



Through the Fire: Matt & Adam

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Category: Romance, M-m Romance, New Adult

Description: Where there's smoke, there's bound to be fire.

Matt Holt likes his quiet life. He works at a sex shop and writes taglines for porn movies. In his spare time, he surfs. The jobs pay the bills, but don't offer much in the way of romance. When a broken door allows smoke from the California wildfires into his apartment, he gets to do more than just chat with his next-door neighbor. Adam Cook has had a thing for Matt since the first day he saw the blond surfer. He's been waiting for an excuse to have more than a casual conversation with Matt. The fires aren't a good reason to celebrate, but when Matt ends up at his door, he's willing to stir the smoke up into a blazing fire. Will Matt's insecurity push Adam away or will the smoke bring them together for more than a white-hot night?

NOTE: This book has been reedited for this reissued version.

Total Pages (Source): 12

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Chapter One

What is a guy supposed to do to get a little privacy? Matt Holt stared at the pieces of the door lock in his hand. He hadn't been rough with the latch or handle, but the cheap plastic snapped off the sliding door. Even if he'd have wanted to glue the pieces together, he couldn't. Nothing fit together any longer. He glanced out his lone window. Smoke rolled over the city and darkened the sky. Huh. Had wildfire season picked up that fast?

He picked up his cell phone and switched on the television. Instead of really listening to the broadcast, he dialed the landlord's number. The stupid lock needed fixed and pronto. After two rings, the landlord answered.

Matt scrubbed his free hand across his forehead and explained the situation.

"What?" He pinched the bridge of his nose. "What do you mean you can't fix it?" Of all the times he needed work done in his apartment, this was the one time the guy couldn't.

"Haven't you looked out the window? Traffic's snarled because of the fires and the smoke. I'll get to it later. I can't get out to get the parts, and I don't have them here."

"Fine." He didn't have much choice. Matt glanced back at the sliding door. Smoke and debris entered through the slight opening. Shit. "I have stuff coming in my apartment."

"Tape it, and I'll be up in two hours. I've got other jobs ahead of yours."

“It can’t—” Before he could finish his statement, the landlord hung up. “Damn it.” Matt tossed his cell onto the couch. He was supposed to plug the crack...shouldn’t be too hard, right? He crossed the room and toyed with the handle. Unlike before where he had some play and could get the door shut, now the handle wouldn’t budge, and he had a full one-inch gap. Smoke and dust eased into his apartment.

“Shit,” he muttered. He tried to think. If Dad or Nick were there, they’d have said duct tape and what else? Cardboard? Did he have cardboard? Not a chance. He wasn’t the type to keep unnecessary items. If it’s not important or reusable, recycle or toss is his motto. Now he kind of wished he had at least a cereal box.

He grabbed the tape from the kitchen. Starting at the top of the door, he stretched the tape to the floor. Smoke still escaped into the room but not as fast.

“Sources say the fires will only get stronger,” the lady on the news read. “Due to the increased pollution, an air quality advisory has been issued, and health officials urge residents to stay inside.”

He finished taping the door but wasn’t satisfied with his work. The smoke stream had slowed, but some continued into the apartment. With his luck the smoke from outside would set off his damn alarms. He dropped the roll of tape onto the floor. What the hell was he supposed to do? It wasn’t like he had family close. His folks had moved back to Ohio, and even if he could’ve booked a flight out, were the planes even flying? Damn.

His phone rang, and he sprinted across the studio apartment to retrieve the device. “Hello?”

“It’s Marie. Because of the smoke, we’re closing today. I don’t see people wanting to buy vibrators and dongs today. They probably can’t find the place anyway. John would love it if you could email the copy for the ménage video he sent you. Like by

the end of today? Then one of us would be having fun.”

He scrubbed the back of his neck with his palm. Well, fuck. “I’ll do my best.”

“Great. I’ll call tomorrow and let you know what we’re doing. This smoke is crazy. You can’t breathe out here.” Marie paused. “Okay, talk to you tomorrow.”

“Bye.” He hung up and returned his attention to the sliding door. The smoke wasn’t going away. When he peeked through the glass, he could’ve sworn it wasn’t three in the afternoon but rather three in the morning. Should he pull the curtain across the window to help keep the smoke at bay? Probably couldn’t hurt. He taped the curtain down and swallowed hard. His throat ached, and he grabbed his water bottle. Staying put wasn’t going to work. He downed the lukewarm water then sighed.

A thump against his door grabbed his attention. “Coming!” he shouted. He grabbed the handle. Please let that be the landlord. He opened the door, and his spirits sank. Not the landlord. “Hi, Adam.”

“Hey. I think this is yours.” Adam offered up an envelope. “It was delivered to my box downstairs.” He frowned. “Close your window, fool.”

“I don’t have one open—not really.” He swiped his keys from the hook. “Let’s step into my temporary office.” The hallway would have to be less smoky than his apartment. He stepped into the hall and closed the door. Unlike his place, the bright hallway was clear and full of fresher air. “Wow, that’s better.”

“I’m sure it is.” Adam leaned against the wall and crossed his arms. “What’s going on?”

“My sliding door broke. The handle’s jammed up, and I can’t get the sliding door closed. I tried tape and I closed the curtain, but I’ll be honest. My mechanical skills

suck.”

“Why don’t you come over? Grab what you need for now, and when the landlord comes up to fix it, you can go back. It’s better than gagging to death.” Adam stepped away from the wall and opened his apartment door. “I guarantee my place is smoke-free.”

“You’re sure?” He didn’t want to impose, but he had been interested in spending more time with his neighbor. Other than chance meetings in the hallway and the rare conversations downstairs in the laundry room, they’d barely been around each other.

“Positive.” Adam smiled. “I could use the company.”

“Then let me get my laptop and my phone.” He headed back into his apartment. The smoke wasn’t much worse than when he’d left, but it was bad enough. He tucked his laptop, the cord, his phone and charger, as well as his wallet into his shoulder bag. Did he need anything else? The movie he was supposed to review and write the blurb for...shit. As long as he was over at Adam’s, he wouldn’t be able to watch it. Like Adam would be cool with viewing a gay ménage? He shook his head and slid the movie into the back pocket of his bag then headed over to Adam’s. Before he left, he locked his door. A streak of giddiness shot through him. Was he excited to spend time with Adam?

Excited didn’t begin to describe his feelings. Every time he looked at Adam, naughty thoughts entered his head. Adam stood a couple of inches shorter than Matt’s six feet of height, but what he lacked in stature, he made up for in sexiness. Adam reminded Matt of a movie star. From his perfectly styled, straight-out-of-bed hair, those deep brown eyes, and the little scar that reminded Matt of a dimple, down his toned body to his feet, he’d featured prominently in Matt’s fantasies. He wanted Adam as his partner in bed—or anywhere really. Was that crazy? Probably, but he’d done other things just as kooky.

“You did call the landlord, right?” Adam appeared in Matt’s doorway. “This is awful.” He waved smoke from his face and coughed. “If you haven’t called him, then I will.”

“I did call, and he said it would be a couple of hours.” But if he could spend those couple of hours with Adam, then maybe he didn’t want the landlord to come through right away.

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“Alistair is a nice guy and a gem with apartment pricing, but he’s slow as crap with repairs. Got everything?” Adam asked.

“Go figure. I’ve got stuff I need to get done today.” He patted his pocket for his keys then flipped the lock on his door. “Let’s go before I fill the hallway with smoke.”

“No problem.” Adam stepped out of the way. “My door is unlocked.”

“Are you going somewhere?” Now he felt a little weary of going over to Adam’s. “If I’m imposing...”

“No. I ordered Thai while you were packing. It’s just around the corner, so it won’t take long. I got enough for the both of us, but I’ve got to run downstairs to get it.” Adam grinned. “Promise. I’ll be right back.” He opened his door for Matt then strolled down the hallway.

Matt paused in the doorway and watched the sway of Adam’s ass. God, the man had a nice butt, just enough to grab during sex. He snorted. Like he’d know what it would feel like to fuck Adam. That opportunity wasn’t going to come around.

He ducked into Adam’s apartment and closed the door. When he turned, the scent of Adam’s cologne wrapped around him. He wasn’t sure what he’d expected, but the woodsy scent comforted him. He gazed at Adam’s personal space. Computers took up most of the horizontal spaces. He wouldn’t have pegged Adam as a computer geek. Looks definitely deceived.

Matt placed his bag on the couch. He wanted to sit, but he wasn’t sure whether he

should. He didn't want to disturb Adam's things.

Behind him the door clicked open. The smell of the tangy food entered the room. A hint of smoke followed as well.

"That didn't take long." Adam strolled around Matt and dropped the plastic bag on the counter. "I got two orders of chicken stir-fry and extra rice. There's water and soda in the fridge. Help yourself."

"I'm not sure this is a good idea," Matt said. He picked up his bag. "I'm intruding."

"You sound just like your brother." Adam stepped between Matt and the door. "I offered you a place to work on whatever it is you've got to do in a smoke-free environment. If you were intruding, I wouldn't have asked you in."

"My—my brother? What are you talking about?" Matt asked. Adam knew Nick?

"Nick told me all about you." Adam took the messenger bag from Matt and put it back on the couch. "Get some food. We'll talk while we eat."

"I'm confused." He crossed the small apartment and sank onto one of the barstools. "How do you know Nick?"

"The U of San Fran here in Santa Rosa. Your brother and I were roommates all four years." Adam grinned again. "I got homesick for Arizona, and he'd get homesick for Ohio and tell me stories about you."

"Huh." He stared blankly at the foam food containers. His brother never mentioned knowing Adam. If he had, then Matt wouldn't have waited so long to make a move. No, he would've waited. He hated to be shot down, and getting turned away seemed to happen to him often.

“Nick taught me how to ask a girl out, how to use every cheesy come-on in the book and how to kiss.” Adam plopped down beside him. “Funny, I miss the guy.”

“I do, too.” Matt bowed his head. “I’m sorry. I wish I knew you were friends with him. How is he? I haven’t talked to him in six months.”

“He’s out fighting the wildfires in the Ventana Wilderness. They’ve got some contained but not much. I just instant messaged him two nights ago.” Adam opened the containers. “It’s hot, dirty, and not going out.”

“At least he’s safe for now.” He hated not talking to his brother, hated that they’d argued before Nick left. He sighed. The food smelled divine, but his stomach churned. He’d lost contact with his brother over a guy—a guy who’d ended up being a real dick. He’d wanted to call Nick a hundred times but didn’t. Why? Fear. What if Nick never forgave him? What if the fucking fire claimed Nick, and he never got the chance to say he was sorry? He only had himself to blame if they never got the chance to reconnect.

Adam slid one of the containers to Matt. “Eat.”

“I can’t.” God, he was becoming so emo. He hated being emo.

“Why? Because I know about Garig, the dick?” Adam offered up a spoon. “I’m going to level with you. Nick told me about Garig. Nick’s my best friend, and I knew how that dick worked him over. He wasn’t pissed that Garig had a fling with you. What pissed him off was you not coming clean.”

“Why—why didn’t you bother to tell me this before now?” He grasped the spoon. “I mean, you are close to my brother, and you live next to me. You could’ve said something.” A thought occurred to Matt. The reason Adam probably kept quiet was the kissing thing—Adam and Nick were together. That’s why they messaged each

other. He'd been fantasizing about his brother's boyfriend. Well, shit.

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Chapter Two

Adam stared at Matt. So many thoughts ran through his head. He'd wanted to talk to Matt a hundred times beyond the cursory chats in the laundry room and the quick conversations in the elevator. So why hadn't he bothered to get to know his neighbor better? Why not hang out? He'd been afraid. Adam scooped the rice in his spoon and watched Matt shove the food around his plate. He should've known Matt would close off when Nick's name was mentioned. Garig had been a sore spot for the both of them.

"How—how long have you and Nick...you know?" Matt asked. "Freshman year?"

"We've known each other since the first day of classes. We got lucky because we got along." Adam placed his spoon back on the foam container. "He's the best friend I've ever had."

"Friends. Right." Matt groaned. "Next time you talk to him, let him know...I don't know."

"Why don't you tell him yourself?" Adam moved his container out of the way. He and Matt needed to clear a few things up before they did anything else. "You're all upset. I bet if I got him on the computer, he'd be happy to hear from you."

"Why?" Matt stared at him. "You're his boyfriend. This is getting weird."

Boyfriend? Adam processed what he'd heard and what he'd said. He'd mentioned the kissing experiments. Shit. "Okay, hold up."

“What’s there to hold?”

“First, you’re holding something back, or you wouldn’t be so pissy. Second, your brother and I have never been together that way. We kissed because of a dare, because we wanted to get away from a couple of gross guys trying to pick us up at a bar and because we were drunk. The relationship never got past being friends. Does that help things a bit? I wouldn’t ask you over if I wasn’t sure I wanted you here.” He gritted his teeth to keep from talking but couldn’t not say the next few words on his tongue. “Your lack of faith disturbs me.” The movie reference brought a laugh from deep within him. He hadn’t been able to make silly pop culture references with his last boyfriend, and Nick hated the movie discussions.

“Not...boyfriends?” Matt still wasn’t eating, but he seemed to relax a bit.

“Not a chance. He likes blonds.” Adam shrugged. “So other than you thinking I had his dick in my ass, what’s wrong?”

“The fire. Those things are hard to contain and dangerous. If I’d have known you could talk to him, I—I don’t know what I would’ve done.”

“Probably bugged me until I could hook you up.” Adam shrugged again then glanced out the window. “I would’ve done it and happily. Now eat. The smoke isn’t getting any better outside, and it’s starting to rain dust and shit out there.” He gazed out at the crud flying through the air. “Did Alistair say he’d call or just fix the thing?”

“I don’t know,” Matt said between bites. “I didn’t ask. Probably should’ve.”

“We’ll give him another couple of hours then call. He might have the parts downstairs and is busy with something else right now.” He turned back to Matt. “I’m sure we can find something to do.”

“Probably.” Matt finished his food and downed the bottle of water. “Thanks. I’ve been living on baloney sandwiches.”

“Really?” Adam picked up the empty containers then discarded the refuse. “Feel free to raid the fridge. Whatever I’ve got is yours.” He grabbed a bottle of soda. “This is my treat for the day. I’m up to my eyeballs in referbs.”

“Referbs?” Matt swallowed the last of the water in his bottle. “You work on all these computers?”

“Yep. It’s my way of staying out of public without losing an income. People call me and drop off their devices at the shop on the corner. I work on them, usually a couple days’ worth of work, then take them back. The people think my friend, Clint, does the work. I don’t care. This way I don’t have to deal with people, and we both make money.” Adam opened three of the laptops. “The viruses can usually be wiped, but then I have to wipe the machine. The PCs are harder, but I make it work.”

“Nice.”

“What do you do? You never mentioned your job.” Adam tapped the keys on one of the laptops. “You’re a personal trainer, aren’t you?”

“No.” Matt managed a smile. “I work out every morning downstairs at the gym, but I’ve never been a personal trainer. You don’t want to know where I work.”

“Why? Are you a stripper? You’ve got the body for it.” Adam focused on the laptop. A mental image of a naked Matt filled his head. He suppressed the moan. He’d never seen Matt without a shirt, but he’d noticed him in plenty of tight T-shirts and those jeans. His mouth watered. He wanted to rip the clothes from Matt and explore his sexy body.

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“This is—I shouldn’t be embarrassed about this.” Matt closed his food container. “I work down at Tease, the sex shop. I’m not a stripper, but thanks for thinking so. I’m not a sex worker. I don’t have sex with the people who frequent the store. I sell dongs and vibrators and videos.”

The answer stopped Adam in his tracks. He’d expected to hear pretty much any other answer from Matt besides a sex-shop worker. “What made you want to work there?” he blurted. “Nick never mentioned you doing...that.”

“I like sex.” Matt blushed from his hairline to the collar of his shirt. “Okay, that’s the easy answer. The truth is I couldn’t make a living surfing, and I don’t want to get other people into shape. I’ve got a degree in art, but like surfing, there wasn’t any money in my paintings. Marie and her brother, Daryl, asked me to work at the store. The money isn’t bad, and the clientele is interesting.”

“I’m impressed. So I go to you for the next butt plug I want?” Adam laughed. “I’ll definitely have to go down there once the smoke dissipates.” He twiddled with the computer then switched to his favorite laptop. He pulled up the local news. The smoke seemed to be getting worse. He knew the fires were burning out of control, but dust and stuff were flying through the air. He scanned the webpage and groaned.

“What’s wrong?” Matt eased up beside him. “Is that the map of the fires?”

“Unfortunately.” He rubbed his forehead. Shit. “That’s a lot of country on fire. No wonder they put up the health warning. ‘If at all possible, stay inside.’”

“That would be great if my apartment weren’t filling with that smoke.” Matt folded

his arms. “Thanks for letting me come over.”

“You don’t have to go anywhere—by all means, check on your apartment, but please hang out as long as possible.” Adam thanked God he had the computer to touch, or he’d have reached for Matt. The warmth from Matt’s body radiated to him. Up close he noticed the amber flecks in Matt’s green eyes. Since when did Matt have scruff on his cheeks, and was his hair as soft as it looked? Damn, he had it bad for Matt.

“I’ve only been here a little while. If the smoke alarm went off next door, we’d hear it.” Matt chuckled and wandered over to the couch. “I can hear the guy with the guitar next door like he was in my apartment.”

“I’ve never heard you.”

“Maybe he’s got the amp turned to full blast.” Matt opened his bag. “I’ve got work to do for the store. I’m not ignoring you, but I’ve got to—you know what? Never mind. I’ll do it later.”

“What?” He wanted to flop on the couch beside Matt but hesitated. “Go ahead. I’ve got a couple of bad viruses to clean and a hard drive to switch over.”

“You’re sure? I don’t want to be rude. I’ll need my headphones.” Matt tugged the item from his bag. “See? The clunky kind.”

“You’re old school. I like it.” Like...no, he loved finding someone who wasn’t following the crowd.

“I do, too. They cancel out the outside noise and help me concentrate. Plus no one else has any like them.” Matt opened his laptop. “I have a question. If you and Nick never fucked, then why not?”

Because I had the hots for you. Still do. Adam reined himself in. He needed to answer Matt, but the truth wasn't quite ready to come out. "He wasn't interested in me. He liked blonds, like I said, and older guys."

"Older?"

"Like thirty-year-olds. He'd started seeing a professor during our last year. After Garig I never argued with him because D'Angelo was good to him." He typed codes on the computer then turned back to Matt. "They split after a couple of years. That's when he started seeing Morgan. I know, I know. So many names. Nick likes his men, but once he settles that's it. Morgan was his it."

"Huh. That's cool." Matt twiddled with his computer. "You've got work to do? I don't want to intrude more than I am already."

"You're fine. We can work for a couple of hours or until the landlord gets up here. Maybe the smoke will dissipate by then, too, and we can get food somewhere." He didn't want the smoke to go away. Without the smoke the fire burning between him and Matt might never have gotten going.

"Sounds good." Matt nodded to the window. "I wish I had a window in my apartment but not right now. That smoke is bad. It's practically night outside."

"Yeah, I don't like it, but we're in here, so we're good."

"All right. You've won me over. If you need me or hear my phone, just kick me." Matt placed the earphones on his head then plugged into his computer. He sat back on the couch and stared at the screen.

Normally, a guy engrossed in his computer didn't bother Adam. This time he kind of wanted Matt's attention. He should've taken the quick conversations farther and

pushed to spend more time with Matt, but the same old concern kept popping up. Nick wouldn't care if Adam and Matt hooked up, but Matt might not be so open. He'd taken a lot of heat on himself for the incident with Garig, and Adam didn't want to cause trouble. Still he couldn't deny the attraction.

Adam carried the laptop over to the table and hooked it up to the power cord. He'd worry about trying to get into Matt's pants later. He focused on his job. The virus wasn't tricky to disarm—with the right codes, but he'd have to dump the memory and save the files via another computer.

An hour later, he glanced over at Matt's phone and swiped the screen. No missed calls. So much for the landlord getting in touch right away. He scooted away from the table and stretched. "Hey Matt? Are you hungry? Thirsty?"

Matt didn't answer. Adam rolled his eyes more for himself than Matt. He should've known Matt wouldn't hear him. The headphones. He left the table then grabbed two bottles of water from the refrigerator. As he strode past the bar, he noticed their phones. The face of his device remained dark, but the little screen on the top of Matt's flip phone blinked. He'd have to get Matt's attention.

"Hey, Matt?" Adam left his bottle of water on the counter then scooped up the phone. "Matt?" He glanced over at Matt. No wonder Matt wasn't answering—his eyes were closed. Caught up in the music on his laptop? Sleeping? He crept over to Matt. Should he peek at the screen? Probably not, but he wondered what Matt was working on. He leaned forward enough to look at the laptop.

At first, he wasn't sure what he was seeing. Lots of pink and tan in blurs. He looked closer and bit back a gasp. Three bodies...three penises. Holy shit! They were fucking. He wanted to turn away but couldn't. He couldn't hear the moans and groans, but in his mind he filled in the sexy blanks. Wow. Matt had come over to watch porn? Something wasn't right—but he didn't want to stop watching.

Part of him wanted to be shocked, but he knew better. He liked to watch porn, and Matt had admitted he worked at a sex shop. Maybe he had a good reason for watching. Authenticity? For suggestion purposes? He noticed the notebook beside Matt. Was Matt taking notes? He'd have to ask later. Most people didn't take notes on porn, but maybe Matt had a good reason. Maybe they could watch the skin flick together later on.

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Matt sighed and snorted.

Oh shit. Adam jumped back a bit and gripped the bottle of water. He wanted to look like he wasn't snooping. "Matt?"

Matt snorted again and opened his eyes. When he did, he jerked. "What? Where?" His eyes widened. "Fuck."

"Hey." He offered over the bottle and the phone. "You were sleeping, and I didn't want to wake you, but your phone is flashing. Looks like you got a call. I didn't hear either phone ring. Sorry."

Matt's eyes widened even more as he sat up. He closed the lid of his laptop and placed his hand on the notes. "Did we fuck?"

Not that fucking Matt would be bad, but where in the hell had that question come from? "No, we didn't. You fell asleep, and I'm giving you your phone and a bottle of water. The smoke is still thick outside and probably in your apartment. You're staying with me until the landlord repairs your sliding door."

"Oh." Matt scrubbed both hands over his face and grunted. "I was hoping we had."

Adam stared at Matt. He hadn't expected to hear those words, but it pleased him. Matt wanted to fuck him? Being thrown together because of the smoke and wildfires was becoming a happy accident he knew he wouldn't regret.

Chapter Three

As soon as Matt said the words hoping we had sex, he wished he'd have kept his mouth shut. Damn. He hated the foggy feeling when he first woke up. He shouldn't have fallen asleep. Who fell asleep during porn? Apparently he did, and now he needed filters, too. If he'd admitted he'd been dreaming about fucking Adam, he'd probably get thrown out of the apartment.

"I'm sorry." He seemed to be saying that to Adam an awful lot in the last few hours. "I'm lousy when I wake up, and I have no filters. I just say whatever I'm thinking." Maybe that wasn't the smartest thing to say, either. "Man," he muttered.

"No, you're fine. I saw your phone light up. I have no idea who called, since I wasn't paying attention, but I figured you'd want to check." Adam sank onto the opposite end of the couch. "I thought it might be important."

"Thanks." He drummed on the lid of the laptop. Shit. He shouldn't have been watching porn at Adam's. What kind of pervert was he? He opened his phone then dialed the number to retrieve his messages. He didn't recognize either caller, but he pressed the device to his ear.

"Hey, it's Patric. Wanted to make sure you're still alive. The smoke is bad up your way. Call me when you get a moment."

He closed his eyes and sighed. He and Patric were never going to be more than friends, but at least the guy cared. One fuck proved they didn't have a spark, but they seemed to stay in touch anyway. He made a mental note to call Patric once he got back to his own apartment.

He pressed the button to play the second message.

"Hi, Matthew. It's your landlord, Mr. Green. I've gone to your apartment and looked at the latch. The fix is pretty easy, but getting the parts isn't. With the air quality

advisory and my asthma, I'm not permitted to leave the building. I've ordered the parts, but they won't be here for three or four days. I'm giving you free rent for the duration of the advisory. Please let me know where you will be staying until the parts come in, and I can fix the handle."

Matt slumped in his seat and slapped his forehead. Free rent was great, but it meant shit, if he couldn't use his damn apartment. Three or four days for the parts to arrive? Where was the damn door made, Siberia?

"What's wrong?" Adam crinkled his bottle of water and downed half of the clear liquid. "Bad news?"

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“Yes and no. My friend Patric wanted to make sure I am still alive. I’ll call him later. The other was Mr. Green. The parts won’t be here for three or four days, so I’m out of my apartment until then. I’ve got to hope the smoke lifts or I can find a place to crash. This is crazy.”

“That’s doucheey.” Adam finished off the water. “I’m kind of not surprised.”

“I’m sorry.” Again with the sorries... Jesus. “It is doucheey. I’ll get my stuff and clear out. You need your space. If I’d known he’d goof off with the parts, I would’ve left you alone.”

Adam frowned. He crunched up the bottle and left it on the side table then turned back to Matt. “What are you talking about? You’re not the douche. Let me guess, he blamed his asthma?”

“Yeah. So?” He gathered his cord and computer bag. “If the air quality is bad like you said, then it’s not safe for him to be out in the smoke and shit.”

“He could’ve gotten the parts over-nighted. Wouldn’t have even had to leave the building.” Adam shook his head. “He’s yanking you around.”

“It’s fine. I’ll call Pat and see if he’s got a spare couch. I don’t want to put you out.” He tucked his laptop into the bag. He’d worry about shutting it down when he went back to his apartment and gathered clothes for the trip to Pat’s. God, he needed more friends beyond the people at the sex store and the few surfers he’d hung out with who refused to carry cell phones.

“Why? I offered that you can stay here. There’s no reason you’ve got to go.” Adam took the bag from Matt’s hands and placed it on the coffee table. “The bed is big enough for you and me, if we want, and the couch also folds out.”

“You’re sure?” He’d heard Adam right—the bed is big enough for the both of them. What was Adam thinking? Or what had Adam seen? He twiddled with the hem of his shirt. “This won’t cramp your style?”

“I’m positive.” Adam’s eyes twinkled. “I’ve got movies and plenty of food. How about I make you spaghetti tonight? Yeah? It’ll be like our own date or oasis.”

“A date?” he blurted.

Adam half-shrugged and smiled. He moved the computer over and sat opposite Matt on the coffee table. “Yeah, it’s not like we can go out, and I’ve wanted to catch you for the last month. This wasn’t exactly planned, but it’s a good reason to stay in together.” His grin faltered. “You’re not convinced.”

“I’m not.” God. How was he going to say this? “You’re my brother’s friend. You’re like brothers with him. I’m—I’m an interloper. This was a freak occurrence, and you’ll see you’re not as interested in me as you were him. I’ll just go.”

Adam placed his palms on Matt’s thighs and leaned forward. “You’re going to convince yourself you don’t deserve this, aren’t you?” He eased closer until their knees touched.

Matt bit back the groan. The heat from Adam’s touch seeped into his body. Even he couldn’t deny there was a sizzle between them, but that sizzle had to be because of the smoke and the situation. If there hadn’t been any reason to stay in, they’d be acquaintances and nothing more.

“You’re feeling it, too.” Adam moved his hand higher on Matt’s leg. “Kiss me. Just once. If you don’t think it’ll work out between us after that kiss, then I’ll back off.” He inched closer until there was only a whisper between them.

Matt stared at Adam’s lips. One kiss wouldn’t hurt anything, right? Just one. He’d realize they weren’t meant to even be fuck friends...right? “You sound like a commercial.”

“You talk too much.” Adam bridged the gap between them and planted his mouth on Matt’s. The moment they touched, Matt could’ve sworn the world stopped spinning. Heat flowed through his body, and his nerve endings tingled. One kiss wasn’t going to be enough.

Matt pulled Adam onto his lap and continued tasting him. The spice from the Thai food lingered on Adam’s lips, and the way he moaned sent shivers down Matt’s spine. He continued to taste and explore Adam. Who knew Adam was so hot?

Matt had noticed, but he’d never had the nerve to act. Now he wished he found his gumption a little sooner. He eased his arms around Adam’s waist and slid his hands into Adam’s back pockets. Damn. His ass looked hot as he walked and felt just as good beneath Matt’s palms. He liked this too much—being with Adam.

Adam smoothed his fingers into Matt’s hair and tugged. Not a huge pull but enough to ensure Matt felt his touch. Matt’s scalp tingled. Being so close together, he smelled not only Adam’s cologne but also his soap. God, it was hot. He shifted in his seat just enough to ease the pressure on his cock. He’d never expected a kiss to be so decadent and to make him want to rip Adam’s clothes off.

Adam broke the kiss but didn’t pull away. His breath warmed Matt’s cheeks. “Well?” Adam asked. “What do you say?”

“I’ll stay.” This time he didn’t mind blurting. He wanted to be right there with Adam. He kissed Adam once more. “I think Pat’s place just filled up.”

Adam kissed the tip of Matt’s nose. “Good to hear.” He closed his eyes and scooted away from Matt a bit. When he did, the bulge in his pants rubbed against Matt’s jean-covered cock.

“Oh shit.” Adam opened his eyes and stared into Matt’s. “We should start the spaghetti.” His voice had dropped an octave, and Matt swore there had been a catch. Adam swallowed and his Adam’s apple bobbed. “You know, a little fortification for later?”

“Yes.” Matt nodded. He definitely liked the way things were going. His common sense screamed he and Adam would only last as long as the fires. Once the smoke cleared out, he’d be gone, too. But did it matter? Was there a chance they could be more? And why was he already thinking in terms of couple-hood when they’d only connected for a few hours?

“Come on.” Adam stood and reached for Matt. “I’m no slouch in the kitchen, but help is always appreciated.” He hoisted Matt to his feet.

“Adam?” Matt hesitated. “What exactly are we?”

Adam turned and tilted his head. He narrowed his eyes as if deep in thought. “Last time I checked, we’re gay men, and we’re together because there’s a big fire burning half the state. Why?”

Matt raked his fingers through his hair. His scalp still tingled from Adam’s touch. “I know we’re gay. I meant—are we friends?”

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“I’d hope so.” Adam stepped up to Matt and smoothed the front of Matt’s shirt. “You’re worried again. I thought I’d helped relax you. No?”

“No.” Matt grasped Adam’s hands. So many thoughts ran through his mind. He wasn’t sure where to start. “You don’t have a boyfriend, do you? Someone who is on his way home to you or across town worried about you?”

Adam shook his head. “Nope.” He let go of Matt and tugged the front of Matt’s shirt, dragging him into the kitchen. “I’m the boyfriend type. I like to know I’ve got one guy to come home to. One that cares about me and isn’t interested in cheating or open relationships or anything.” He shrugged and pulled a pan from the cupboard. “There’s a fire burning outside and smoke all over the place. What’s wrong with taking advantage of the situation?”

Plenty of things were wrong with the situation, starting with Adam’s confusing statement: “He is the boyfriend type.” Fine. Wanted monogamy. Perfect. But what did that have to do with using the fire as a reason to get together? Matt leaned against the counter.

“I’m a booty call,” Matt said. His shoulders slumped. “Oh my God.”

“What?” Adam poured water into the pot then frowned. “What are you talking about? Who asked you for that?”

He’d been alone for too long. Nothing made sense, and he was jumping to crazy conclusions. Fuck. Matt smacked his forehead. “Just forget I said anything. God, I’m delirious from the smoke.”

“I’m not sure that’s possible.” Adam placed the pot on the stove. “Okay, before we do anything else, let’s get a few things settled. You’re confused, and I’m confused, and it’s not going to get any clearer until we do some talking. Deal?”

“Sure.” Matt crossed his ankles and held onto countertop for stability. “Ask away.” He wasn’t sure he’d like the answers, but he’d go along with it for the moment.

“First, a hookup would be nice, but I really asked you over because you can’t return to your apartment. Second, I had no idea Alistair would take his freaking time with the repairs. It’s only been a few hours, but I bet you’re itching to get back into your place. Makes sense. It’s your place. Third, I’m not seeing anyone. Being a computer programmer and IT specialist is a thankless job with shitty hours. Most of the guys I meet aren’t interested in being with a guy who knows more about megabytes than he does about protein shakes. Hold up. I need to turn this on and get the sauce out.”

Adam poured a few drops of olive oil into the water then switched on the burner. When he bent over to retrieve the sauce, Matt could’ve sworn he wriggled his ass. He’d given Matt so much to think about already.

“Okay. That’s better.” Adam emptied the jar of sauce into another pot. “My mom used to watch us when we’d cook. Not so we wouldn’t get burned, but to make sure we knew how to cook. I’ll never be a five-star chef, but I can boil water and make a mean spaghetti dinner.” He glanced over his shoulder and grinned. “What about you?”

“My cooking involves prepackaged shakes and grab-n-go salads. I never learned to cook. That was Nick’s job.” Nick, the perfect guy. Matt suppressed a groan. A lot of things seemed to make sense. Being with Adam dredged up feelings he’d sworn he’d buried: the jealousy, the guilt, and the loneliness. He’d been a dick to his brother. All along, he’d known he wasn’t going to live up to Nick’s larger-than-life persona. Nick did nothing wrong. Nick finished school in four years and didn’t need a boyfriend to

be happy. Nick fought forest fires and was successful. He didn't need to watch porn. He had the perfect life. What did Matt have? He worked at a sex shop and surfed. He'd never rescued anyone or was recognized for bravery. He got his bills paid and spent an awful lot of time alone. Nick ended up being most everything Matt wished he could've been.

"You are deep in thought." Adam curled his fingers under Matt's chin. "Want to talk? I'm good at chattering, if I'm not reined in."

Matt shook his head once. He glanced out the window at the smoke. The streetlights and building neon weren't visible through the thick cloud. According to the clock, it was nearly six, but looking outside, he would've guessed the hour to be much later.

"Matty, hey." Adam snared Matt in an embrace. "Nick always used to tell me I am a good listener."

Matt winced. Again with Nick. He hated to be jealous, but he also hated the feeling that he was only a minor stand-in for his perfect brother. When the smoke cleared and his apartment door was fixed, he'd get the hell out of Adam's apartment and hope his heart remained intact. The more Adam touched him and said nice things, the more he wished he'd have never left his apartment and never got to know the guy next door.

Chapter Four

Adam didn't understand Matt's shift in attitude. One minute they were happy on the couch and kissing. The next minute everything seemed to go to hell. But he couldn't fix anything if he didn't know what was wrong. First, he needed to add the pasta to the water or they wouldn't have supper.

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“I don’t know what’s eating at you, but I need to finish the spaghetti. If you would, I’ve got parmesan cheese in the fridge. Grab it?” Adam stirred the pasta and lowered the temp on the sauce. “When I was a kid, Mom let us loose in the kitchen. She’d only correct if we were going to hurt ourselves or something. I learned about the different spices and how to make food taste better without salt. It’s kind of fun. One of these days, I’ll teach you.”

“You will?” Matt placed the cheese container on the counter.

“Sure.” He set the timer and stirred the pasta once more. “We could do like wine tasting but with different spices and dishes.”

“That would be cool.” Matt eased away from Adam and stood in the doorway. “I can’t cook for shit, so I’ll stand over here out the way. You seem to have everything under control, and I’m not much help.”

He had so much self-doubt. Adam checked the boiling pasta then turned his attention to Matt. Now he understood Matt’s hesitance. His confidence had been blown to hell. By what? Adam wasn’t sure, but he wanted to know. “Before we do anything else besides finish cooking the spaghetti, I want you to open up. Talk to me. What’s wrong?”

“I’m just tired.”

He hated when people lied. “Want to go with that, or do you want time to come up with something better? We’re stuck together for the next day or so. I haven’t seen a radar or news broadcast, but I’m betting the fires and smoke won’t be over for at least

another day. Come on.”

“Is—is Nick okay? Have you heard from him?” Matt didn’t look Adam in the eye.

“This isn’t about Nick.” He checked the pasta again and switched off the stove.

“Everything is about Nick,” Matt muttered.

“True. The guy is full of himself.” He dumped the water and pasta into the colander, then glanced back at Matt. “You’re the older brother, but you had to live in his shadow.” He knew Matt’s story so well in that respect. Nick talked about Matt a lot but mostly how Matt wasn’t good enough. Matt never seemed to measure up, and Nick complained. Not that he’d tell Matt yet, but that complaining was most of the reason he and Nick never coupled up.

“What are you talking about?” Matt inched into the kitchen and stirred the sauce. “Ready for this? Or are you a sauce and pasta separate kind of guy?”

“I like it all mixed up.” Like he wanted to be all mixed up with Matt. “Pour it on once I put the pasta back into the pan.” Once the sauce and pasta were mixed, Adam placed the food in a dish. He nodded to the living room. “Take this out there, and I’ll bring plates and sodas.”

“Good deal.” Matt exited the kitchen with the bowl in hand.

Adam peered into the open fridge and used the cool air to clear his thoughts. He wasn’t sure where the pornos came into the mix, but he understood Matt a bit better. The guy lived in the shadow of his younger brother. Didn’t Matt understand he isn’t like Nick? Adam grabbed the two cans of soda and tucked them in the crook of his arm. He picked up the plates and silverware then headed into the living room.

If it took the rest of their time cooped up together, he'd show Matt he was a sexy, sweet guy who deserved to be taken on his own merits. Hell, he wanted Matt to fuck him senseless—after they watched that porno. Maybe they wouldn't last beyond the confinement, especially if Matt wasn't excited by Adam's love of porn, but he was willing to take the chance. He'd fallen in lust with Matt when he heard stories about him when he and Nick were in college. Now that he and Matt were neighbors and confined together, he wasn't going to squander his chance to be with Matt Holt.

"I turned on the television," Matt said. "Looks like the fires are getting worse. The smoke isn't going anywhere either. The governor was just on, complaining about the air quality. He urged us to all stay inside, if at all possible. Good thing the store is closed. We wouldn't have any business."

Adam portioned out the pasta then offered a can of soda. "Well, you could find a few things to do. Testing the toys comes to mind. Viewing the videos. Possibly trying on the clothes?"

"We can't do that." Matt put one hand up. "Well, that's not true. If we want to test anything for recommendation purposes, we get the item, but there's a limit. One per month per person." His ears burned red. "I've taken advantage."

"Yeah? Got a couple dildos or a vibrator?" Adam asked. He opened his soda can then downed part of the cool liquid.

"Maybe... What would you take for testing purposes?"

"I don't know." Adam paused to consider the question. He'd never been to the store, so he wasn't even sure what they had. What would he want? Hmm... "I'd get a few videos and a butt plug. Yeah, something to use with a friend and something for solo use."

“You—you like videos?” Matt toyed with his pasta. “I’ve never met anyone who wasn’t a regular at the store who liked watching porn. Most of the guys I’ve dated and my friends probably watch it but not with anyone. When I brought it up to my ex, he squirmed and flipped out. That was the end of that.”

“Oh, I’d watch it with someone. You can only jack off so many times before that gets boring, and I’m not a Fleshlight kind of guy. I want the real thing.” Adam propped his feet on the coffee table and crossed his ankles. “My dream is to find a guy who isn’t afraid to watch porn with me. We don’t have to act everything out. I’m more interested in the getting-horny part and fucking like rabbits afterwards.”

Adam stuffed a bite of pasta into his mouth. Let him chew on that. Would Matt balk? He hoped not. Would Matt catch his not-so-subtle come-on?

Matt paused with the food part way to his mouth. Slowly, he turned to Adam. “A dream guy?”

Adam nodded. “My dream guy. Someone who isn’t afraid to explore my kinks with me and would share his. Know anyone like that?”

“Not Nick?” Matt blurted.

“Nope. He wasn’t cool with my choice of videos. If there weren’t guns and explosions, he wasn’t interested.” Adam moved his feet to the floor and placed both plates on the coffee table. He tapped the lid of Matt’s computer. “I confess I saw what you were watching. I’d be lying if I said it didn’t affect me. It did. Turned me on and made me want to view it with you.”

“You’re nuts. Did the smoke get in here and mess with your head?” Matt dropped the fork and held his head in his hands. “That’s got to be it.”

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“Nope, just horny. I’ve got a hot guy beside me and a steamy video on his computer.” Adam opened the laptop. “Now where is that video?” He tapped the keys until the player started. The image of two guys curled together like a naked pretzel came on the screen. “Wow.”

“I’m a perv, I know.” Matt reached forward to shut the laptop, but Adam stopped him.

“Perv? Not a chance.” He squeezed up tight to Matt and cupped the growing bulge in his pants. The guys in the video kissed and moaned, but Adam saw through the act. He also wasn’t interested in talking any longer. “They aren’t exactly into it.”

“How can you tell?”

Adam blew out a long breath. He grasped Matt’s hand and placed it on his jean-clad cock. “They’ve got hard-ons, but the moaning...they’re faking it.” Not like the way I want you.

“I—I see.” Matt massaged Adam’s cock through the cotton fabric. “The top isn’t really telling the bottom what he wants.”

“And the bottom seems to be controlling the situation.” He nipped Matt’s earlobe. “I don’t care who’s the top or bottom. Right now, I’m going to show you what real passion looks like.” He crawled onto Matt’s lap again and whipped his shirt over his head.

“You’re not squicked out by the porno?” Matt trailed his fingers down Adam’s abs.

“Nope. I said I liked them. Right now, I want to act out our own dirty movie—sans video.” He leaned into Matt and kissed him again. This time he sucked on Matt’s tongue. God, the man tasted good.

“Wow.” Matt tweaked Adam’s nipple. He opened his mouth to say something, but Adam stopped him.

“Before you tell me this won’t work, don’t. It will.” He left Matt’s lap long enough to drag him to his feet and into the bedroom. “I’m not taking ‘no’ for an answer.” He yanked Matt onto him and landed on the bed. “I’ve wanted this for a long time.”

“Me, too.” Matt hiked his shirt up over his head then kissed Adam again. His hair tickled Adam’s cheeks. Up close Adam noticed the variations in Matt’s eyes. Everything about Matt pleased him.

He swatted Matt’s hip. “Take it all off. I want to watch.”

“You’ve seen me when I come back from surfing.” Matt stood. He popped the button on his pants, and the loose denim dropped to his ankles. The boxer briefs clung to his muscular frame and highlighted his growing erection.

“That’s so much better than looking at you with a wetsuit on.” Adam scooted to the edge of the bed. He rubbed his face on the bulge in Matt’s underwear. Damn. He wanted to suck him off but not yet. First, he wanted that dick in his ass.

“Oh man.” Matt threaded his fingers into Adam’s short hair. “Feels good.”

He grabbed the waistband of the underwear and pulled. Matt’s erection bobbed free of the cotton. Unlike Adam, Matt kept his pubic hair shaved. A small tattoo of an infinity symbol decorated the hairless spot above his cock. He’d have to ask why that particular ink—later.

He engulfed Matt's dick in his mouth and bobbed his head. Damn, the man was endowed. Not huge but definitely a mouthful—just what he liked.

“I need to be inside you.” Matt eased away from Adam. “Between the movie and what you're doing, I'm right on the edge.”

“I am, too.” Adam stood long enough to shuck his pants and boxers. He didn't bother to kick out of his socks. “Condoms and lube in the dresser.” Face down, he planted his shoulders on the bed and grabbed his ass. His cock throbbed. “I'm ready.”

“Can't be,” Matt said.

Adam closed his eyes. He heard the clunk of the dresser drawer closing then the snick of the lube cap. Almost time for bliss. “I can. I played with my plug last night. Use a lot of lube, and fill me.” He jerked as the cool liquid slid down the crack of his ass.

“Scared?” Matt asked. He palmed Adam's hip. “I promise to be gentle.”

“I know you will.” He didn't doubt Matt would treat him with the utmost care. But he couldn't hide his excitement. He let go of his ass and dug his fingers into the bedding. “Please?”

“I will.”

Something clicked again behind him. The condom? More lube? He wasn't sure. Adam shivered and tried to relax, but doing so was just about impossible.

Matt dragged his finger over Adam's hole and drew a circle around the tight ring of muscle. “Pretty.”

“Me?” He grunted. “Matt.”

“Yeah.” Matt pressed the head of his cock against Adam’s hole and pushed. Inch by inch, he sank into Adam.

“Whoa.” Adam gritted his teeth and bore down on Matt. Having Matt in his body sated his desires but also made him want Matt even more. He needed hard and fast. “Jesus. Move!”

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Matt grasped Adam's hips. He started off slowly, sinking to the hilt into Adam, then pulling out until only the tip of his dick remained inside.

Adam groaned. Matt massaged him everywhere from within. It was what he wanted—to be taken by the man he'd lusted after for so long.

"You're gripping me tight." Matt's nails scraped Adam's hips. He increased speed and pushed into Adam. In and out.

A shiver ran the length of Adam's spine. He opened his eyes and panted. With each thrust heat engulfed him. His thoughts fuzzed.

"Matt." He drew his friend's name out. "Oh my God."

"Right there?"

"Yeah...already." He usually came fast, but this was nuts. He met Matt thrust for thrust. "Oh God."

"Fuck." Matt slammed into him and growled. "Can't hold back." He rocked Adam on the bed, forcing his face into the sheets.

Adam didn't care. He wrapped both hands around his dick and squeezed. Only a few pulls would get him to orgasm. Fuck. His brain refused to cooperate as the orgasm washed over him. He shuddered and came all over the bed.

Matt said something Adam couldn't understand as he smacked Adam's ass. His cock

throbbed within Adam, and he tensed. He wrapped his arms around Adam and grunted.

“Sweet Jesus.” Matt kissed Adam’s shoulder. “I’m wiped out.”

“Me, too.” Adam eased onto the mattress with Matt still on top of him. If they stayed like that forever, he’d be happy.

After a few moments, Matt climbed off Adam and pulled out. “Gotta remove the rubber.”

Adam flopped onto his back and patted the mattress. Where was his shirt? He glanced across the room. Shit. He’d left the garment on the floor. He sat on the edge of the bed long enough to ditch the sheet then grabbed a blanket from the closet in the bedroom.

Matt inched into the room and hesitated before getting back into bed.

“Come here.” Adam stretched out on the mattress and spread the blanket over his body. “Don’t you dare think we fuck, then you boogey. I’m not done with you.”

“You’re a cuddler?” Matt asked. He took his place beside Adam.

“I am.” He threw his arm across Matt’s belly and breathed in the scent of sex and laundry soap. Damn, he was a lucky man. “I’m also a talker after sex. I know, most guys aren’t, but I am.”

Matt sighed. “Somehow I knew you would be. Before you ask if you can ask questions, ask away.”

Matt had read his mind. A thousand questions buzzed in his brain, but he’d pace

himself. He wanted to get to know Matt more than just what he'd learned during the course of the day and what he'd learned from Nick. He'd started to fall for Matt and wasn't ready to let go.

Chapter Five

“Why are you so hard on yourself? Because of Nick? I’d tell you he’s not perfect, but I doubt you’d hear me.” Adam tucked one arm under the pillow and opened his palm on Matt’s hip. Having Matt in his bed was better than he’d ever dreamed. “I need to confess something. When Nick and I were in college, he’d tell me about you. The more I heard, the more I liked you. I’d never even met you. Then I moved here, and who is my neighbor? You. What are the odds?”

“Yeah.” Matt toyed with the silver chain around Adam’s neck. “I’m sure Nick said plenty.”

“He did, but the thing is, I didn’t believe him.” Adam smoothed his hand around Matt’s forearm, stilling Matt’s movements. “No one and nothing is going to live up to Nick’s expectations. That’s why he and Garig split. Garig knew damn well he wasn’t good enough. Nick made a point of enforcing that train of thought, too. The whole thing with Garig and you having the one-nighter was because he wanted to hurt Nick, but true to form, Nick wasn’t hurt. He’d already moved on.”

“What?” Defeated didn’t begin to describe the look on Matt’s face. He closed his eyes. “Everyone knew but me, and again Nick got the last laugh.”

“Nick wanted it that way—laugh and all. I don’t understand how, but he thought the whole situation would put the both of you in your collective places. Garig would see he’d never be good enough for Nick, and you’d see you were only worthy of Nick’s cast-offs. Pretty shitty, if you ask me.” Adam twined their legs together and rubbed his flaccid cock against Matt’s. “I wanted to say something before now, but I didn’t. I

should've. I thought you were miserable at your job or just in a blue mood. I was wrong." And he wished he would've made a move so much sooner. If the sex was any indication of the kind of romance they'd have, then he didn't want the relationship to end.

"This is how it's always been. I can't do anything enough to make him happy, but instead of telling me I'm lousing shit up, he makes me think I'm a bad person." Matt groaned. "It's crap, but I've gone along with it, because he's Nick. My folks always said they loved us equally, but I wonder. He got away with so much because he seemed to be good at everything. I struggled with school and wanted to surf, so they thought I was lazy. I've never been able to get out of that mind frame."

"You're not lazy—I've seen you. Your dedication to surfing is awesome. I also doubt you're not smart. But you're right, you'll never be Nick. Do you really want to? I'm not horny as hell for Nick. I'm hot for you."

"It was pretty hot a little while ago." Matt finally looked Adam in the eye, and he smiled. Not a fake or limp one, but a real, honest smile. "You make me horny, too."

"Which is why I want you to forget about him." Adam tilted Matt's chin until he looked into Matt's eyes. "Nick is my best friend. Yes, he's your brother, but he's also doing his job. You need to do yours." He pressed his lips to Matt's. Kissing him would never get old.

"Adam," Matt murmured. "This is bad."

"Why?" He nibbled Matt's bottom lip. "I'm horny. You're getting there." He slid his palm over Matt's crotch. Matt might not be able to admit he liked Adam, but his blossoming erection gave him away.

"Adam." Matt pulled away and shook his head. "This is a bad idea."

“No.” He’d spank Matt if the opportunity came. “Talk to me. I’m so ready to fuck you then to have you in my ass again. What’s eating you? Explain so we can sort this out, and I can suck that dick.”

Hurt swam in Matt’s eyes. “You said it yourself. I’m second best to my older brother.”

“You need to worry less about being better or whatever than him and just being yourself. You’re awesome as you are.” He caressed Matt’s cheek. “I’m right here with you during a freak occurrence. I can’t think of anywhere else I’d rather be.” He swiped his thumb across Matt’s bottom lip. “You’re sexy, smart, and sweet. I think about you all the time.”

“Why?”

“Lots of reasons.” Most of all because he wanted to fuck again. “You’re only obsessed with appearances because of your past. When you’re not trying to be like your brother, you’re free and so handsome. I think about our conversations. You listen to me. We don’t just talk to get into bed, but there’re actual words being said. You didn’t try to get into my bed the first day you met me, and when I made a few overtures, you got so damned cute and embarrassed. Matt, the fire has been the best thing to happen to me—it brought us together.”

“You’re too smart for me.”

“I know.” He shrugged then sobered. “Part of me wants to go again, but part of me wants a breather. How about later we’ll try Nick on the chat? If nothing else, you’ll know he’s okay. I don’t expect you to exorcise your demons during the wildfires, but if you’ll let me in, I think we’ve got a chance to have a really hot time.”

Matt smiled again. “I agree.”

The damage from the fires wouldn't be fixed in day, but one day could make a difference. Adam closed his eyes and cuddled Matt in his embrace. Tomorrow would be the first day of their dating lives together. He'd been crap with other boyfriends, but something about Matt was unlike his exes. He and Matt could grow together. If he worked his hours right to coincide with Matt's schedule, they'd have time for dates and such. He settled against the pillows and yawned. Fire might destroy an awful lot, but it also allowed for rebirth, and that's what he and Matt needed. Tomorrow, he'd show Matt they were meant to be together.

* * *

MATT SIGHED AND ROLLEDover. He opened his eyes for a moment and noticed the bright green numbers beside the bed. What the—? He blinked. Bright green? His clock had red numbers. He scrubbed both hands over his face. What the hell? A hand flopped onto his belly. He froze. A hand? He focused on the arm and body connected to the hand. Adam.

How...he must've been really tired, but he knew exactly how he'd ended up in bed with Adam. He closed his eyes once again in order to gain his bearings then glanced toward the window. Instead of sunlight, the world outside was still dark.

Still dark? He checked the numbers on the clock again. 7:30 a.m. How in the hell was it still dark at seven thirty? He crinkled his nose. The smoke on the other side of the window circulated enough for him to see it. Oh yeah—the wildfires.

Beside him Adam snorted. "I've wanted to wake up like this for so long."

"Like what? In the dark?" He had a feeling he knew what Adam meant, but he wanted to hear the words.

"With you in my bed and happy." Adam scooted tight against Matt and rested his

head on Matt's shoulder. "I don't regret a moment of our time together."

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“No?” He didn’t either.

“I want to keep seeing you once the smoke dissipates and the fires burn out. I don’t care if you work at a sex store.” Adam walked his fingers across Matt’s belly. “I like you a lot.”

“You know that’s crazy.” Matt didn’t fight the grin. “But I like your kind of crazy.” He tucked his free arm behind his head.

“We take what we’ve started here and keep going? See what happens?” Adam nipped Matt’s chest. “Yeah?”

“You read my mind.” Matt closed his eyes and basked in the newness of the relationship. He hadn’t expected to find a boyfriend when the smoke seeped into his apartment. He’d only wanted the hole fixed. He hadn’t realized the hole wasn’t just in the sliding door but also in his heart. He’d allowed himself to be alone for too long and practically feared getting together with anyone. On paper, Adam wasn’t right for him, but in practice they could fit together pretty damn well. They weren’t moving too fast or trying to be something they weren’t, and he liked that.

Adam wasn’t kidding. The fire had been the best stroke of bad luck he could ever have.

* * *

SIX MONTHS LATER...

Matt stood behind the counter at Tease and righted a stack of naughty housewives videos. The fires were over and the smoke long gone. Santa hats and naughty Santa clothes replaced the summer fare at the store. The passage of time managed to heal some of the fire damage in the state and in Matt's heart.

In the last few months, he'd become more comfortable with his role at the store and his love life. He should've known opening up and allowing Adam in would be good, but he'd had no idea. Adam liked Matt's desire to watch porn. He hadn't questioned Matt when he'd written the taglines for the different videos or the fact that Matt still worked at the store.

The one thing Matt hadn't been able to do was reconcile with his brother. Nick hadn't wanted to talk to him, despite Matt's repeated attempts. He'd only talk to Adam.

Matt should've been angry about the rebuff. He didn't understand Nick's issues, but he'd given the communication a try. If Nick wasn't ready to respond, then he was done pressing the matter.

"Now there is one handsome shop worker." Adam strolled up to the counter. He placed a glass butt plug in front of Matt. "I'm thinking about getting this for my boyfriend. He loves to pound my ass, and I want to be ready pretty much at a moment's notice. Think he'll like this?"

Matt rolled his eyes and grinned. He loved Adam's teasing. "I don't know. You seem like the type to be ready and willing all the time. I'm guessing you don't need the plug, but your boyfriend might enjoy it for extra play time."

"Well." Adam nodded. "Then I'll take it. I want to make him happy."

Matt rang up the purchase and bagged the plug then rounded the counter. "Hey, Marie? Can I take a quick break?"

His coworker waved him off. “Get out of here for a while.” She stepped behind the register. “Why don’t you two take that home tonight and test it?” She winked. “We do need reviews on it.”

“Great idea.” Matt grabbed the bag and his boyfriend’s hand. “We’ll be right back.”

“We’re not testing it yet,” Adam murmured. He allowed Matt to lead him to the small office at the back of the store. “Are we?”

“I just wanted private time.” Matt shut the office door. “I missed you.” He pinned Adam to the scarred wooden surface and kissed him. “Never thought I’d feel like this.”

“Umm...” Adam sighed and slid his hands into Matt’s back pockets and groaned. “We definitely made fire out of that smoke, didn’t we?”

“Sure did.” Matt ground his jean-covered erection against the bulge in Adam’s pants. “Best place to wait out the smoke was with you. Maybe I do want to fuck.”

Adam groaned again. “Then you don’t want my news? I heard from Nick.”

Matt froze. “News on Nick? What does he have to do with us right now?”

“He’s invited us to his wedding. You and me—together.” Adam squeezed Matt’s ass. “He’s also ready to talk to you. I know, I know. He’s being a prick about doing the talking, but it’s a good thing.”

Matt smoothed his palm along Adam’s chest and pinched his nipple. Part of Matt was still pissed about Nick’s refusal to talk. The rest of him was relieved. He wanted this portion of his life to move forward. If Nick was ready to talk and ready to meet up, then Matt was ready, too.

“Well?” Adam asked.

Matt nodded and kissed Adam. “I’m ready. I found my heart when you opened the door during the wildfires. I’m ready to open the door with my brother and move on. As long as I’ve got you beside me, I can do this.”

“I know you can.” Adam cuddled in Matt’s arms. “I’m positive.”

Matt breathed in the scent of Adam’s cologne and sighed. Who knew a little smoke would create such a fire and lead to a second chance? Not him, but he wasn’t questioning fate or the weather. Bring on the storms. With Adam in his corner, he could handle anything.