



The Heartbeat Under a White Coat
CR GUILLIANO

Table of Contents

Love’s Landscapes.....	3
The Heartbeat Under A White Coat – Information	5
The Heartbeat Under A White Coat.....	7
Chapter 1	8
Chapter 2.....	11
Chapter 3.....	13
Chapter 4.....	16
Chapter 5.....	18
Chapter 6.....	21
Chapter 7.....	27
Chapter 8.....	31
Chapter 9.....	33
Chapter 10.....	38
Epilogue	42
Author Bio	43

Love's Landscapes

An M/M Romance series

THE HEARTBEAT UNDER A WHITE COAT

By CR Guiliano

Introduction

The story you are about to read celebrates love, sex and romance between men. It is a product of the *Love's Landscapes* promotion sponsored by the *Goodreads M/M Romance Group* and is published as a gift to you.

What Is Love's Landscapes?

The *Goodreads M/M Romance Group* invited members to choose a photo and pen a letter asking for a short M/M romance story inspired by the image; authors from the group were encouraged to select a letter and write an original tale. The result was an outpouring of creativity that shone a spotlight on the special bond between M/M romance writers and the people who love what these authors do.

A written description of the image that inspired this story is provided along with the original request letter. If you'd like to view the photo, please feel free to join the [Goodreads M/M Romance Group](#) and visit the discussion section: *Love's Landscapes*.

No matter if you are a long-time devotee to M/M Romance, just new to the genre or fall somewhere in between, you are in for a delicious treat.

Words of Caution

This story may contain sexually explicit content and is **intended for adult readers**. It may contain content that is disagreeable or distressing to some readers. The *M/M Romance Group* strongly recommends that each reader review the General Information section before each story for story tags as well as for content warnings.

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THE HEARTBEAT UNDER A WHITE COAT

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Photo Description

Jordan is lonely and in the closet thanks to a painful past and prior abusive relationships. Here you see him thinking, wishing he had someone to love in his life. Despite the chance to meet someone, he is scared. Afraid that no one will want him after all that he has suffered.

Story Letter

Dear Author,

This is Jordan. He is a Physician's Assistant (PA) working in the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit (NICU) at the Children's Hospital. Jordan is a sweet and caring man. Given that he works in the NICU, he is surrounded by women. They are his best friends and they are always trying to set him up on dates. Unfortunately, those dates are with women. You see Jordan is not out. He has been hurt in his life. Friends have betrayed him. He has been in abusive relationships. Yet he longs to have someone special to call his own. One co-worker of Jordan's is Susan. Susan is a lesbian and her gaydar goes off whenever she and Jordan work together. Susan and her wife Michele have a friend that just might fill the lonely place in Jordan's life. Susan decides to ask Jordan if he is open to a date with a man, and he finally feels relieved to come out to someone at work.

Martin is truly a good guy. He is an Advanced Practice Nurse Practitioner (APRN) working as a counselor to physically and emotionally abused children at a free clinic. Martin has been divorced from his wife for two years. He has done the bar scene and is over it. He is tired of being alone and just wants to find someone special to share his life.

Susan and Michele are close friends with Eva and Jake. Jake and Martin are BFF's and work together at the free clinic. The women devise a plan to invite both men to a dinner party. But when Susan approaches Jordan with the plans, he is nervous and intimidated to meet Martin surrounded by Martin's friends. This causes Jake to explode and say that Jordan can't be good enough for Martin.

How can we get these two nice guys together? Cause when they meet the sparks will fly...

Sincerely,

Melissa

Story Info

Genre: contemporary

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THE HEARTBEAT UNDER A WHITE COAT

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Chapter 1

Jordan looked up from the stool he was perched on to see his friend and one of the NICU nurses, Susan shuffling in, hiding a yawn behind her hand. “Who did you piss off to be on the night shift?” He smirked at her, and then chuckled softly when she glared at him.

“No one. Michele and I are trying to buy a house, so I’m taking on extra shifts and she’s working overtime. I damn sure hope it’s worth it. We never see each other!”

With a small smile, Jordan just shook his head at her. It was going to be nice working with Susan; they got along great. He only wished he wasn’t so envious of her relationship with her wife, Michele. He’d met Michele a while back at some function or another, and could easily see what a wonderful couple they made. Sometimes, he wondered if he’d ever find someone to love that much. “The Sherman twins are going to be released tomorrow morning.”

Susan nodded, and went to look at their charts. Jordan went back to his notes on tiny, little Emily. He’d been called in early by Dr. Conrad when Emily had taken a turn for the worse. They’d managed to stabilize her, but she was still critical. Dr. Conrad had gone home and admonished Jordan to call him if there were any changes, good or bad. Jordan looked over at the miniscule baby girl.

So far, he’d never lost a patient, but it was very touch and go with Emily. He wasn’t sure how he was going to handle it if she didn’t make it. Jordan tended to get really attached to his small patients, and if the baby girl didn’t survive, he was going to take it really hard.

“You okay?”

Jordan jumped when Susan spoke. She was right next to him and had laid a hand on the small of his back. He gave her a weak smile. “Yea, just worried. She’s not doing as well as I’d like.” Susan would understand how much Jordan worried about all his patients. She did too. That’s why Jordan liked working with this staff at the Children’s Hospital. They all cared so much for the littlest patients, the ones struggling to just begin their lives. It bound them together, made them friends, if only at work. Jordan’s thoughts turned back to how lonely he was, despite having those friends. Part of it was they knew he was single and liked to set him up on dates. The problem? They were dates with

women and Jordan didn't have the courage to say he wasn't attracted that way to the female gender. He had his reasons for keeping quiet and not revealing why he wasn't out, something else his friends didn't know.

Susan moved away to continue working on the twins' paperwork in preparation for their release and Jordan went back to watching Emily, monitoring her oxygen levels, pulse, and updating her nutritional intake so he could administer her next feeding. Most of what he was doing could be done by Susan or one of the other NICU nurses, but Jordan wanted to be close in case there were any problems.

He had breakfast with Susan right after their shift ended, enjoying her company. Once, while they were chatting, Crystal, another nurse came up to them, trying to engage Jordan in conversation— about another date setup. He declined, like he always did, stating he had out-of-town friends coming in. It was a lie, of course, but there was no way he was going out on a date with a woman. He tried to be as nonchalant as he could and was relieved when Crystal seemed to accept his excuse. When he turned back to Susan, he couldn't help notice the thoughtful look on her face, but she didn't say anything and they resumed their interrupted banter.

Jordan walked down the grocery aisles, feeling lonelier than ever as he shopped. He probably wouldn't even be here if he hadn't nearly run out of everything at home. He caught himself darting his gaze around, and tried to stop being paranoid. It had been three years since he fled his hometown, ran from Brolin and his violence. His ex-boyfriend didn't know where he was and Jordan was pretty sure Brolin wouldn't bother searching for him. Not after all this time. Time that didn't seem to wear down Jordan's fear, or the nightmares that still plagued him occasionally.

He grabbed only what he needed and headed for the checkout. Errands were a chore and he kept them to a minimum, always anxious to get home. He'd purposely rented a house near the hospital he worked at, so he wouldn't have a long commute. It cut down on the time he was vulnerable, or at least felt exposed. Stupid, really, but it kept him sane. He made his way home, unloaded the groceries, and locked up his house for the night.

He made himself a small meal, then showered before going to bed. Sleep never came easy and he lay there, his mind wandering. He missed his folks, but he couldn't face them. Not even now. They still lived in the small bungalow

he'd grown up in, north of Miami, but Jordan hadn't been home since he'd fled Hallandale Beach to get away from Brolin. He sometimes wondered if they thought about him, wondered where he was—worried for him. He'd been too ashamed to seek them out after the abuse he'd suffered. They'd never approved of any of his boyfriends, and didn't really understand his sexual orientation either.

His chest ached when he thought of Shelly and Farrah. He'd thought they were friends. Close friends. Hell, he'd thought of them as his best friends. That was until they figured out he liked guys. The disgust on their faces, and the slurs still haunted Jordan. His mind went back to the first boyfriend he ever had. Senior year of high school, and Tyler. A boy Jordan had thought he'd spend the rest of his life with. Except Tyler decided Jordan wasn't enough for him and had cheated—repeatedly. Jordan had been devastated by the betrayal, which had prompted his coming out to Shelly and Farrah. That breakup was probably the reason he'd fallen into some of the bad relationships after that. His self-esteem had taken a brutal hit.

But Brolin was the worst. Abusive, controlling, arrogant—and stunningly beautiful. Jordan had fallen fast for the man, Brolin's initial charms drawing him in, until he *owned* Jordan, body and mind. That's when things had changed, for the worse. Jordan had been so confused over the shift in Brolin's demeanor that he'd been unable to cope, or defend himself. The first time Brolin slammed a fist into Jordan's body, he'd been stunned. The subsequent ones had taught him fear. Where he'd gathered the determination and courage to leave, he didn't know. Maybe he was just tired of being a punching bag.

He sighed and turned on his side, jabbing the pillow into a more comfortable lump. He wished the memories would fade, or better yet, disappear altogether. But his nightmares were testament to the hold they had on him. He had to admit, they weren't as bad as they'd been when he first moved away, for which he was thankful. He just wished he could replace them with new memories, happy memories. Replace the pain with love. He only hoped, if he did meet a man he was attracted to, that he could trust again.

Chapter 2

“You look beat.”

Susan gave her wife a peck on the cheek on her way by, shucking her coat and scarf and hanging them over the small sectional in their living room. “Yea, it was a long night. The Sherman twins are going home today, we admitted two more premies, which are doing well. But Emily isn’t. Jordan was in all night, keeping watch over her.” Susan glanced at Michele, her wife watching her closely. “What?”

“I can hear something in your voice when you mention Jordan.”

Susan sighed and walked up to her wife, circling her waist in a hug. Michele hugged her back and guided her to the couch to sit.

“What’s going on?”

“You remember me telling you how some of the other nurses and PA’s like to set Jordan up on blind dates?” Michele nodded, pulling Susan into her side and holding her. “Well, I think they are doing it wrong. I swear, Michele, the man is gay. My gaydar tingles every time I’m around him.” Susan leaned back to stare at her wife when Michele gave an inelegant snort.

“Hon, you do realize there is no such thing as ‘gaydar’, right?”

Susan leaned back into Michele’s side again and sighed. “Maybe. But I can’t help thinking he’s not interested in women. I mean, he’s always declined with one excuse or another when anyone tries to set him up. What straight man does that?”

“Maybe he just isn’t into blind dates? Or maybe he’s just timid. I mean, he was awfully shy at that last holiday function we attended.”

“True, but I really don’t think the man dates. Gaydar aside, he seems lonely. He could be in the closet. We know a few men like that. Unwilling, or unable to be open about their sexuality. Look at Jake’s best friend, Martin. He was even married to a woman for a while.” Susan knew Martin’s marriage had ended about two years ago. Their friend Eva had mentioned that Martin and Josie had divorced. The circumstances were sad, Martin hiding his sexuality and trying to fit into what his conservative parents wanted from him. Eva had even said that Martin was happy there had been no children, especially since Martin’s ex had been devastated by the divorce. But Martin, being the kind man he was, still

kept in contact with his ex-wife. Susan didn't comprehend that, but to each his own, she supposed.

"You know, we have a dinner party coming up in a few weeks. Jake and Eva will be there. I wonder if we can talk Jake into bringing Martin and if your friend would be willing to come?"

Susan startled at Michele's idea. But the more she thought about it, the better it sounded. Martin wasn't dating anyone at the moment that she knew of. She almost giggled out loud when she thought of the gossip that traveled between her and Michele and Eva. She was pretty sure Jake would be annoyed by it since Martin was his best friend, and Jake was very protective of Martin. If she didn't know better, she'd think Jake was into Martin, but he was as straight as they came, and dating Eva.

"That sounds like an excellent idea. You call Eva and run it by her. I'll approach Jordan. I'll have to be discreet since he could be straight, and just shy, or obviously in the closet."

"Yea, be careful. First, I don't want him being mean to you if he's straight and gets angry and second, if he's hiding, you can't let anyone know. You don't want to inadvertently out the man."

"He won't be offended if he's straight. He knows all about us and is fine with it. But I'll be careful. I don't want to hurt him. He's a sweet man."

Michele hugged Susan and then pulled her from the couch.

"Let's take a nap. I've got an early day tomorrow and could use the rest and you are obviously exhausted."

Susan didn't argue. With all the extra shifts she'd been putting in, she was beyond tired. She'd wait to hear what Eva thought and talk to Jordan the next time she had a shift with him.

Chapter 3

Jordan shot up in bed, his heart racing, sweat dripping from him, his eyes darting around the dark. Another nightmare! He was getting so tired of them. He was safe now; no one from his past knew where he was. He turned when he heard his cell phone go off, and figured that's what had woken him from his dream. He was thankful, actually, until he saw the number displayed. "Hello?" Now his heart was racing for a different reason.

"Dr. Caruthers?"

"Yea. Yes, what's wrong?" Jordan cleared his throat, his voice raspy from sleep. He only hoped the hospital calling didn't mean that Emily was in trouble. Even a week later, she was still critical. At this point, they were just waiting for her to be strong enough for the heart surgery she needed to repair the hole in her left ventricle. Jordan tried to keep up hope, but every day she seemed weaker than the one before and he wasn't sure she was going to survive to have surgery.

"We have an emergency. Can you come to the hospital?"

"Sure, what's the emergency?" Jordan was kicking his covers off even as he spoke, digging around for something to throw on so he could get out the door. He only lived about five minutes from the hospital, so could get there fast. He really hoped it wasn't Emily. Sometimes it sucked to be on call, but he'd do anything for the health of his patients.

"Dr. Marsh just delivered a set of triplets. They've been admitted to the NICU, and she wants an immediate consultation on their status."

Jordan couldn't help the relief that Emily wasn't the emergency, but wanted to roll his eyes at being called in because Dr. Marsh demanded it. Dr. Bailer, the Neonatal Resident that worked overnight was more than capable in assessing newly admitted infants, but it was a known fact Dr. Marsh didn't trust residents or interns. She wasn't going to be happy that he was coming, since she distrusted PA's even more. But then his mind went into doctor mode and told the hospital attendant he'd be right there. He was not fond of Dr. Alice Marsh. She was haughty, bigoted, opinionated, and felt that all the PA's were there just for her convenience anyway. Jordan's only run-ins with the OB-GYN were unpleasant, to say the least. He dropped his phone on the bed and hurried to get dressed. No time for a shower. He grabbed his wallet, phone, and keys and headed out.

Once he arrived, he hurried to the NICU only to be stopped at the door by Dr. Marsh. He'd expected it, but was still annoyed.

"Where is Dr. Conrad?"

Jordan gritted his teeth, forcing himself to be professional. "He was unavailable and I'm on call. I'll be assessing the triplets." The scowl he got had Jordan getting angry, until he saw Susan come up behind the doctor. She smiled at him, rolled her eyes behind Dr. Marsh's back and it helped Jordan release the tension he was holding.

Three hours later, Jordan had determined the triplets were fine, if tiny. Their hearts were strong, though he put all three on ventilators to help their underdeveloped lungs get enough oxygen. He and Susan monitored the tiny infants for another hour. The babies blood oxygen levels were low, but within normal. Much to Jordan's relief and surprise, Dr. Marsh accepted Jordan's assessments and left. He stretched on the stool he was perched on and smiled over at Susan. As always, they'd worked like a well-oiled machine, and he was thankful she was here.

"Come on. I think the triplets are fine for now, and we can grab some breakfast. My shift ends in another hour."

Jordan nodded. He'd already checked Emily and he was hungry. His own shift didn't start until six tonight, and he planned on going home to get a few more hours of sleep. He knew he probably looked like death warmed over. He placed the chart he was making notes on back on the end of the incubator of Parker baby #3 and followed Susan out of the NICU to the elevators that would take them to the cafeteria.

Once they settled at a corner table, he noticed Susan staring at him intently. "What?" She'd never been so focused on him before and he squirmed a little at the scrutiny. Good friends they may be, but Jordan never let anyone get *too* close to him. He had so much baggage and shame he couldn't allow it.

"Jordan, how come you don't date?"

Jordan's heart flipped in his chest, dread making sweat pop out along his hair line. This was so not a conversation he wanted to have. He tried to act as casual as he could, shrugging his shoulders, and avoiding Susan's eyes. "No particular reason. Just busy, I guess." God. That sounded stupid even to Jordan's own ears.

"I think I have an idea. I think it's because people have been trying to set you up with the wrong... gender."

Susan had lowered her voice, nearly whispering the last word. Jordan's stomach turned. It seemed Susan was a lot more astute than he'd given her credit for. He could feel his face flaming and he swallowed around a lump in his throat. He'd been so lonely, scared to let anyone know about his orientation, images of his past haunting him. But if Susan guessed, maybe it would be a relief to at least have one person, one friend, know that he preferred men. "How..." Jordan paused, clearing his throat, his eyes darting around to make sure no one was near them. He took a deep breath. "How did you figure it out?" He glanced up at Susan to see a warm smile on her face.

"Oh, sweetie. I'm a lesbian. It isn't too hard to know another of my kind, though Michele is convinced that gaydar doesn't really exist."

Susan's light laugh calmed Jordan like nothing else. He should have known Susan wouldn't have a problem with him, since she was gay herself. He gave her a small smile. "Well, you're right. I, obviously, have no interest in any of the dates others have tried to set me up on." That was an understatement.

"What if I told you that Michele and I are having a dinner party in a couple of weeks and we'd like you to come? We have a friend... a male friend, who will be there."

"Really?" Jordan wasn't sure what he thought of that, but the fact that someone was willing to set him up with a man, instead of a woman, had him a little excited. And nervous. "I don't know, Susan. I mean, I won't really know anyone but you there and he'll be surrounded by his friends. I'll have to think about it." Susan reached over and patted Jordan's hand, still smiling at him.

"You do that. Think about it and let me know. Martin is a great guy, and happens to be an APRN and works with abused kids over at the free clinic. You'll have a lot in common."

Jordan nodded, and they changed the subject, chatting about work and Susan and Michele's house-buying plans.

Chapter 4

Jordan absently fiddled with his dinner, his mind too occupied with Susan's proposal. He wanted to go, but he was scared. Susan had shown him a picture of Martin on her phone, and *good Lord*, the man was stunning, with blond, sun-streaked hair cut stylishly, a light shadow on his jaw and the most amazing blue eyes Jordan had ever seen. He was laughing in the photo and there were sexy crinkles around those big eyes, and his smile was to die for. He was out of Jordan's league, he just knew it. He didn't handle rejection well, and what if Martin didn't like him?

Susan said Martin was a good guy, worked at the free clinic. Would that mean he was nice? That if he wasn't into Jordan, he'd let him down easily? He was so lonely. What did he have to lose? And if he continued to cower under his fear, he was never going to find someone to relieve that loneliness. Never find someone that actually cared and didn't use him like all his past relationships. He'd never quite understood why every boyfriend he'd had seemed to think he was some kind of submissive and enjoyed getting hurt. Jordan didn't consider himself submissive at all, and certainly didn't like pain. But no matter what he'd said, they did what they wanted.

Shame swamped him as he thought about what he'd endured, how he'd let it go on and did nothing to stop it. What kind of man allowed that? Was he a coward? Or did he just not like confrontation? Jordan didn't really know anymore, having been subjugated for so long under violent and domineering men. He sighed, picking up his plate of uneaten food and dumping it in the trash. He'd been resolute when he fled his hometown, determined to make a life for himself here. And he'd done it. He had a great job, a house of his own, even if it was rented. Paid his bills, was kind to others. Now, to have what he wanted, he was going to have to be unwavering again and gather his courage. Shake off his past, and remember that he had a lot to offer a man, if he found one worthy enough to trust.

“You think they'll hit it off?”

Susan looked over at Eva, her bright red hair shining in the sun. Had she not been so in love with Michele and married her a couple of years ago, she would have made a play for Eva. She was adorable in a fiery, pixie sort of way. Of course, it would have never gone anywhere since Eva was very committed to

Jake. Michele was convinced they would eventually get married, if Eva could handle Jake in the long run. He could be so arrogant sometimes. It definitely made Susan and her wife glad they preferred women. "I think so. Jordan is very sweet, and cute, for a guy."

Eva laughed at Susan and she gave a wry grin at her friend. "Not that my opinion means much. But I do know he's lonely, and in the closet. I know Martin understands that." Eva sobered quickly and a small frown marred her smooth forehead.

"Yea, but Martin has worked hard to be out and has finally come to terms with being gay. I'm not sure he'd be attracted to a man that hides his sexuality."

Susan nodded, understanding that. "I agree, but I think all it would take for Jordan to be comfortable in being out is having someone who really cares for him. I have the funny feeling he's been treated badly in the past. He's timid. Not shy timid, but scared timid. You know what I mean? I mentioned Martin to Jordan, and he seems, well, excited but really nervous." Eva nodded and looked thoughtful.

"I know Martin has been lonely too. Jake has tried to set him up a few times, but the dates haven't worked out for one reason or another. Not that Jake knows many gay men, but he tries. He's very devoted to Martin."

Susan grinned at Eva's disgruntled look. "Still feeling jealous over their relationship? You know Jake loves you, right? It's just that Martin is his best friend and he's known him longer. You have nothing to worry about. And if we can get Jordan and Martin together, maybe that will give you more time with Jake." Eva grinned again at Susan and she gave the redhead a wink. Susan had never been much into the whole matchmaking thing, but she hated that Jordan was so unhappy, and it sounded as if Martin was in the same boat.

"I'll talk to Jake. I'm not sure what he's going to think."

That was all Susan could ask for. Eva wasn't as close to Martin as Jake was, or she'd suggest Eva talk to Martin herself. She knew Jake would have his opinion. He always did when it came to Martin.

Chapter 5

“No way! Why would you think it’s okay to set Martin up with some shy guy that’s in the closet?”

Eva sighed at Jake’s outburst. He was being unreasonable. “Look, I know you are protective of Martin, but really, he’s a grown man. He can make the decision himself. And you know as well as I do, that he’s been lonely lately. You, my dear, are not a substitute for a man he can call his own. You aren’t his boyfriend!”

Eva was annoyed. It was one thing to be protective of Martin, but entirely another to try and make decisions for his friend, especially in the romance department. “He has his own life, ya know. You can’t run it for him. Give Jordan a chance.”

“If he’s scared just to meet Martin, then he’s not good enough for him.”

“Jake, that doesn’t even make any sense. Just because you don’t have a shy bone in your body, does not mean every man has to be like you! Jordan is sweet and handsome and lonely. Just like Martin. They may just hit it off. You don’t know. Has Martin even ever told you what his type is? Or do you just bulldoze your way through his desires and pick any man *you* think would be good for him?” Eva watched Jake turn away from her. “Yea, that’s what I thought. Look, we’re going to Susan and Michele’s dinner party, and we’re going to ask Martin to join us. Susan and Michele are expecting him and Susan will bring Jordan. It won’t hurt to let them, at least, meet each other.”

Eva ignored Jake’s scowl. Her boyfriend was just going to have to suck it up and realize that Martin deserved someone whether that took away time from their friendship or not. She suspected that was the problem. Jake didn’t want any lover Martin might have to interfere with his and Martin’s close friendship. She sighed as she picked up her cell phone to call Susan.

“Jake’s being a dick about it, but I want you to invite Jordan. Despite Jake’s obnoxious attitude, Martin has a way of making people around him feel comfortable. I’m sure that’s why he is so good at his job. If they don’t hit it off, they will at least become friends and from what you told me, Jordan could use a guy friend.” Eva heard Susan’s chuckle over the phone.

“I’ll say. Poor man is surrounded by women trying to pair him off. That would make any gay man want to hide in a closet.”

Eva laughed and they chatted for a while before hanging up. Eva went to find Jake and stopped to see him on the phone.

“I don't know, Martin. I've never met the guy, but Eva says that Susan thinks the guy is okay.”

Eva stomped over and pulled the phone from Jake's hand. “Martin? Don't listen to Jake. Susan says that Jordan is sweet and cute, and you know Susan wouldn't say something like that unless it's true. Even Michele likes him, and she's a hard person to impress. You know that.”

“It's okay, Ev. I know Jake. I'll be happy to come and meet this Jordan.”

Eva gave Jake a smug grin and handed the phone back to him. “He's fine with it, so you need to be fine with it.” She walked away to get ready for work, ignoring the rest of the conversation between Jake and Martin. As long as Martin agreed to come, that was all she needed. When she reached her desk at work, she dialed Susan to let her know that Martin would be there.

Susan knew that Jordan was scheduled to work tonight, which is why she'd signed up for another overnight shift. She smiled when she saw him walk in, his head down like he was thinking hard. “Hey, you.” She watched Jordan startle and look up at her and was surprised at the circles under his eyes. “Are you okay?”

“Oh, yea. Just not sleeping well.”

There was more to it, but Susan wouldn't pry. It really wasn't her business and she was pushing the envelope by setting Jordan up on a date anyway. “Okay, if you say so.” She could hear the skepticism in her voice and it was apparent that Jordan caught it too.

“No, really. I'm fine. These weird hours are just playing havoc with my sleeping cycle.”

Susan nodded and went to work, thinking it would be a good idea to bring up the dinner party a little later, when Jordan was more alert. The hours went by, Jordan being unusually quiet, even for him. He wasn't ignoring her exactly, but he wasn't really engaging either. She pulled him aside a few hours later, and insisted he go to the cafeteria with her. She sat him down, ignoring his small smile at her manhandling. “Okay, I wanted to let you know that Martin will definitely be at the dinner party and I expect you to be there too.” Jordan stared at her, enough that she felt a blush at her demanding tone.

“Well, do I get a choice in this matter, or are you going to drag me there in chains?”

Susan leaned back abashed, at first thinking Jordan was offended, until she saw the sparkle in his dark eyes and his mouth quirking. “You shit!” Jordan’s laugh eased Susan’s guilt that she was pressuring Jordan into this meeting. “I’m sorry. I just care about you, Jordan, and I hate seeing you lonely.” Susan reached across and patted Jordan’s hand and was shocked again, when he quickly turned his hand over and gripped hers tightly and glanced around surreptitiously.

“I’m nervous, Susan. Look, I know you figured out that I’m... well, you know. But you don’t know everything and why I’m as apprehensive as I am. I can’t talk about it, but just know that I appreciate you doing this for me, and I will be there.”

Susan could feel her heart going out to this young man who seemed so lost. She knew she was one of those people that liked to save others. That was why she became a nurse. But Jordan? He was special. There was just something about him that brought out the nurturing in her. Michele would think it hysterical. “No worries, Jordan. You don’t have to tell me anything unless you want to. I’m glad you are going. I think that Martin is just the guy for you. And Michele and I’ll be there if you feel overwhelmed, all right?” Jordan nodded at her, squeezed her hand, and then let go.

Chapter 6

Jordan fixed his tie, groaned, and yanked it off again. He'd not had this much trouble trying to dress for a party in a long while. Of course, past boyfriends had dictated what he wore, and it sure as hell wasn't a suit. He stared at himself in the mirror. He'd finally caved and taken an over the counter sleep aid for several days and gotten some much needed rest. The circles under his eyes were gone and he wasn't as pale as he'd been. He'd managed to drag himself to the barber and gotten his hair cut too.

He finally gave up, shoving the tie in the dresser drawer and slamming it shut. He unbuttoned the top button of his shirt to help relieve the feeling of being stifled. His heart was beating much faster than normal, and he couldn't help the perspiration that slicked his skin. He almost felt like he needed to take another shower, but he didn't have time, or he'd be late to the dinner party. Satisfied he looked the best he could, he grabbed his phone, wallet, and keys. He'd gotten Susan's address from her when he'd let her know he'd come.

When Jordan pulled up to Susan's duplex, he noted only one car parked on the curb in front of her house and two in the driveway. The old Toyota he knew was Susan's, and the Honda was her wife's. The big Escalade he didn't recognize, but then there was no reason he should. It could even belong to the people who lived in the other duplex. It was a sweet ride, though and he wondered if it belonged to this Martin guy. It was much nicer than the smaller Explorer Jordan was paying for. He exited his car, his nerves jumping and made his way up the walk. He hesitated right before taking a deep breath and knocking.

"Relax, Jake. Damn, you're like a pit bull." Martin adored his best friend, but sometimes Jake could be a big pain in the ass, and not in a good way. When Martin had found out about this little setup of Eva, Michele, and Susan's, and the invitation, he'd actually been excited about it. He still was. Jake, bless his misdirected heart, couldn't seem to find a man that Martin was compatible with. Hell, Martin wouldn't even be accepting the blind dates Jake liked to set him up on if he wasn't as lonely as he was. He honestly hoped the women had better taste.

He'd tried the bar scene, to find his own man, but it had been a complete waste of time. He just wasn't wired for the whole hook-up, one-night stand

scenario. He wanted a boyfriend. Someone to love and build a relationship with. Maybe even get married and adopt or surrogate a few kids. He wanted the fucking white-picket-fence life he'd not had with Josie. Thinking of his ex-wife made him want to cringe, the guilt swamping him, the epically bad decision and farce still bothering him even after two years.

When he'd ended his marriage, his parents had been unhappy. When he'd told them *why* he'd ended it, they'd been surprisingly okay. Martin had never expected his conservative parents to accept him being gay. That's what had pushed him into marrying Josie in the first place. But the only anger they had was him deceiving them for so long, and hurting Josie, by not only marrying her, but when he divorced her as well. He kept in touch with Josie, though it was hard. His ex-wife hadn't gotten angry with him for lying to her. No, Josie had been shattered at what she thought of as betrayal, but had blamed herself. It had taken a few talks to convince Josie she hadn't *turned* Martin gay by not being woman enough for him.

"Martin, care for another drink?"

Martin turned to smile down at Susan. He'd always liked the petite woman, ever since Eva had introduced her and her wife, Michele. For that matter, Susan's marriage was an unconscious model for what Martin wanted for himself. These two women were happy. Happy in their skin, happy with their lives, and happy with each other. It was so easy to see the love between them when they looked at one another. That's what Martin wanted. "Sure." He accepted the glass of wine, but was determined not to drink too much. He didn't have work for the next three days, but since he wasn't much of a drinker to begin with, it really didn't matter.

"So, are you sure Jordan's going to come?" Martin had to admit to himself, he was getting a bit anxious. Susan had confided in him when he'd first arrived that Jordan was a bit gun-shy and to be gentle with him. Well, Martin, unlike Jake's obnoxious ways, was always gentle. Sometimes, he thought maybe that was what turned a lot of men off. He wasn't the big, rugged he-man they were looking for. Big, sure, but more like a gentle giant. He had to be in his line of work. Abused children were skittish, and his size was intimidating. But he'd learned, if he stayed calm and quiet, listened well, and hunkered down on the floor at their eye level, the kids opened up, many feeling safe with him. Protected. And they were. Martin would never let anything happen to his young patients.

There was a knock at the door when Susan opened her mouth to respond to his question.

“Yes.”

They both laughed as Susan started towards the door to answer it. Martin saw Jake headed that way too, and grabbed him by the upper arm. “Whoa, there, buddy. I honestly don’t need help meeting a guy. Why don’t you go get Eva a drink while I get to know Jordan?” He gave Jake a smile and a push towards the back of the duplex. Susan and Michele’s place was small, so they’d opted to have the party in their backyard. The weather was beautiful and the cool breeze coming off the coast was perfect.

When Martin turned back around, he nearly swallowed his tongue and almost dropped the glass he was holding. Jordan was not cute! *Jordan was fucking gorgeous!* He almost chuckled out loud when it occurred to him that a couple of lesbians wouldn’t really know gorgeous on a guy, at least not as far as attraction anyway. Christ, why hadn’t Jake ever picked up on it being this kind of man that pushed all Martin’s buttons? Martin held a snort, because Jake never bothered to ask, that’s why.

He waited as Susan guided Jordan to him, watching his every move, thrilled at the smaller, thin size of him. His dark, almost black hair looked soft and Martin was itching to run his fingers through it. He could tell Jordan had dark eyes, but he wanted to gaze into them, see if he felt as if he could fall into the smoldering depths. He wanted to taste those rosy lips and flawless skin. He could feel his body responding, his dick on board with Martin’s thoughts. But with Susan’s words in mind, he sternly made himself relax. No need to scare the man to death with his lust.

When Susan answered the door, Jordan gave her a small, nervous smile. He almost laughed when she grabbed his hand and yanked him inside before shutting the door behind her. Jordan had never been to Susan’s place before and looked around. He didn’t get far when his gaze was caught by a tall, devastatingly handsome man standing a few feet away. Jordan’s mind almost short-circuited when he realized... this was Martin.

Oh, holy shit, but Jordan wanted to climb the man!

He could already feel his face heating at his thoughts as Susan led him over to Martin. The closer he got, the more stunning the man became. And tall! Jordan didn’t think he’d ever met a man that towered over him like that. When they stopped in front of Martin, he had to tilt his head slightly just to look into the man’s eyes. And, he’d been wrong. He’d thought they were blue from the

picture Susan had shown him, but they were more an aqua color, green swimming in the blue depths. Susan was saying something, but Jordan's heart was beating so fast, all he heard was the blood rushing through his ears.

"I can see I'm not needed."

Jordan barely acknowledged Susan walking away he was so mesmerized by Martin's gaze. "Uh, hi." Jordan gave an embarrassed laugh. God, he was nervous. But when Martin smiled at him, he was struck mute. A beautiful smile surrounded by deep dimples. Jordan's stomach flipped. He'd been prepared to be disappointed, but that was far from what he felt at the moment.

"Hello, Jordan. It's so nice to meet you."

Jordan found himself relaxing at the low, quiet voice Martin had. He smiled and held out his hand. "Nice to meet you, too." Martin's hand was large, and swallowed up Jordan's smaller one. His shake was firm, gentle, and warm, and Jordan really didn't want to let go. His stomach flipped again when Martin laid his other hand on top of their clasped ones, holding on for longer than was required. He didn't know what else to say, and felt a sharp letdown when Martin let go.

"How about we go have a seat and chat?"

Okay, Jordan could do that. He followed Martin to a chaise lounge in the living room, his eyes riveted on the way the man's slacks hugged his ass. *Nice!* His nerves jumped again when Martin patted the cushion next to him for Jordan to take a seat. It would be incredibly rude, and embarrassing of him to sit on the chair to his left, so he sat where indicated, but left some space between them. That he wanted to just straddle the man's lap wasn't something he could do. And, despite the overwhelming attraction, Jordan was still a little wary. He didn't know Martin. He'd been attracted to Brolin too and look how that turned out.

"So, how did you get wangled into this? Susan threaten you?"

It took Jordan a minute to realize Martin was joking, his sea foam eyes twinkling and Jordan laughed, relaxing further. He shook his head, feeling his face heat. "No, um, she sort of figured out I like men... and, um, here I am." Jordan watched Martin's face, his eyes soft and his smile warm. He'd been instantly attracted, his physical reaction intense, but the more he saw, the more he wanted to see.

"I'm glad Eva asked me to come. You're nothing like the guys Jake likes to hook me up with, and I mean that in the best way."

“Did I hear my name?”

Jordan turned to see another handsome man enter the living room, followed quickly by a pretty redhead. He assumed this was Jake, though he'd never met him. He only knew Susan and had met Michele at a couple of hospital social events. He suddenly realized he was leaning away from the intimidating man, right into Martin's side. He held in a gasp when Martin put a comforting arm around his shoulders, drawing him in closer and scowling up at the new arrival.

“Back off, Jake. You're scaring him.”

Jordan wanted to fall into a dark pit right there. How humiliating was it for the man you'd been invited to meet figuring out you were so timid? “I-I'm fine.” Jordan bit his lip, frustrated at the stutter and angry that he seemed so cowardly, and sat up straight, putting a little space between himself and Martin, though the large man kept his arm over Jordan's shoulders and since it felt—protective, he wasn't going to shrug Martin off. It was just that Jake reminded him of Brolin, dark, brooding—aggressive. He wasn't prepared for the look of shock on Jake's face, or the punch on the arm the redhead gave Jake, glaring up at him.

“I'm sorry. I didn't realize.”

“Butthead.”

Jordan almost laughed at the fiery little woman as she frowned up at Jake, but did calm down a bit when Jake sat down and held out his hand.

“I'm Jake, Martin's best friend. We work at the free clinic together.”

Jordan tentatively shook his hand, pulling away quickly without seeming rude. “Jordan.” He'd not moved that far from Martin, and had to stamp down the desire to snuggle back into the man's side. He should be embarrassed, feeling so needy. But he didn't. For that matter, he scooted a little closer, and held a smile when Martin gave him a gentle squeeze.

“Since Jake is such a moron and didn't introduce me, I'm Eva.”

The redhead—Eva—had sat down on the arm of the couch and Jordan shook her hand as well. “Nice to meet you both.” Jordan almost sighed in relief when Susan walked in. As much as he was enjoying Martin's company, he didn't like being the center of attention, especially when they all knew his preference. He'd never been in the closet until he came here. He figured, if he hid his orientation, maybe he wouldn't draw the kind of men that he'd experienced before.

“Come on everyone, dinner is ready.”

Jordan didn't move as Jake and Eva followed Susan out of the living room. When he went to stand, Martin stood with him and squeezed his shoulders again, and then trailed his large hand lightly down Jordan's back. A shiver of desire raced down his spine in the wake of that touch and when Martin leaned down, close to his ear and whispered low, his whole body shuddered.

“Don't mind Jake. He's a bit overprotective of me. I really like you and he'll see that.”

The barely there kiss on his neck, below his ear, made goose bumps break out over his skin, his heart race, and lust fill him. He wanted to turn and capture Martin's lips in a passionate kiss, but held himself in check. He'd only just met the man! Martin slipped his palm from Jordan's back and turned towards him. He held out his hand and Jordan grasped it, blushing as Martin led him to the backyard. They were close, their bodies almost touching and Jordan's heart was pounding against his ribcage. He looked up to see Martin smiling down at him, those dimples popping. What was it about this huge man that set Jordan at ease?

Chapter 7

Jordan was having a really fun time. He couldn't remember when he'd laughed so much. Of course, it might be partially from the three glasses of wine he'd had. He could feel the buzz, and knew he was inebriated, but he didn't care. This was the first time he'd been able to let go, be himself, and he was going to savor it. It helped that Martin was so attentive and kind. He never left Jordan's side and Jordan was learning that Martin was funny, interesting, and very intelligent. All hot buttons for Jordan. Not to mention the physical attraction sizzling between them that had Martin almost obliterating Jordan's self-control. He couldn't believe how much he wanted the man.

"Seriously, I've never seen anyone as devoted to the infants as Jordan."

Jordan blushed at Susan's admiration. "I'm just doing my job." He mumbled the words, trying to be modest. He didn't handle compliments well, having rarely been the recipient. He continued chatting when Susan's cell phone went off. Apologizing, she left the backyard, entering the house to take the call. When she returned, it was obvious something was very wrong, her face pinched and pale. Her gaze zeroed in on Jordan and his stomach clenched. She motioned for him to follow her and he stood, a bit unsteady until Martin's hand was on his elbow, supporting him. Intent on finding out what had upset Susan, he didn't pay much attention to Martin accompanying him.

He followed Susan into the house and stood in front of her, noticing for the first time the tears that made her brown eyes glassy. "What's wrong?" Dread filled Jordan, his mind racing for any reason that would have Susan nearly crying. Michele joined them, placing her arm around her wife.

"That was Courtney. She's on night duty tonight. Jordan... we lost Emily."

Jordan's whole body jerked at Susan's announcement and he could feel his legs giving out. Emily? Tiny little Emily was gone? He felt strong arms go around him, and he clung to Martin as the man picked him up. He barely heard the exchange between Martin and Susan.

"A bedroom, Susan? Someplace I can take him?"

"Sure, follow me."

Jordan felt himself lowered to a bed and he curled up on his side. Vaguely, he was aware that Martin had saved him from embarrassment, but all he could

think about was the loss of Emily. God, they'd tried so hard to save her! Tears stung his eyes and he blinked repeatedly, trying to stem them. Crying wasn't going to bring her back. Her parents' faces swam behind his vision, their worry and sadness as their tiny daughter struggled to survive. They'd lost their baby girl. Jordan's chest hitched, and he fell under the sobs that tore through him. He hadn't known he'd react like this, but couldn't stop the deluge of grief that overcame him.

"You have him, Martin?"

Jordan suddenly found himself engulfed in warm, strong arms, and he turned to bury his face against Martin's wide chest. If he wasn't hurting so bad, he'd be mortified at his actions. He just managed to keep the wail inside him from escaping. It was so unfair! She'd never had a chance, would never grow and thrive. Love and be loved. Wear dresses and ride a bike. Nothing. Jordan wondered if he was taking this so hard because he was not a religious man. He didn't believe in heaven or hell, so it would never cross his mind that Emily was now in the clouds, tucked up there with God.

He didn't know how long he cried, his fists tightly clutching Martin's shirt, holding on for dear life. When he'd finally settled into hard hiccups, he tried to pry his hands from Martin's shirt. "I-I'm sorry. I think I r-ruined your s-shirt." His voice was raw and raspy, the sound thick with emotion, the hiccups hard and painful.

"Don't worry about it, babe."

Jordan leaned back to see Martin's face. The big man's gaze was so caring, so concerned that Jordan leaned up and kissed him. Martin didn't kiss back right away, but when Jordan wrapped his arms around Martin's neck, Martin responded, his lips firm and tender. He pulled Jordan close and Jordan clung to him, deepening the kiss and pressing for entry into Martin's mouth. He opened for him, and Jordan swept in, needing to taste, needing to feel, to wash away the numbness of Emily's death with something life affirming, something primal.

Jordan growled in frustration when Martin slowed the kiss and then broke it.

"Jordan. Babe, this isn't right. I won't take advantage of you in this state."

Jordan jerked away, the rebuff stinging and stumbled to a standing position. The alcoholic haze was long gone, but his mind was still muddled, his thoughts unclear. He needed to go home. Ignoring Martin, he straightened his clothes,

and walked over to the bedroom door. He turned back to see Martin sitting up, his face blank. That surprised Jordan. Martin had been so animated, so caring and kind all evening, but now he showed nothing. No emotions at all. "Um, thanks. Good-bye." He turned away and made his way to the bathroom he'd used earlier in the hall. Shutting the door and locking it, he surveyed his face. His eyes were red-rimmed and sunken, his face pale, cheeks covered in tear stained tracks, his lips puffy from the kissing.

Jordan rinsed his face with cold water, hoping it would lessen the redness around his eyes and wash the tears from his cheeks. Taking a deep breath, he left the bathroom and went back into the living room. Susan was on the couch with Michele wrapped around her. Jake was in the chair, Eva on his lap. The low whispers ceased when he entered the room. He ignored everyone and focused on Susan. "I'm going home. I'm sorry for ruining the evening." Susan stood and walked to him, hugging him tightly.

"You didn't ruin the evening, Jordan. I'm sorry about Emily. I know this is hitting you hard. Will you be okay?"

Jordan remained stiff until Susan let go of him. He didn't want to break down again, and it was a close call with Susan's arms around him. What he wanted was Martin's arms, but that wasn't going to happen. Despite what Jordan had seen earlier, it appeared Martin didn't want him back. He didn't want to admit that Martin was being a gentleman in turning his advances down. Jordan was in no condition to be engaging in sex, and certainly not in a strange bedroom at his friend's house. His shoulders slumped heavily. He just wanted to go home. He was not on call for the next few days and planned on spending the time in bed, hiding from a world that would let little Emily down, including himself.

"Are you sure you're okay to drive?"

Susan's concern was nice, but he really needed to escape. He could feel the others all staring. "I'm fine. I'll see you later and thank you for inviting me." Jordan took Susan's hand and gave it a squeeze before he turned and left the small duplex. He made his way to his car, his steps jerky. Unlocking his SUV, he climbed in, slammed the door, and laid his head on the steering wheel for a moment. His throat felt clogged and his eyes were still stinging with unshed tears, but he needed to get home before he lost it again. He placed the key in the ignition and started his car. He gave one last look over at Susan's place to see Martin in the doorway watching him. He'd really thought there might be

something with the big man, and maybe there still was once Jordan could get past losing one of his patients. Losing his first patient.

He drove away, the numbness of before taking over.

Chapter 8

Martin sat in his sedan outside Jordan's house after having Jake take him home in Jake's Escalade. He didn't bother telling his best friend he planned on coming here, knowing Jake would probably not approve. But he needed to know Jordan made it home safely. God, he felt like such a dick, rejecting Jordan the way he had, but it was the right thing to do. No way was Jordan in the right state of mind to be intimate with Martin. Not while hurting over his first patient that had died. Susan had told him that, along with Jordan's address. She knew he was going to check on Jordan. Jordan's Explorer was in his drive, if parked a bit crookedly.

Martin could see a light on in what he assumed was the bedroom. He could see Jordan's shadow behind the curtains moving around. Satisfied Jordan was safe and not wanting to get caught hanging outside his house, Martin left. He had been really surprised at how much he liked Jordan, and how much he wanted him. No man had ever captured his attention like the lithe PA. Susan hadn't been lying when she said Jordan was sweet and after witnessing his meltdown over Emily, he knew Jordan felt deeply. He idly wondered what it would be like to have such intense emotions directed at him.

He ignored his phone beeping while he drove, knowing he had at least three text messages and one voicemail from his best friend. He knew Jake better than Jake knew himself and wasn't in the mood to listen to his friend's diatribe regarding Jordan. Eva had told him privately about Jake's comments on Jordan, and Martin was sure that Jake would be telling him that Martin didn't need the drama that being with Jordan would entail. That wasn't Jake's decision to make. Somehow, Martin was going to see Jordan again.

As time went by with no word from or about Jordan, Martin was thankful for the distraction that work provided him. It didn't stop him from thinking of the sexy young man, but it helped. Jake had ranted for a couple of days, then dropped the subject when Martin finally told him to stop talking about Jordan. Jake wasn't being mean, but certainly negative, insisting that Martin could do better than Jordan. Martin didn't want to do better than Jordan. He wasn't sure there *was* better than Jordan. Not for him.

He'd spoken to Susan a couple of times, but her schedule had changed enough that she'd not bumped into Jordan in a couple of weeks, and didn't see

that changing anytime soon. She didn't have his phone number, always talking to him at the hospital when they worked together. He'd been surprised she had his address, but apparently, Jordan had let it slip during one of their conversations. Martin had found himself driving by Jordan's place, sometimes parking to watch the house, and feeling like an idiot.

Jordan kept busy, working through his pain of losing Emily. He'd spoken with Dr. Conrad and was given the details, not that he really wanted to hear them. Dr. Conrad had been kind, knowing this was the first time Jordan had lost a patient. His words had been comforting and Jordan appreciated it. He'd also been thankful not to have seen Susan in the last couple of weeks. Not since his despicable meltdown at her house. He didn't know if she was avoiding him or maybe just giving him space to process the grief.

And... his mind was on Martin more than he'd expected. He'd finally accepted that Martin hadn't really rejected him, just... postponed the intimacy until Jordan was ready for it. Jordan believed he was, but he had no way of getting ahold of the other man without going through Susan or showing up at the free clinic. And, as he hadn't seen her, and didn't feel like dropping in unannounced at her duplex, he was out of luck, because there was no way he was going to interrupt Martin at work. He also didn't think, after the scene he'd caused, that Martin's friend Jake would like them seeing each other. Despite the time together, Jordan was still wary of Jake. He just seemed too much like Brolin for him to be comfortable around him.

He was also preoccupied about his ex-lover too. There'd been a dark sedan hanging around his house lately, and that's what Brolin drove. His fear had ratcheted up knowing the man that had caused him so much fear and pain might know where he was and was stalking him. He wasn't sure what he'd do if Brolin showed himself or tried to get to Jordan. He was no match for his much larger ex-boyfriend, though Martin was a lot bigger. That's why Jordan couldn't figure out why he was so attracted to Martin. There was just *something* about him that called to Jordan.

Chapter 9

Martin watched Jake frown at him and sighed. They were out having a beer together, and as usual lately, Martin was quiet, his mind preoccupied.

“You might as well call Susan and see if you can meet up with the man.”

Martin stared at his best friend in surprise. Jake had been so adamant about Martin finding someone new, he hadn't expected this. “What changed your mind?” Jake shrugged at him, dropping his gaze.

“It isn't hard to tell you're... smitten over the guy. I still think you can do better, but it's obvious you're not going to let this go... let him go. I just hope you aren't making a mistake pursuing him. He's not bothered to contact you. Seems that should tell you something. I just don't want to see you get hurt.”

Martin choked down his frustration with Jake. “He doesn't have my number or address, Jake. How's he supposed to contact me?” Martin chose to overlook Jake's comment on him getting hurt. If his friend had any sense, and knew him, he'd see that missing Jordan was hurting him.

“He knows Susan. He should know he can get ahold of you through her.”

“I've talked to Susan. She hasn't seen him since her schedule changed. He doesn't have her number either.”

“Yea, maybe, but he knows you work at the free clinic.”

Martin groaned at Jake's arguments. “Maybe he doesn't want to just show up. Did you think of that?” Martin ignored Jake's huff of irritation. “Just drop it, Jake. You're right; I'm smitten. I want the guy, but I'm not going to go all stalker on him.” A twinge of guilt hit Martin, knowing he'd been doing just that. Driving by Jordan's house, parking outside and watching.

“Then maybe you ought to just show up at the hospital. After all, you know where he works too. You want him? Then go get him!”

Martin gave Jake a speculative look. He'd thought about that, but had been reluctant. But as time went by, it looked as if that was the only way, or at Jordan's house since that was less obvious than his place of work. He'd given his number to Susan, just in case she ran into Jordan, and made sure she knew to give it to him.

He didn't even know if Jordan was still interested, or knew that Martin was. He could guess that after Jordan's emotional breakdown at Susan's place, he

might be too embarrassed to come find Martin. Well, Jake was right. If he wanted Jordan, he needed to go to him. At least to see if the man was still interested in starting a relationship.

Jordan's heart raced seeing the dark sedan parked two doors down. Instead of pulling into his drive, he accelerated past the vehicle, hoping whoever was inside didn't see him. He'd wait until the car was gone before he'd go home. No way did he want Brolin getting his hands on him. He was certain the man would kill him.

He parked at the grocery store, but stayed in his car. He couldn't stop his body from shaking, and punched the steering wheel in frustration. God, how he hated being such a coward! He'd just gotten off his shift, and wondered how weird it would look if he just went back to work. It's not like they'd turn away the help. He had just turned the ignition back on when his cell phone buzzed. Curious, he grabbed it off the seat and checked the screen. Unknown number. He ignored it since he never answered those. A few minutes later his phone beeped indicating a voicemail.

He punched the button to listen to the message and couldn't help the relief in hearing Susan's voice.

"Hey, Jordan. Hope you don't mind, but I got your number from HR. Shhhh, don't tell anyone."

Jordan grinned at the laugh he heard. He missed Susan.

"Anyway, I wanted you to know that Martin has been asking about you. I think the guy is still interested, if you are. I know you're probably pretty shook up over what happened, and maybe even embarrassed. But you don't need..."

The voicemail cut her off and Jordan frowned at his phone. He ended the message and his phone buzzed in his hand, startling him. The unknown number again. He answered, hoping it was Susan. "Hello?"

"Hey you! I'm so glad you answered! I left you a message, but it cut me off."

"Yea, I just heard it."

"Oh, okay, well, anyway, I wanted to tell you not to be embarrassed. No one thought less of you for being so upset. It took Michele almost all night to calm me down and I wasn't as close to Emily as you were. Are you okay, Jordan?"

Susan's concern for him was touching. No wonder she was such a good friend to him. "Yea, I think so. I mean it still hurts, but I'm better. So, Martin's been asking about me?" Susan's laughter rang through the phone and Jordan felt the heat of a blush, even if she couldn't see it. He was such a dork.

"Oh, yes. He asks about you every time I talk to him. Do you want his number? He told me I could give it to you."

Jordan's stomach flipped in excitement. "I do. Can you text it to me?" His face was flaming, but he wasn't going to lose the opportunity to contact the big man. He still wanted him. Was still very much interested. He just hadn't known whether Martin was as well.

"I can. You go get him, tiger!"

Jordan gave an embarrassed laugh, talked to Susan for a minute more then rang off. By the time he turned his car off again and unbuckled his seatbelt, the text came through. Taking a deep breath, he dialed the number.

"Sheahan here."

"Martin?"

"Jordan! I'm so glad you called!"

Jordan couldn't help the goofy smile that crossed his lips. Just hearing Martin's low, sexy voice was doing funny things to him. "I'm sorry I haven't before. Susan just gave me your number." Jordan didn't know what else to say. It sounded so... desperate... to tell Martin he wanted to see him again.

"Jordan, where are you? I want to see you."

Well, it seemed Martin had no problem saying what Jordan found so hard. "I'm parked at the grocery store. Honestly, I didn't want to go home because there's a black sedan sitting outside my house and I'm afraid it's my ex." Jordan had never told Martin or anyone about what he'd gone through with Brolin. He wasn't sure what Martin was going to think, but was puzzled over the funny sound that came across the phone. Like a strangled groan.

"Jordan. That's me. I'm sitting outside your house. I saw you drive by, but figured I'd be taking the whole stalking thing too far if I followed you. I'm so sorry I scared you."

Jordan wanted to be angry, but the shame and apology in Martin's voice was enough to keep him from exploding. Martin didn't know about Brolin, so

there was no reason for him to think he'd frighten Jordan. "It's okay." Actually, when Jordan thought about it, it was kind of sweet that Martin wanted to see him so badly that he was hanging around outside Jordan's house. "I'm coming back. Just wait for me."

"Okay. I'm really sorry, Jordan."

"I'll see you in a few minutes." Jordan hung up, but took just enough time to save Martin's number in his phone before starting his car and heading out of the parking lot. He made it back to his place faster than he thought and parked in his drive. When he got out of his car, Martin was getting out of the sedan and walking towards him.

Jordan's stomach flipped again at how very sexy the man was. He had regular clothes on, jeans and a blue button-up shirt that matched his eyes that Jordan could see even from this far away. But it was the white coat he was wearing that had Jordan's attention. Jordan had been attracted to many doctors and male nurses in those white coats, not that he'd ever done anything about it. Jordan was still wearing his own as well. He sucked in a breath when Martin came up to him, wrapped his arms around him, and squeezed him tight. Damn, but that felt good!

Martin released him and without a word, he led the larger man to his door. He would have been curious what Martin was going to think of his home, but was too turned on to care. The moment the door shut, Jordan shoved Martin against it, pulled his head down and crashed their lips together. He'd been wanting to kiss the man for ages. Much to Jordan's surprise, Martin went pliant under his assault, letting Jordan lead. No lover had ever done that, and it thrilled Jordan that Martin submitted like that.

Desperate to feel skin, Jordan yanked at Martin's clothes, shedding the white coat and letting it fall to the floor before attacking the buttons on Martin's shirt. The low groan of arousal from the man went straight to Jordan's cock, making it thicken and throb. Jordan gave an inelegant squeak when Martin palmed his ass and lifted him, urging him to wrap his legs around him.

"Bedroom... bed."

That Jordan had reduced Martin to monosyllables was more than he expected, but the thought was quickly erased when Martin's lips were back on his. The kiss was passion filled and Jordan finally had to break it to breathe. He pointed towards his bedroom door, even as he buried his face in Martin's neck, inhaling deeply and licking the stubbly skin.

Somehow, they made it to the bed, and Martin laid Jordan down gently, following with his much larger body, covering him and kissing his face and neck. Jordan waited to see if he would panic at being restricted under Martin's bulk, but all he felt was overwhelming desire. His need for Martin was staggering. He started pushing and pulling to get the bigger man naked, and almost growled when Martin stood up. His protest was quickly stifled as he watched Martin remove his shirt, toe off his shoes, and then strip from his pants, briefs, and socks.

Jordan was panting at the exquisitely muscled body before him. Martin was fucking glorious! He zeroed in on the man's erection, the skin tight and red, one thick vein pulsing and the slit leaking. Jordan's mouth watered and he scooted forward to take hold of that engorged cock, his nether region clenching in anticipation.

Chapter 10

Martin's whole body flushed when Jordan grabbed him and wrapped his lips around his cock. Watching himself slowly sink into the wet heat nearly had him coming right then. He gritted his teeth, staving off his orgasm. He wanted to come with Jordan, not before. Gently, he carded his fingers through Jordan's soft hair, holding him steady and rocking his hips, sliding himself in and out of the man's luscious mouth. God, Jordan felt perfect and it was driving him insane!

His balls beginning to tingle, he carefully pulled from Jordan's mouth and held in a smile at Jordan's groan of protest. "You're wearing too many clothes." He wanted to see Jordan, touch his skin, kiss every part of him, and pleasure Jordan as much as Jordan was pleasuring him. He watched as Jordan divested himself of his clothes, his skin milky white and flawless. Martin's cock twitched when Jordan pulled the last piece off and stretched out on the bed, nude as the day he was born. Much to Martin's gratification, Jordan was well-endowed for being such a thin man. Martin dove, capturing his soon-to-be lover's prick, sucking it to the back of his throat.

Jordan cried out, curling in and grabbing Martin's head, holding him as he thrust forward, his legs bending to plant his feet on the mattress, giving him leverage to go deep. Martin didn't mind as he buried his nose in the trimmed hair cradling Jordan's erection, and swallowed around the hard length in his throat. Jesus, the man even smelled wonderful, the musky scent ratcheting Martin's need even higher. He sucked, licked and gently dragged his teeth along Jordan's length, reveling in the mewling and groans coming from the younger man.

"Stop! Stop, I'm too close!"

Martin let Jordan's length go with a loud pop and caught Jordan's hazy, lust-filled gaze. He could hardly believe how much he wanted this man. He lunged upward, grabbing Jordan and flipping them so the smaller man was on top of him, capturing his lips and sharing Jordan's taste with him. He rocked upward, dragging their erections together and moaned along with Jordan. He broke the kiss, panting heavily. "I want you inside me." The shock on Jordan's face almost made him laugh. Being as big as he was, most men just assumed he was a top... exclusively. But Martin liked to bottom with new lovers, though he was more than willing to switch if they continued the relationship.

“What?”

Martin smiled at Jordan's confusion. “Do you not top?” He'd had a few lovers that didn't, especially liking smaller, more effeminate men. Men who like to bottom only. But something was telling him that it was important to give himself to Jordan. As he watched, Jordan's face lit up, his smile breathtaking.

“I've never had the opportunity.”

Martin wasn't going to pursue that comment right now, but maybe later, after Jordan learned to trust him, the smaller man might tell him why that was. “Then I'm pleased to be your first.” Jordan's reaction was all that Martin hoped for as the man suddenly devoured his mouth, before pulling back and yanking open the drawer to his nightstand. Within seconds, Jordan had lube and condoms in hand.

Martin's heart thundered as Jordan slicked up his fingers and he spread his legs wide, giving Jordan full access to his ass. Jordan's brown eyes were nearly black with lust, his breath coming in rasps as he leaned forward to circle Martin's hole. Carefully he inserted one finger, Martin moaning at the sensation. Too afraid of missing anything, he kept his eyes open and watched as Jordan prepared him, Jordan's other hand slowly stroking his own cock which was an angry purple. Testament to how turned on Jordan was.

Jordan was so aroused with his fingers buried in Martin's ass that he could hardly breathe. His gaze kept bouncing between Martin's face and where his fingers entered the man. That Martin was allowing him to top him was something he'd never thought would happen. He'd been prepared to have Martin fuck him, but this was so much better! He curled his fingers, searching...

“Oh... *fuck!*”

Jordan grinned widely at Martin's reaction to him stimulating his prostate, the big man's hips bucking and Martin quickly grabbing his own dick, squeezing to stop from coming. Never had Jordan had a lover respond so completely, holding nothing back. Ignoring his own dick, he leaned down to kiss Martin, thrusting his fingers deeply within the man. He worked his way down, kissing and licking until he reached Martin's swollen erection. He licked the head, Martin shuddering at the sensation. He gave it a slight suck before removing his fingers and opening a condom with shaking hands.

He was nervous, but not enough to stop what they were doing. He didn't want to hurt Martin, but by the way the man was panting, he was pretty sure he'd prepared him well. He rolled the condom on, covered it in lube, and then looked up at Martin. "Face to face?" He didn't know if Martin was comfortable with that position, since it was so intimate. All Jordan's past lovers had always held him down and taken him from behind, usually locking his arms behind him as well. Only Brodin had ever fucked him face to face and that was so the man could hold onto Jordan by the neck while he rutted inside him, nearly choking him.

Martin's answer was to spread his legs wider and draw up his knees, holding onto his thighs, opening himself fully to Jordan's taking. He scooted forward, lining himself up with Martin's glistening hole, then watched Martin's expression as he slowly sank into his body. The bliss that came over Martin's face was enough to tell Jordan he was doing it right. Once buried to the hilt, he stilled, his cock throbbing along with the thundering of his heart. Martin was tight and hot, and felt incredible surrounding Jordan's length.

"Move, babe."

Jordan didn't know what to think of the endearment again, but when Martin let go of his thighs and wrapped his long legs around Jordan's waist, Jordan grabbed the big man's hands, twining their fingers and stretching them above Martin's head, holding them tightly and began thrusting hard and deep. Martin curled his fingers around Jordan's, tightening their hold and matched every thrust, his leaking cock mashed between their bodies. Never had Jordan been so close to another man, so connected. His heart tripped, the intimacy overwhelming him. When Martin started groaning and gasping, Jordan sped up his thrusts, shifted slightly and then cried out when Martin's channel clamped down, the rhythmic clenching throwing Jordan headlong into his orgasm, even as Martin shot semen between their bodies.

When Jordan's climax ebbed, he slumped down, burying his face in Martin's neck and waiting for his heart to slow and his breathing to ease. Martin relaxed his legs, letting them slide down until they were tangled with Jordan's. He pried their hands apart, Jordan's fingers stiff, and wrapped his strong arms around Jordan's shoulders, and caressed his sweaty back. Once Jordan could breathe again, he reached between them, the back of his fingers dragging through the come on Martin's stomach, to hold the condom as he carefully pulled from the big man's body. He was amazed at the load stretching the latex. He didn't think he'd ever come that much.

“Nice.”

Jordan relaxed at Martin's teasing.

Epilogue

Jordan lay stretched out on his bed, drained, his body covered in sweat and come, Martin looking down at him with a smug smile. “Pretty pleased with yourself, aren’t you?”

“I so fucking am!”

Jordan chuckled. Three months, and still he and Martin were going strong. He’d finally told Martin about his past and with that confession, finally feeling as if he could get over it. Martin had moved in with him just last night, and they’d been celebrating in their favorite way, by making love. Jordan didn’t think there was a position they hadn’t tried at least once, and though he especially liked it when Martin came inside him, his lover had a thing for pulling out and coming all over Jordan’s body. When he’d asked about it, Martin had gotten a bashful look on his face and mumbled something about liking to mark Jordan. Martin also liked it when Jordan topped, a position Jordan would never tire of.

Jordan didn’t think he could find a more perfect man. Kind, generous, funny, sexy as hell, strong, confident... the list went on and on. But it was when Martin told Jordan he loved him, that Jordan finally knew he’d found the happiness he never thought he’d have. He gazed up at Martin, his lover sitting next to him, naked except for his white nurse’s coat. Okay, Jordan felt a blush steal up his face, apparently, he had a little kink in him. He reached out and Martin dropped down next to him, giving him such a tender kiss that Jordan’s eyes stung.

“I love you.”

The whispered words never failed to make Jordan’s stomach flip. He turned on his side and laid his head on Martin’s chest, listening to his heartbeat. A heartbeat under a white coat... and all his. “I love you, too.”

The End

Author Bio

CR Guiliano is an avid reader which logically morphed into the love of writing. She writes in many genres, but is most happy writing the love between two men (or more!). She makes them work hard for their HEA and considers herself an expert in angst. CR finds her favorite form of writing is in serials, where she can continue to write about characters who have captured her heart and hopes have captured her readers as well.

You will usually find CR cuddled up to her laptop creating stories to entertain, inspire, and bring your emotions to the surface. CR has a huge warren of plot bunnies that is growing every day and can't wait to fill out each story idea and share them all with her readers.

CR was proudly nominated in the Goodreads Best Anthology Nominations and was thrilled to be included with the many talented writers from the same Anthology.

CR is a committed advocate for the GLBTQ community and does her best to change society's attitudes, one mind at a time.

You can learn more about CR Guiliano and her stories at the following locations and feel free to drop her line as she loves to hear from anyone interested in her or her writings.

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