They’re stretched so thin. Aiden’s lucky he’s at the hospital. Everything he needs is right there.” He sighed. “It’s not fun when we can’t help patients because we don’t have the equipment. It’s also not fun when those patients give us a tongue-lashing because they aren’t happy. I can’t make the appointments run smoother so it doesn’t take as

long. I can't help it when someone faints because they've seen a needle or screams when they're supposed to get a shot."

"Slow down." Len stopped in front of the dog food display. "I'm listening, but this is our stop."

"Oh. How many?"

"Get eight." Len helped Isaac add eight bags of food to the cart. "Feel free to continue decompressing."

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“I’d rather decompress with you at the house,” Isaac said. “It’d help me relax.”

He wanted to answer, but people were in the aisle. “I’m sure.” He’d rather take Isaac home right now, too. “I have room in the back seat for this.” He pushed the cart toward the registers. Once he stopped, he pulled out his wallet.

“I’ve got this.” Isaac nodded to the self-checkout. “Use the scanner.”

Len whipped out the scan gun. He admired Isaac’s fluid grace when he moved. Paying for the dog food was a small gesture, but other men might not have offered to foot the bill. Some wouldn’t have met him at the store and would’ve been angry not to have the lunch date. But Isaac had a big heart.

“You’re staring at me.” Isaac swiped his credit card. “Do I have something on my shirt?”

“No.” Embarrassment washed over him. He’d been caught.

Isaac nodded. “Let’s go. I can put some in my car, too. The trunk is tiny, but it’s there.”

He walked out of the store with Isaac, proud to be with his man. “Do you need to get back?” He pressed the button on his key fob and the trunk opened. “When’s your next appointment?”

“Two.” Isaac hefted the dog food into Len’s car. “It’s been a rough day, so I scheduled a little more time for lunch. Why? Do you have a good suggestion for how

to pass the time?”

“Yeah, with lunch.” He pulled his phone out of his pocket. He spotted the food trucks and surveyed the choices. “Tacos, gyros or salads?”

Isaac’s eyes flashed. “Salads.”

“Chicken, turkey, tuna, steak, chef salad or surprise me?” He opened the app for the salad truck.

“Surprise me.” Isaac finished putting the dog food bags into the trunk and closed the lid. “Why? Do you have salads in your car?”

“Nope.” He tapped the order and paid. “But if you’ll stop by the Chilly Chops truck, our order will be ready in about ten minutes. It’s paid for and I ordered for Stone, too. Three salads and drinks.”

“You’re treating me?” Isaac grinned. “Thank you.”

“You bought the dog food and I interrupted your lunch. It’s the least I could do.” He kissed Isaac. “I’m going to the shelter. Meet me there?”

“Yes.” Isaac lingered beside him. “I’ll be done at seven tonight. Think you’ve got some time for Stan and me tonight?”

“Always.” He kissed Isaac again. “I’d say get going before it gets cold, but they don’t come warm, I suppose.”

“I’ll hurry.” Isaac let go and climbed behind the wheel of his car. He waved, then drove across the lot to the square.

Len sat behind the wheel of his own car. He had a great thing going with Isaac. As long as Aiden was still okay with the relationship, he'd have everything he needed—the son and son-in-law, the dogs, his health, his home and his man.

* * * *

Isaac rolled his shoulders. He still couldn't contain his excitement. Meeting Len for lunch hadn't gone quite the way he'd wanted, but he didn't mind. Their lunch date had been unorthodox, but it didn't matter. He'd been able to see another side of Len and loved it. Tender, caring and patient, Len—with Stone's help—ensured each dog got their food and a little attention. He talked to each pup.

Len would be tender with Isaac's heart, too. Isaac could tell by the way he treated the animals that Len wouldn't hurt him. Ever.

Len was a keeper. The kind of man he could be with forever.

"Are you leaving soon?" Elise asked as she walked into his office.

"I am." He needed time away from the practice.

"Are you going to see Len?" She winked. "I had the feeling you'd hit it off."

"Did you?"

"He lives in my housing development and I met him at one of the development-wide mixers. He seemed so sweet, but lost," she said. "He needed a good man, a stable one, to be his partner. You fit the bill." She elbowed him. "Plus, you're handsome. He is, too."

"Thanks." What an odd conversation, but he'd grown used to them with Elise. She

seemed to know what to say and when to get him to think. At least he didn't have to discuss pus or lancing boils or the strain of chicken pox he'd seen in four teen patients.

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“I noticed you meet up with Len a lot. Are things...serious?” she asked.

“Yeah.” He shut down his tablet and placed the device in the tray on his desk. “We’re exclusive.”

“Any chance you’ll move in together?”

“Slow down.” He hadn’t told Len he loved him yet. That had to happen before they moved in together. No, Len had to ask him if he wanted him to move in before anything else. Isaac didn’t believe in barging into a relationship that way. “Maybe eventually, but not yet.”

“You should. Marry him while you’re at it. Neither of you should be on the market,” she said.

“We should be together and off the market or just out of circulation?”

“Smart aleck.” She shook her head. “Go home and love that man silly.”

“If you insist.” He donned his jacket.

“I do.”

She’d said something that stuck with him. “Do you enjoy that development? Know a lot of the people there?”

“I do.” She hesitated. “It’s quiet, clean, diverse...why? Don’t you buy a home there.

Move in with Len. That's where you belong."

"Eventually," Isaac said. He longed to leave the tiny apartment and have room to move. Room for the animals to play. First, he wanted some answers. "Do you know a man by the name of Brandon? He lives close to Len."

"Yes. Newsome. What about him? Don't tell me you like him." She shook her head. "He's bad news. He'll use you and you're better off with Len. In fact, if you're looking to dump Len for him, I'll have to do something I regret. I respect the hell out of Len."

"Whoa." He held up both hands. "Brandon likes to show up uninvited and makes comments about being with Len. He claims they were a thing, he and I were once a thing and I'd turned him down. I've never seen him before I went to Len's." Isaac sank onto his desk. "Is he popular?"

"He thinks he's God's gift to gay men. He's not." She waved her fingers. "Don't worry about him. He gloms onto every new man who moves in and he claims they were a thing, but they aren't. It's a lot in his mind and a little in reality. He tries to say he's with everyone so they'll like him. It's sad. He deserves someone who can care for him in the way he needs, but he won't stop long enough to let that person in."

"Ah." He slung his bag over his shoulder and checked his pockets for his personal phone, his keys and wallet.

"He's greedy, but harmless. I've known him for five years. He's never been with the same man for very long and is always looking for the next score." She shrugged. "If you're not interested in him and neither is Len, but you love each other, then you've found your man."

"I guess I have." He refused to argue with her. She was right. "I appreciate the

information.”

“Anytime.” She escorted him out of the office. “Now get some love.”

“I need to get Stan first.” He walked with her down the corridor to the back of the building. He should’ve gone out of his personal exit, but wanted to listen to her. He liked Elise and the more time he spent around her, the more he thanked fate she’d been assigned to him as his receptionist.

“Then get out of here.” She waved. “Let the pup out and get your man. See you Monday.”

“Bright and early. Have a good weekend.”

“You, too.”

Isaac left the office and his heart beat faster. He’d see Len soon. No patients, no complaining, no sad stories for a little while. He needed his man in his arms. Once he stopped at his apartment, he picked up his overnight bag and Stan, then fed Ollie. Was Cissy fond of cats? He should figure that out if the dog would get along with his cat. If he and Len had a future together, they’d have to mingle their pets. He wasn’t giving up his cat.

Would he risk his relationship for a cat?

He wanted a future with Len, but Ollie wasn’t a throwaway item.

He locked up and headed downstairs with Stan. He should start leaving clothes at Len’s place. They were a month into the relationship and it might be too early, but what if they went the distance? Instead of thinking about what could be, he pushed the thoughts aside and focused on driving to Len’s.

Ten minutes later, he pulled into the housing development. Being there felt like coming home. He didn't have to check the signs or look at the houses. He knew his way to Len's by heart. His comfort level increased.

He turned into Len's driveway. Aiden's car was already there. Isaac hesitated a beat. Shit. He hadn't known Aiden would be there. What would he have done if he had known? Waited? Stayed home a little longer? Insisted Aiden go?

Why was he so worried? Jesus. He knew Aiden. They were friends. This shouldn't be so hard. He could handle being around Aiden. They'd run into each other again eventually. He wasn't sure what to say to Aiden, but he'd figure it out.

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Stan barked, bringing Isaac out of his thoughts. He couldn't stay in his head all day. He left the car and the porch light came on. Len strode out of the condo.

"You made it." Len made his way up to the car. "Hi, Stan." He turned his attention to Isaac. "I'm glad you're here."

"You missed me?" Isaac held on to Stan's leash and guided him out of the vehicle.

"I did." Len threaded his arm around Isaac. "You make me happy."

"Make me pretty happy, too." He paused. "Aiden's here."

"And Matt."

Shit. "Am I walking into an ambush?"

"No. I told them to drop by any time and they did." Len squeezed Isaac's side. "Don't worry. If I thought you'd get attacked, I wouldn't have been okay with all of us being together."

"You're sure?"

"Yes." Len kissed his cheek. "Come inside. If we're going to be together, then we have to get along. It's not hard and we can do this."

"Agreed." He held tight to Stan's leash. "Let's go. I'm ready." Sort of.

“You’ll be fine.” Len opened the door for them. Stan strode into the house first and yanked the leash. He pranced with Cissy and barked.

Isaac unclipped the leash, then sighed. What a time to lose his courage.

Aiden and Matt stood together at the counter in the kitchen. Aiden waved.

“Hi.” He couldn’t hide his discomfort, but he’d deal. “How are you?” He kicked out of his shoes and left the leash with Cissy’s by the door.

“Good.” Aiden strode into the living room. He offered Isaac a glass of wine. “Is it rocking there at the clinic?”

“It’s busy.” Isaac nodded. “I sent some tests over to the hospital labs today.”

“Nice.” Aiden held up the glass. “Want some?”

He should stay level-headed. “I’m good, but thank you.” The offer could be a test or a goodwill gesture. Either way, he wasn’t in the mood for a drink.

Len eased up beside him and squeezed Isaac’s ass.

Matt headed into the living room. “Good to see you, Isaac. Len’s talked about you nonstop.”

He blushed. His skin heated and a prickle ran the length of his spine. “I’m not that exciting.”

“I don’t agree.” Len laughed. “You’re plenty exciting.”

“Dad.” Aiden shook his head. “I don’t need to know.” He laughed, too.

Isaac smiled, unsure if he should be proud or embarrassed.

“Matt, help me with the chicken,” Len said. He elbowed Matt. “You can add the garnish.” He and Matt left the room.

Aiden sipped his wine, then stared at Isaac. “So, you and Dad.” He dipped his head. “I could see it all along. You’ve always hit it off with him.”

“You knew?” He contained his shock, but not by much.

“Everyone knew. When you and I discussed Dad after his stroke, I could tell it was genuine concern, not doctor-patient worry. There was a sparkle in your eye, but also a catch in your voice. You were just as scared as we were. That made an impression on me and apparently on Dad, too. I haven’t seen my dad this happy in forever.”

He wasn’t sure what to say. His world was better with Len in it. He cared for and loved Len.

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“Ross screwed him up,” Aiden said. “I knew my dad wouldn’t be single for long. He’s a relationship kind of guy, but Ross did a number on him. They never should’ve been together, but I don’t know. Maybe there were good things about him. I never saw them. All I do know is that he’s gone and you’re here. Be good to Dad. He needs someone who can love him, warts and all.”

“I will.” Without question.

“Be good to him and I’ll be on your side.” Aiden clapped Isaac on the shoulder. “I’m glad he’s with you.”

“I’m proud to be with him.”

Aiden nodded again. “Do you swim with him or run together?”

“We’ve done both. I had to get a pass at the swim complex, but I didn’t care. I miss having someone to challenge me. It’s no fun swimming and running alone.” Isaac shrugged. “Do you still run?”

“Matt and I do. We clock laps on the trails. It sucks when we’re on opposing schedules, but we figure things out,” Aiden said. He sipped his wine again. “You should have some of this. It’s really good. I’m no wine connoisseur, but this is smooth.”

“Nah, I’m good. Thanks though,” Isaac said. “I’m not much of a drinker.”

“I remember.” Aiden smiled. “That’s another reason I know you’re good for Dad.

You're not prone to losing control and getting sloppy."

"In our line of work, we need to be in control."

Aiden sighed. "Just be careful with Dad and be honest."

"I will."

"Then let's eat." Aiden headed into the dining room. "I'm starving."

Isaac got the hint—conversation over. He exhaled. He'd gained an ally in Aiden, but also knew where he stood with him. Good enough. He'd passed the test.

"It's all good," Len whispered. "And it'll keep getting better."

"It will." Isaac took a seat at the table and relaxed. He had a family and people who cared about him. He wouldn't trade it for the world.

Chapter Nine

Isaac stayed long after Aiden and Matt left. He sagged on the sofa. He hated the tense feeling, but damn it. He couldn't settle down. "That went better than I thought."

"I did, but I wasn't worried. You were?" Len sat beside him. "Honey, it's just Aiden and Matt. No one was going to turn you down or say anything." He palmed Isaac's thigh. "They like you."

"But the age thing. I know Aiden said to be good and careful, but I know it's got to be bothering him." He groaned. "I'm overthinking this, aren't I?"

"You are, because the age thing isn't a big deal."

“I was your doctor.” He couldn’t get past Aiden mentioning the concern going beyond him being Len’s physician.

“And you know me.” Len rested his head on Isaac’s shoulder. “Stop worrying about whatever you’re overthinking. You passed the test. You’re in and I’m the deciding vote. Aiden and Matt are happy for us because they see we’re both better together. That’s what matters.”

“That’s true.” If he didn’t get over his fears, he’d lose out on the person he cared about most. “Come here.” He tugged Len onto his lap, straddling him. “How’d things go today at the shelter?”

“Everyone’s fed and two dogs were adopted. The people came through,” Len said. He massaged Isaac’s shoulders. “Our contribution helped, too. Thanks for donating.”

“Any time.” He slid his hands over Len’s ass. “You center me.”

“I do?”

“You remind me what matters.” He kissed Len. “I appreciate it. I need all the centering you can give me.”

“My pleasure,” Len said. “What’s also my pleasure is to make things up to you. You’ve had a stressful day.” He ground on Isaac’s lap. “Let me destress you.”

A groan rumbled in Isaac’s throat and his cock throbbed. Damn. He needed this kind of appreciation. “It’s working.”

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Isaac caressed Len's chest. He pinched Len's nipples. The more he touched his lover, the more he wanted to keep doing it. Len, so taut and perfect, weathered but sexy, was everything Isaac had ever wanted.

"I wondered if you'd like this," Len said. "If you'd ever like me."

"Of course." He nipped Len's chest. "I love it."

"I wasn't sure we'd get together." Len curled into him. "Like you'd come to your senses and walk."

"Never." The pull was too strong. "I wondered if you'd ever see me as more than your doctor."

"I couldn't help myself." Len scooted off Isaac's lap and onto the floor. He opened Isaac's pants. "You've seen me in every way. Happy, sad, naked, crushed..."

"Built up again," Isaac said. "I've felt you, too." He slid down in his seat and loved the passion in Len's eyes. The scent of Len's cologne wrapped around him. He was right where he should be—with Len. He caressed Len's cheek. "No regrets."

"None?" Len withdrew Isaac's cock.

"Nope." He sucked in a ragged breath as chilly air caressed his dick. The tip of his erection shimmered. He craved Len and couldn't wait for Len to engulf him in his perfect heat. "Do what makes you happy."

“Of course I will.” Len licked his lips. Fire lit in his eyes. He nuzzled Isaac’s cock, then fondled his balls. Heat enveloped Isaac.

Isaac spread his legs. He needed this more than his next breath.

Len sucked Isaac’s cock to the hilt. Warmth, wet and hard. Len buried his nose in Isaac’s dark curls before he pulled back. He built into a steady rhythm and caressed Isaac with his velvet tongue. He swallowed and hummed. The vibration slid down his spine.

Isaac palmed the back of Len’s head. No way he’d rush this. Even the scrape of Len’s teeth on his shaft was perfect. Something coiled tight in his belly. Orgasm started in his veins. But love with Len was always like this—overwhelming. He moved his hips, giving Len more access. “Len.”

No sound came out, but Len bobbed his head faster and joy sparkled in his eyes. Bliss radiated on his face. His hair tickled Isaac’s belly.

The coil tightened and Isaac’s control held by a thread. He rested his head on the back of the sofa. His thoughts muddled. He tugged lightly on Len’s hair. “Yes.”

Len opened his eyes for a moment. A wicked smile pulled across his lips. He looked so pretty with a cock in his mouth. Len fondled Isaac’s balls.

Isaac’s control shattered. “Fuck me,” he bit out. He jammed his dick in his lover’s mouth.

Len sucked hard, drawing the climax out of Isaac. His balls tingled and he came. He panted. “Oh, my God.” He stared at the ceiling and let go of Len. He’d never be the same. Ever.

“Good?” Len licked him clean. “Yum.”

He focused on his lover and wanted to say something witty, but his words were gone. He sighed.

“I love that contented smile.” Len stood. He wrestled Isaac’s pants off him, then dropped his own trousers. “I need to make love to you.”

“Don’t tell me,” Isaac managed. “Just do it.”

“I will.” Len stroked Isaac’s cock. “Once I get a rubber and lube.”

Details...Isaac sprawled on the couch and gathered his bearings. “Holy shit.” Len had blown his mind again.

Len returned with a condom and the bottle of lube. “I’d keep these in here, but they’d probably be found by those we don’t want to find them.”

“Probably.” He was still reeling, but he knew what Len meant. The dogs got into everything.

Len settled between Isaac’s knees again. He kissed him and stroked Isaac’s now limp dick. “My favorite place is right here with you.”

“Is it?”

“Or in you.” Len grinned. He dribbled lube on his fingers and folded Isaac in half. “I love your ass.”

“Do you?” He wasn’t good at making sense after an orgasm.

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“I do.” Len caressed his hole. He massaged the now slick pucker of Isaac’s ass.

Shivers ran through Isaac. “God, I need that.” He’d just come and could do it all over again with a little more coaxing.

Len remained over Isaac and rubbed his hole. “My sexy doctor.” He kissed him again and kept toying with him.

A groan rumbled in him. “Fuck me.” His skin heated and his nipples pebbled.

“Gladly.” He slid his finger into Isaac.

No matter how many times they made love, the burn remained. Each time felt like the first. Isaac groaned again. “Yes.”

Len pulled back. “All mine.”

“I am.” He held on to his knees and bore down on Len. He’d wanted to go slow at other times, but not now. He needed Len to fuck him. “Please?”

Len added more lube. “Relax.”

“Can’t.” He parted his lips. His nerve endings were on fire. “Need you.” The rest of the world seemed to fade away.

“Soon.” Len donned the rubber. “I need to look into your eyes when we do this.” He turned Isaac on the couch, arranging him along the length of the sofa. He folded Isaac

in half again and situated himself between Isaac's legs. He lined his cock up with Isaac's hole and pushed. In one swift move, he buried himself to the hilt in Isaac.

Isaac moaned. He felt every ripple and nuance of his lover's cock. Being with Len was so tender, yet could be hard and fast.

Len wound into a steady rhythm, in and out of Isaac.

Isaac was helpless to argue—not that he wanted to put up a fight. He met Len thrust for thrust as best he could. The muscles of his legs twitched and his foot bobbed. He gritted his teeth.

“Yes, babe. Ride my dick and get yourself off again. Do it,” Len murmured. He increased his pace. “Fuck, this feels good.”

Isaac groaned. He had no control and his every last thought belonged to Len. His boyfriend owned his heart and knew how to play his body. The springs squeaked and each push ripped the breath from Isaac's chest. He didn't care. He was at Len's command. He pinched one of Len's nipples.

“Oh, fuck yeah.” Len parted his lips. His brow crinkled and he stared into Isaac's eyes. Perspiration shimmered on his chest. He panted.

“Can't hold back.” The orgasm wound up just as fast as the first time. Isaac writhed beneath Len. He'd been imprinted by him.

“Fuck.” Len arched his back and tipped his head. He closed his eyes as he growled and pushed himself to the hilt in Isaac. His cock throbbed as he came. “Holy God damn.” He continued to thrust, but slowed his pace.

Isaac shivered and sagged on the cushions. His world seemed to tip on its axis. He

didn't care. He loved being right here beneath Len. Neither he nor Len spoke for a long moment. Instead, Isaac basked in their closeness. He draped his arms around Len and relaxed.

"I can't think straight." Len focused on Isaac. "I've never been this tired, but this happy in my life."

Isaac panted. "Might be because you've the best at good stress relief." Len had wrung him out, too.

"Yeah." Len stretched out on top of him on the sofa. "Damn." He kissed Isaac's throat. "Stay tonight. Stay forever."

"I'd planned on spending the weekend with you." He liked waking up to Len beside him. But staying forever? Was Len kidding? Still caught up in the rush of orgasm and saying things he didn't mean?

"Move in with me."

"What?" Len had to be joking.

Len pulled out. "I'm serious."

"I'm sure you are." Kind of. He sat up and stared at Len. "Are you positive?"

"I am." Len helped Isaac to his feet. "If I wasn't sure, I wouldn't have asked. I don't just every guy I know to move in with me."

"I know." He bit back his shame for doubting. "It's..." He hadn't expected Len to ask him. Hadn't thought they'd be to this point this fast.

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“If it’s too much, then tell me.” Len scrubbed his forehead with the back of his hand. “I never thought I’d feel complete again. That I’d have a love like I did with Keye. This isn’t like with Keye, though. It’s different, because it’s a love I never thought was possible, and I’m glad.”

“Len?” Love? Did they feel the same? He wouldn’t move in with a man who didn’t love him.

“I can’t see my life without you.” Len grasped Isaac’s hand. “I’ve never been in this deep and in love. Keye was my partner then and I wouldn’t trade that time for the world. You’re my partner now. I love you and treasure what we have.”

“You do?” His voice clogged in his throat. His dreams were coming true.

“Without a doubt.” Len tugged Isaac close and rested his forehead against Isaac’s. “Be my swim partner, my boyfriend, lover, and love me.”

“Yes.” He didn’t need to think this through. He didn’t question his heart. “I’ve got six months on my lease.”

“Don’t sweat it. We’ll figure that out.”

He nodded. “What about Ollie? I don’t want to leave him.”

“What about him?”

“Cissy?” If the dog and cat didn’t get along, they’d have problems.

“She won’t care. She loves visiting the cats at the shelter.” Len slid his palms over Isaac’s bare ass. “I’ve thought about getting a cat. We’ll try it out and work with them.”

“You’re sure?” He needed to know.

“Positive.”

“We’ll get him in the morning.”

“After a swim?” Len asked. “I won’t turn down a reason to see you in those swim trunks.”

“Yes.” He kissed Len hard. For the first time in his life, he was loved and wanted. He wasn’t ready to admit out loud that he loved Len, but he did love him. He needed more time, but he’d have it if they lived together. Len was willing to take a chance on him and he loved Len more than he’d ever thought possible. They had time to grow and learn each other in a way that’d make their relationship stronger. He couldn’t wait to get started.

* * * *

Isaac set Ollie’s food dish on the top of the cat tree and poured food into the bowl. He hadn’t been sure that Ollie would like the move. Twice in a six-month period was a lot to ask of an animal. Instead of being stressed, Ollie acted like he owned the condo. He preened on his cat tree and sunbathed in the front window. Len had even insisted on buying and installing a special perch for Ollie there.

“I think he’s happy,” Len said. He petted the cat. “Ollie’s a good boy.”

“He is.” He closed the plastic container he kept the cat food in and placed it on the

counter. Isaac had no reservations about moving in with Len, but he'd worried about the animals. Now, he had no cares in the world.

"I'm glad you're here." Len gathered Isaac's hands in his. "Happy?"

"I am." He'd settled into a nice routine—he worked at the clinic, came home to Len, spent time at the swim complex with him and ran laps during the weekends and his short days. They walked the dogs every night and he couldn't ask for more. Dorian liked Len and Aiden liked him. The situation was better than he'd ever planned.

Isaac's phone rang and he tensed.

"I'd say don't answer it, but it could be important," Len said. "Go. I don't mind."

"I'll check first." He needed to change the ringtone to differentiate the important calls from the junk ones. He checked the screen. Jake, his ex-boyfriend. "Hello?"

"Isaac," Jake said. "You never showed up at the clubs."

"I know." He placed his hand over the receiver and spoke to Len. "It's nothing."

Len shrugged. He put the cat food away, then wandered out to the living room.

Isaac walked to the sliding door and let Stan out. He stood on the back porch while Stan inspected the spring flowers in the beds lining the fence. Isaac focused on the call. "Why are you trying to contact me?"

"I can't call a friend?" Jake asked.

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“Not when you told me to drop dead.”

“It was a joke.” Jake laughed. “I did ask you to come to the clubs and you said you would. You never did.”

“You and I split and I’m not a club kind of guy,” Isaac said. “I’m sorry, but I’ve had to grow up.”

“You don’t have to be an adult all the time.”

“Yeah, I do.” He watched Stan chase an errant leaf across the backyard. “Sorry.”

“What are you doing? Dating the old guy? He’s old enough to be your dad. That’s gross,” Jake said.

“He’s my boyfriend.”

“Christ. He’s ancient,” Jake said. “Do you realize he’s old?”

“He’s my boyfriend, so yes, I know his age and no, I don’t mind.” He groaned. “Who I’m with isn’t your business.”

“No?” Jake’s voice cracked.

“Jake, why are you doing this? You could have any guy you want. I’m sure you met someone that night at the clubs and had a ball,” Isaac said. “I’m not important to you. Are you trying to fuck up my life? It’s not working, but kudos for the effort.”

“Jesus.”

He rolled his eyes. He’d argued with Jake enough during their relationship. “I’m out.”

“How can you love that guy?” Jake begged. “Money?”

“How about I love him? That’s enough.” He’d never get enough of saying those words out loud. He loved Len.

“Love? That old guy?” Jake snorted. “So you can have his money when he’s dead.”

“Stop.” He didn’t want to think about life without Len. They’d just gotten the relationship solidified.

“Because he’s so good in the sack? Is that it?”

“Enough.”

“I can’t let you make a mistake with your life. You should be with me,” Jake said.

“No.”

“Isaac.”

“We split and I love Len. Accept it,” Isaac said. “Leave me alone.” He didn’t give Jake a chance to argue. Instead, he hung up, then blocked Jake’s number. A dull ache started behind his eyes.

“Are you okay?” Len asked.

“Yeah.” He tucked the phone into his back pocket and followed Stan and Len into the

house. “He’s a happy dog when he’s outside, but he loves to be inside, too.”

“Some men are like that, too.” Len held Isaac’s hand. His voice remained calm and even. Concern filled his eyes. “Are you okay?”

“I don’t love him,” Isaac said. “Not a bit.” He wasn’t sure why he felt the need to say that, but he couldn’t stop the words from tumbling out.

“I heard,” Len said.

“And?” He hated fear, but he wasn’t sure what Len would say. He knew his feelings, but he hadn’t admitted to Len that he loved him. Not yet. He wasn’t ashamed of his feelings, though. He loved his boyfriend.

“Tell me how you feel,” Len said. “Be honest.”

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“I love you.” He couldn’t stop now if he tried. “It’s been the best three months of my life and it seems like we’ve been together for longer than that. I never would’ve moved in with you if I didn’t love you. You have my heart in your hands. I trust you with my body, soul and life. I’m the best me because I have you.”

Len’s eyes shimmered. “Isaac?”

“I don’t blurt this kind of thing out. I have a reason for finally telling you how I feel. I care and I’m devoted to you.” He smoothed his hands over Len’s chest. “We’re together. That’s the best.”

“Love you, too.”

He had everything he needed.

Len kissed him. “I wish we hadn’t waited so long to get together.”

“It happened for a reason.” And he had no regrets.

Stan barked and Cissy joined in. Isaac tensed again. “Now what?”

“They’re at the front window. Ollie just bolted from the living room.” Len ventured into the front room. “We have a guest.” He opened the door, but left the screen door in place. “Hi.”

Isaac noted the person on the front porch. “Brandon.” Good God. Did everyone want to interrupt them?

“May I come in?” Brandon folded his arms.

“What’s wrong?” Isaac asked. He wasn’t in the mood to put up with Brandon or his attitude.

“Do you live here?” Brandon asked. “Did you move in?”

“I did,” Isaac said.

“There isn’t a mandate as to who can live here or with me,” Len said. He kept the screen door latched. “I own my own home and I have read the by-laws.”

There are issues in the by-laws? Isaac massaged his forehead. The ache intensified. The housing development could probably set rules as to who lived where, but if he and Len weren’t doing anything illegal, then what did him living there matter?

“I just thought we had something,” Brandon said. “You and me.”

Len sighed. “Isaac and I have been together since before I met you. We’re getting married, so I’m sorry. You and I can be friends, but nothing more.”

Isaac bit back his shock. They were getting married? News to him. Good, but still news. “Brandon, there is someone out there for you. I know it, but he isn’t either of us. Slow down, stop chasing everyone and that man will come to you.”

Brandon averted his gaze. “So that’s it?”

“Uh-huh,” Len said. “You’ll find that guy when you aren’t looking for him.”

“Well, okay.” Brandon straightened his spine. “Thank you. I hope it’s a long, happy marriage.”

“Thanks.” Isaac watched Brandon exit the porch and venture down the sidewalk.

“I think he finally got the hint.” Len closed the front door. The dogs quieted and he sighed again. “Well, hell.”

“Hint?” Isaac cocked his eyebrow. “Was that just to get him out of your hair or did you mean what you said? The marriage thing?”

“The marriage thing?” Mischief filled Len’s eyes.

“You said we were getting hitched.” He knew what he’d heard.

“I did?” The gleam intensified. “Me?”

“You did.” He threaded his arms around Len. “Do you want to get married?”

“I do.” Len dropped to one knee. “I meant to do this earlier, but we were interrupted.” He pulled a box from his pocket. “I never thought love could strike twice in my life. You showed me how to be me again. I love you and want you here as my husband. Will you marry me?” He tugged a thick gold band from the velvet. “Isaac?”

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He had no words. The man who talked too much finally had nothing to say. He thought he knew how he'd handle this moment, but he'd been wrong. He'd dreamed about this event. Yet Len stole his words and breath.

"Isaac?" A smile quirked on Len's lips.

"I will." His voice cracked, but it was there. He sank onto the floor with Len and the dogs. Laughter bubbled in his throat. "Yes."

Len slid the ring onto his left hand. "Then this is almost exactly how I imagined this moment."

"It is?" Tears slipped down Isaac's cheeks. "Really?"

"Yes. The dogs, us, tears...yeah. I even knew you'd say yes." Len leaned against the wall. He petted Cissy. "Now we're a family."

"Yeah." He wiped his face. "I'm yours."

"Aiden? Did you and Matt get that?" Len asked. He pointed to the tablet screen on the end table. Aiden and Matt waved.

"We did," Aiden said. "Congrats."

Isaac paled for a split-second, then sighed. "You called them on a video chat."

"I wanted them to see this. Besides the dogs and Ollie, they're my family. Now you

are, too. I wanted everyone included.” Len grinned. “They have been.”

Mild embarrassment washed over him, but pride mixed with the emotion. He was part of the tribe.

“Congrats,” Aiden said again. “This is what I hoped would happen.”

“You did?” Isaac stared at the screen, then at his new ring.

“Sure. You and Dad are made for each other,” Aiden said.

“Told you,” Matt added. “Engaged, living together and happy ever after. It’s how this goes.” He laughed. “We should let those two celebrate.”

Isaac held Len’s hand, but grinned at the screen. “Thank you.”

“Good evening and congrats,” Aiden said.

“Yes, congrats.” Matt waved and the screen returned to the image of Isaac, Stan, Cissy and Len.

“I’m sorry if you felt ambushed. I wanted them to see that moment, babe,” Len said. “I screwed up so much with Aiden and I needed this to happen this way. No, we did. We’re a family and we muddle through this all together.”

The band weighed heavy on his finger, but felt right. Like it belonged there. Isaac crawled onto Len’s lap. “We are.”

“I had faith you’d say yes, but I worried you’d clobber me when you realized they were watching,” Len said.

“Nah.” He shook his head. “I love you too much to care that we’re on camera.” He

draped his arms around Len's shoulders. "Do you want a huge wedding or something small?"

"A party in the backyard is enough for me. I found my guy and I've got the life I want. I'm great," Len said. "You can have the lead on the wedding."

He nodded again. "I'm great, too, and I have no desire to have a huge wedding. I am, though, rather partial to nuptials in September. Something in the backyard, a few friends, our family, the dogs..." He'd never thought he'd get married and now he would be. Christ. He had no idea how to throw a wedding.

"September it is." Len kissed him. "I'm there no matter what."

Isaac sighed and leaned into Len. He didn't have to be a lone wolf any longer. Now he never would because he had his silver fox, Len, Stan, Cissy and Ollie right beside him. Life was perfect.