

LOVE'S LANDSCAPES



Don't Read in the Closet 2014

ELEVATION

Jenna Jones

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Love's Landscapes

An M/M Romance series

ELEVATION

By Jenna Jones

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.

This story is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places and incidents are the products of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously. Any resemblance to actual events, locales, or persons, living or dead, is entirely coincidental.

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[Sunset](#); [Sunset on the beach](#); [Smooth sunset](#);

[Morning mist background 6](#);

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Photo Description

A series of animated .gifs where a handsome, bearded man strips off his clothes in an elevator. At the end of the series, he laughs.

Story Letter

Dear Author,

My name is XX. I live in XXX, or rather in one of the crappy suburbs of XXX. I am and have always been the poor kid, everywhere I go. It's not my fault I have a few siblings and my parents divorced when I was little. We kids stayed with (either mom or dad) and (the other parent) never paid any support. So it's been tight. Enough for me to skip my college dream for now in favor of making sure my (younger sibling) has the means and the money to go.

When I needed a better job to make ends meet when my (parent) fell ill, my uncle stepped in. He's one of the maintenance men in this massive building downtown. It has offices in the first ten floors and apartments above. They needed someone to fill in for the maternity leave of one of the "night portiers" as they call the position and I got the job, for now. It's actually a glorified way of saying "you get to stare at screens all night and sit in the middle of a lobby that's bigger than your house."

That's okay, it's easy money. Or was, until this one guy showed up. He's one of the people who get to use the special elevator in the back corner. That leads to the top two floors only. Where the city's richest people live.

I've no clue where he was, maybe abroad or in rehab or whatever, but since he came back, he's been hitting on me nonstop. It's been going on for months, now. Every night I'm on shift. He's getting frustrated, sure, but I didn't expect THIS! What the hell is he doing? Doesn't he know WHO ELSE needs to use the elevator and might walk into the building at any moment while he surfs up and down, doing this... THING! (I refuse to call that striptease, the elevator doesn't even have music...)

He's hot, but we're from two very different worlds, and a guy like that is no good for a guy like me.

Sincerely,

Tia

Story Info

Genre: contemporary

Tags: college, security/guard, twink, grief, first kiss, reunited, rich playboy, draftsman, roller coasters

Content Warnings: past child abandonment, mental illness/depression of secondary character

Word Count: 22,533

ELEVATION

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The Wolcott Building stands on the corner of Main and First. While it might be overshadowed by newer and showier skyscrapers, it's still one of my favorites in the city. It was built in the 1920s, with Art Deco-style arches and silver-gray brick with blue brick accents around the doorways and tall windows. Inside, it's pale marble and rich wood and golden light.

Over the front doors, there's a sculpture that my drafting teacher in high school said represents Sophia, the goddess of wisdom: it's a voluptuous woman, who holds scrolls in one hand and an astrolabe in the other. Sophia was also the name of the wife of Joshua Wolcott, who built the Wolcott Building and was the father of Stephen Wolcott, the late head of the Wolcott family.

I let myself into the building through the revolving doors and enter the vast, two-story lobby. To my right is the coffee shop, Brewsters; to my left are a few upscale boutiques. I can smell the leather goods shop even through the scent of coffee. At this time of night the lobby is quiet, with all the office workers upstairs gone for the day and the residents already home.

Tyson is on duty tonight, with the new guy by his side. They both say, "Cruz!" at the sight of me, and I go around the bank of security monitors to give them both hugs, though it takes me a minute to remember the new guy's name.

"Tyson, Davy, hi."

"You're all dressed up," Tyson observes. "Lookin' sharp."

"Thanks. I've just come from work," I tell him, though that's not why I'm in my best suit. I ask Davy, "How do you like graveyard?"

"It's an adjustment," Davy says. "But I've always been a night owl anyway."

"That helps," I agree. I ask Tyson, "Hey, is my uncle Ricky around?"

"He said he'll be waiting for you in the maintenance office."

I tell them good night and go through an *Employees Only* door to take the stairs up to the third floor. The Wolcott Building is forty stories: the first two

are the lobby, then thirty are offices and businesses, and the top nine are apartments. About twenty years ago, the owner had the top story revamped to be a swimming pool and rooftop garden. That's my ultimate destination tonight.

But first I check in with Ricky—my uncle, big and broad like the rest of my dad's family, his hair more black than silver and another attempt at a mustache over his lip. He gives me a hug and slaps my back, even though we just saw each other last Sunday.

I nudge his chin. "How long until Tía Cristina makes you shave that off this time?"

"Until she gets tired of bristly kisses. Is today the day?"

"Today's the day." I try not to fidget as he gets a skeleton key card out of a locked drawer at a glacial crawl. "Have you seen him?"

"You asked me not to tell you." He gives me the key and I tuck it into my breast pocket.

"And I don't want you to tell me," I say with a nod, because surprise, good or bad, is the point of this entire night. "See you later, Tío Ricky."

"Or not," he says, mischievous, and I wonder if that's a hint.

Back in the lobby, I pass Tyson and Davy again, as well as the main bank of elevators, and go to the private elevators in the northeast corner. You can go to any of the business floors from the main elevators, but to reach the residential floors and the roof, you have to take either the freight elevator or the private elevator, and to get into the private elevator you have to have a key. I let myself in with the skeleton key and push the old brass grate closed. You don't have to use it—the elevators have carved mahogany doors that form an elaborate, decorative circle when they're closed—but I like the brass grate. It lends a satisfying sense of history.

I press the button for the fortieth floor, and glance up at the security camera. It wouldn't surprise me if Davy and Tyson are watching, so I smile at them—probably nervously—and fold my hands together in front of me.

I dressed up for the occasion: my best suit, pale gray with a darker gray tie and a white shirt. I pulled back my hair into a ponytail which I've tucked under my collar, my usual trick for formal occasions. It doesn't really work—there is always a stray lock or two that escape the elastic band and frame my face. I don't fuss with them, though, except to tuck them behind my ears.

He likes them. He likes to curl them around his fingers.

I resist the urge to press the button for the roof again. It doesn't make the elevator go faster—if it did, I'd be pounding it with my fist. As it is, I wait patiently as the elevator glides up forty stories to the rooftop level, thinking about the path that brought me to this time and place and who I hope is waiting for me on the roof.

It's about a year and a half ago that I hear my father talking to someone as I'm getting ready for work, and I go to the kitchen to see what's going on. He's on the phone, and after a moment I realize he's talking to his boss—he's been cooking at a burger place called Sammy's for the last year, and they really like him, and the customers like him, and I was hoping this one might stick for a while—and I cross my arms over my chest while I wait for him to finish. It's the fourth day of him calling in sick, and it's not hard to tell what his boss is telling him: if you don't come in today, don't bother coming back. It's the same old song and dance that happens every time he gets a job—once spring rolls around, he stops getting out of bed.

He sees me when he hangs up, and starts, "Cruz, *mijo*—"

I hold up my hands. "I'm supposed to start a new semester at the community college in a few weeks, or did you forget?"

"I remembered." He rubs his forehead. "But I can't—I can't—"

"You never can," I say, and it's bitter and unfair and I know it, because I know what this is and why, but that doesn't stop me from hating it. "Fine. No classes this year. At least I haven't paid tuition yet."

"Cruz," he says quietly, but I just take the lunch I made last night from the fridge and toss it into my backpack.

"Luna's tuition is due in July," I say and leave it there for him to do the math. Rent is due, bills are due, we have to eat, and Luna goes to a private performing arts high school. She wants to be a dancer. When the choice comes down to me or Luna, I'll choose Luna, every time.

When I leave the house, I let the door slam behind me. At least my job at the plant nursery is pretty good. I get to be outdoors most of the time, it smells like fresh soil and growing things, and most of the people I deal with are excited and happy because they're making their homes into something beautiful. Still, I only make minimum wage and I've been working part-time

for the last few months while I take some classes at the community college. Even if I change to full time, that's not enough to cover everything, and we really need Dad's wages. The family is willing to help sometimes—Ricky makes a decent wage working maintenance at the Wolcott Building—but I hate asking for handouts.

I should have known this was coming, though. As I wait at the bus stop I count the months, and yep, it's about time for the anniversary of Mom leaving. After seven years, I should see the pattern. Spring rolls around and he loses himself in asking why he wasn't good enough, why his wife didn't love him enough to stay, and why she left him with two children who look so much like her it hurts to look at us.

He thinks I don't see that, how sometimes he'll avoid looking at me unless he absolutely has to.

She was a renowned beauty, my mother, and my sister is becoming beautiful too. Me, my resemblance to my mother makes me look delicate, and this got me a lot of punches to the face when I was a boy. I still get called a pretty young thing when I go out, and though I've been twenty-one for months, I still get carded at bars.

The bus comes and I climb on, and wrap an arm around one of the poles to keep my balance while I text Luna:

Dad's bad again today. Can you make dinner?

She texts me back:

Sure. When are you home from work?

Late, I tell her, and then my stop comes and I get off. As soon as I clock in I find my boss, Emily, to explain the situation and ask for more hours. She taps a ballpoint pen against the new catalog for a moment or two before she answers.

“I've got everybody scheduled as much as I can right now, but if you're willing to be on-call, I'll call you first when I need a sub.”

“Thank you,” I say fervently, and go out to the yard to start my day.

Next comes four hours of carrying bags of mulch and potting soil, restocking flats of flowers, and maneuvering concrete statues carefully on hand trucks. At twelve-thirty, I clock out and take my lunch bag and a sketchbook to the employee break room. A couple of guys are playing Foosball and ask me if I'd like to join in, but I tell them I've got a project to work on, and sketch while

I eat. Finals are next week and I still have to figure out exactly what my final project is going to be for my urban design class. The brief is to create a civic building within specific budget guidelines and using specific materials. Most of the people in my class are designing grand city halls or court buildings, but I'm leaning toward a library—and if it's got a few elements of my favorite building in Aldhurst, so be it. I sketch in tall, arched windows—you need plenty of light to read—and draw in some stained-glass designs of climbing vines. Stained glass is probably out of the budget, unless I can move some numbers around...

Then it's one o'clock and I'm back to work until five. The nursery isn't busy on weekdays—weekends are another story—but I still help four or five customers before it's time to clock out. Three of them thank me by name. One of them, a handsome, graying man with a fading tan line on his ring finger, even gives me a look like he wants to ask for my number, but I keep my smile polite and call him "sir" when I ring up his purchases of weed killer and marigolds. I don't date customers. I don't date co-workers or classmates, either. I don't date much at all.

After I clock out, I wash up as best I can in the employee bathroom, throw on a clean shirt, and catch the bus to the community college. Class is three hours, twice a week, and while I feel like I'm learning a lot, it's still a frustratingly slow process, and there's only so far that a community college course can take me. After graduation, the next step is an internship with a design firm if I really want to learn anything, and even if you can find a paying one, it won't pay much more than I make at the nursery. And graduation will be put off for another year. Again.

After class, a group of us get together in the student lounge for study group. I have an ancient laptop that I bought used, and it's hard not to growl in frustration every time the CAD program freezes up. One of my classmates looks over at my computer when I shove my hands through my hair in frustration again. "You need more RAM, Cruz," he tells me. "That will help until you can get a new machine."

"I can't afford any upgrades right now."

"It's cheap," he says with a shrug, "and I'll install it for you."

"I can't pay you for your time, either."

"We could get a cup of coffee and not talk about school for an hour."

I look up from my laptop. His name is Paxton and he cuts his golden-red whiskers into a goatee. I like him enough, I suppose, but it only now occurs to

me that he makes a point to talk to me every class and it was his suggestion that got me into the study group in the first place. I was struggling a little on my own.

Still, I'm not here to enhance my social life, and I smile and say, "Thanks, but I'll just have to manage with what I've got for a while longer."

Paxton smiles and shrugs again, and we get back to work.

Study group ends at nine, and the bus gets me home by ten. The house smells like waffles and bacon, and there's a stack of waffles on the kitchen counter for me, kept warm under a clean dish towel. I pour on syrup and get a glass of milk, and take them to Luna's room to talk to her while I eat. But her light is off and the door is closed. Asleep already, even though it's a Friday night. Probably smart—she probably has a rehearsal of some kind tomorrow morning. I should get to bed early too.

But I don't work tomorrow until two, and despite my long day, I don't want to go to bed just yet. I wash my dishes and put the rest of the leftovers away in the fridge—my dinner tomorrow will probably be peanut butter sandwiches made with cold waffles—and spend a moment or two lingering at the kitchen sink, looking out the window at the neighbor's house across the yard. Their kitchen light goes off as I watch.

Something about that makes my decision for me, and I grab my billfold and a light jacket and head out again, letting the door close behind me much more quietly this time, so I don't wake anybody up. The buses run all night, so it's a short wait for one that will take me downtown.

Aldhurst isn't one of those cities that rolls up the sidewalks at ten o'clock, thank God, so there's plenty to choose from. I can hear bands playing as I walk past bars, or there's a pool hall that's open until two, and as I pass the art movie house some friends call my name as they wait in line for *Rocky Horror* Night. I smile and wave back, but I don't join them.

If I were in a different mood, any of these would do, but tonight I'm looking for something else. Preferably with no exchange of names.

There are two gay-friendly dance clubs in Aldhurst: the Zephyr, which has been around since the 1910s and still has the tunnel bootleggers used to bring in illegal beer during Prohibition, and Glass Onion, the newer and more popular one. On a Friday night, its three dance floors will be crowded with beautiful,

shirtless men looking for love, or looking for what will pass for love for the night.

For the mood I'm in, the Zephyr is the wiser choice. Its clientele tend to be older than me, rough and bearded men, looking for something they can forget about in the morning. The music that greets me is more bluesy than electronic, and after I hand over my jacket to the coat-check boy and climb the stairs, I see the dance floor is sparsely populated and the pickings are slim.

A few heads perk up as I circle the dance floor, but only one of them actually gets up from his stool to approach me. He reminds me of the man who wanted to pick me up at the nursery today, the same graying temples, the same visible lack of wedding ring. "Dance with me," he says simply, and I take his hand and lead him onto the dance floor.

It's not the easiest music to dance to, but we manage, bumping together slowly, his hands on my waist. "You're the hottest guy in here," he tells me, and I smile and murmur, "Thank you," thinking that it's not much of a compliment, all things considered.

Still, he seems like a good candidate for what I want tonight, and when he kisses me I don't stop him. I push my fingers into his short hair and he mutters, "Let's go out to the alley."

Technically, we're not supposed to have sex in the club. Back in the day, in addition to being a speakeasy, the building was a warehouse, but the most recent owner removed all the doors from the little rooms for liability reasons, and they're not used for much aside from historical color.

Then there's the alley. You'll find people doing everything from having sex to selling drugs in there, and it's where you go if you don't mind risking the other guy messing you up. That happens sometimes too. I've had friends go out there and come back with bloody noses or black eyes, or I wouldn't see them at all for days and hear later that they were jumped by a group of straight guys who beat them to a pulp. There are actually signs in the alley that it's under surveillance, so those incidents have dropped somewhat, but still, even I am not that stupid tonight.

"Nah, that's okay," I say, and I'm turning away when the guy grabs my elbow.

"I insist." I try to tug my arm away, but his fingers dig in deep. He pushes his face closer to mine and growls, "Don't play with me, amigo."

“*Amigo?*” I say, when an arm goes around my neck and another man says, “There you are, honey,” in a tone that makes the creep release my arm. I would object to this newcomer manhandling me too, but there’s something about his easy smile and the tropical scent of his cologne that makes me relax against him like I’ve known him for years.

“Hi, *mi cielo*,” I answer as I put both arms around his waist. “I’ve been looking for you.”

“Who’s your friend?” He gives the creep a smile that doesn’t reach his eyes.

The creep takes a step away from us. “You should have said your boyfriend’s here.”

“My boyfriend’s here,” I say with my sweetest smile. The creep gives us both a dirty look and goes back to the bar.

“Are you okay?” the newcomer asks me, his arm still around my shoulders. “He looked like he was up to no good.”

“Yeah. Thanks.” We stand there for a moment, looking at each other. There’s something about him that’s so familiar I rack my brain for where we might have met. He’s mid-twenties or so, so we probably didn’t go to school together, and I would know if I’d seen someone this handsome on campus at the community college. There’s always church—unlikely—so it’s probably that we’ve just seen each other in the other gay-friendly spots in town.

And yet, I feel like there’s something more to it than that.

He smiles at me. It’s a wonderful smile, showing even, white teeth against full pink lips. His whole face is pretty good, high cheekbones and square jaw and lines beside his eyes that grow deeper when he laughs, which he does as I stare at him. “Are you sure you’re okay?”

“I’m just trying to remember the last time I met a knight in shining armor,” I say with an uncertain smile back. “Can I buy you a drink? To thank you?”

He laughs. It’s a hearty sound, and I like it. “I’m no knight. I’m Mal.”

“Cruz,” I say, “nice to meet you.” So much for not exchanging names tonight, but I’m all right with that. Some people you fuck for the sake of fucking, and some people you fuck for the sake of fucking *them*. This guy definitely falls into the second category.

He tilts his head, an odd look on his face, like he expected a different answer. “Nice to meet you too,” he says. “I’d love for you to buy me a drink.”

Holding hands, we go to the bar. The bored bartender ambles over and I hand over my ID without waiting for him to ask, and say to Mal, "Whatever you like. Within reason."

"Whatever's on tap," says Mal, and I order the same. As we wait, Mal says, "So do you come here looking for trouble, or does it just find you?"

"It found me. What about you?"

The bartender brings our drinks. Mal has a sip and wipes foam from his upper lip. "Definitely not looking for trouble. Kind of the opposite, actually."

"And yet you still came to my rescue," I marvel. "Thank you."

He shrugs a shoulder and gives me a sidelong glance. "I have a soft spot for boys like you."

"Boys like me?" I say, bristling.

"Whoa, don't get offended. You remind me of someone." He strokes my cheek, and I glance down at his fingers, unsettled by how gentle he is. "I've always had a soft spot for wounded creatures, I guess."

"What makes you think I'm wounded?"

"You hiss when you're backed into a corner." He gives me an off-kilter smile and has a pull on his beer. I drink too, frowning, and look at him again when he says, "My grandfather's dying and I wanted to get my mind off it. He's one of my favorite people in the world and I am going to miss him like hell."

"I'm sorry to hear that."

"Thanks." He gives me another sideways look. "How's your family?"

"We're fine," I say, wondering why a complete stranger would ask. "We get by."

"Good." He drains his mug and stands. "Thanks for the drink. It was nice to—to meet you."

Before he can go far, I turn and say, "Hey," and he pauses and looks back at me. There's something in his face I can't read, regretful or sad or something even more complicated. The last thing I thought I wanted was complicated. Still, I say, "If you're looking for peace of mind," I swallow, "maybe you could give me a try."

Mal looks at me a moment, then steps close, crowding me against the bar. "Maybe I should," he murmurs and takes hold of my face. His eyes search mine, and then he kisses me.

Sometimes you kiss a new person and it takes a few minutes to get used to the shape of their mouth, the taste of their breath, even the click of teeth. Sometimes it takes a try or two to figure out how deep to go, how to make our faces fit together, where to put our hands.

Kissing Mal is not like that.

It's more like we've kissed a hundred times before and will kiss a hundred times again. His tongue sweeps into my mouth naturally, and his face fits perfectly between my hands. We breathe together, into each other, and my legs wind around his hips as he presses closer, fitting us together like puzzle pieces.

He looks stunned when we finally part. I know I am. I gasp, "I feel like I've kissed you before. When have I kissed you before?" as I stroke his cheeks with my palms.

Mal shakes his head. "I—" and then he scowls as his phone starts vibrating loudly in his jeans pocket. He takes it out with a curt, "Yeah?" and then just listens for a while, holding my hand. "Okay. I'll be there as soon as I can." As he pockets his phone again, there's a look of devastation in his eyes, and I hold his hand tighter as he says simply, "My grandfather died."

"I'm sorry."

"I have to do—whatever it is you do. I don't know what you're supposed to do."

"Funeral stuff," I say, because while there have been deaths in the family I haven't done any of the preparations and planning. I suppose that day will come eventually. "Would you like me to drive you wherever it is you need to be?"

"I actually have a driver. He's waiting for me." He holds his temple a moment as if he can't get his thoughts in order. "I can take you home, if you want."

"It's okay. I took the bus. Go do the things that need doing."

"Right," he says and lets go of my hand. "Okay. See you."

"See you," I reply, and it's not until he's disappeared down the stairs to the street that I realize I didn't ask for his number and don't know his last name.

There's a family dinner on Sunday at my grandparents' house; my father's parents. Dad doesn't come, of course, too busy lying in a dark room, and when I make excuses for him my abuela exchanges glances with Tía Cristina as if this is exactly what they expected.

We're catching each other up on what's going on in our lives, when Tío Ricky says, "I have very sad news. Mr. Stephen Wolcott died Friday night. He's been a very good boss and I'm going to miss him very much."

"He wasn't exactly your boss," says Tía Cristina.

"He signed our paychecks," replies Tío Ricky. "That's enough for me."

"Who's Mr. Stephen Wolcott?" Luna whispers to me.

"He owned the building Daddy works in," says my cousin Marisol, who's sitting on her other side. "The Wolcotts own half the city."

"I wouldn't say half," says Tío Ricky. "They own a lot of it. The city really ought to be named Wolcott, since they basically built it when there was nothing here but scrub brush and desert."

As he extols the virtues of Mr. Stephen Wolcott, his generosity, his friendliness, how he treated everyone from the building supervisor to the girl who watered the flowers in the lobby as if they were equally important, I think of my briefly-met friend and his grandfather, of the devastation on his face after he had that call. I wonder if people miss Mr. Stephen Wolcott in the same way that Mal missed his grandfather.

"The funeral is private, just the family," Tío Ricky says. "But there will be a memorial service in a few months for everyone else. With all he's done for Aldhurst, I'm glad they're doing it this way. I plan to go."

"That poor family," says Tía Cristina, and I for one am glad when the conversation moves on to what my cousins Mateo and Aron plan to do over the summer.

We're cleaning up after supper—the women cook, the men clean up, and we both think we have the better side of the bargain—when Ricky quietly says to me, "How long has Arturo been in his funk this time?"

"All week," I reply. I'm scrubbing goblets in the sink, my sleeves rolled up and my tie thrown over my shoulder. "They haven't fired him from Sammy's yet, but they will if he doesn't go to work Monday."

Ricky frowns. "Your grandfather used to get like this sometimes. I remember when I was a boy, there were just some days when we had to let Daddy sleep, even if it was the middle of the afternoon."

"I didn't know that."

"It used to be the kind of thing you never talked about. People are much more open now." He takes a soapy goblet to rinse and dry. "Are you still working at the nursery?"

"Yes," I say with a sigh. "Emily is going to call me first when they need a sub. I think I need to look for another job."

"Maybe not," Ricky says. "How do you feel about working graveyard? Ten at night to six in the morning?"

"It would be hard to work another job with that shift."

"You wouldn't have to. How much are you making at the nursery? Eight dollars an hour?"

"Yes," I mutter.

"One of the people on the security team is going on maternity leave soon, and they need a replacement for at least four months. It pays fifteen an hour."

Fifteen. It sounds like riches.

"There are other benefits, too," Ricky says, watching my face. "You know I love working there. They're good people, the Wolcotts. They take care of their employees."

"It would help a lot," I say quietly, as I give him another soapy goblet.

He gives me a pointed look. "Should I get you an interview?"

I inhale, knowing that I should say I'll get him a resume and then see if they want to interview me—but I say, "Yes, please. Thank you, Tío Ricky."

"Anytime, Cruzito." He puts another goblet in the dish rack. "Just remember to wear a tie. And I'll see if I can talk my idiot brother into acting like the head of the family soon, too."

I smile a little at that, but we both know it's no use. My dad will come back to himself in his own time. I just hope it's soon.

A few days later, I get the interview at the Wolcott Building. Like Ricky said, I wear a tie. They offer me the job on the spot, which makes me think maybe Ricky had a hand in it, but they seem genuinely happy to have me and it's a better-paying job than the nursery.

The security team—the porters, they tell me they're called—are Douglas, the head of security; Evan and Tyson, the daytime guys; and Mina, the pregnant woman I'll be replacing for the next five months or so. "I wouldn't worry about looking for a new job when I come back," she tells me. "If we like you, we'll find a place for you."

We arrange for me to start as soon as finals are over, and I give notice at the nursery. Emily says as we plan my schedule, "I'm sorry to lose you. I never had to worry about you," and I take the compliment for what it is.

Meantime, the portrait of Stephen Wolcott is framed with black fabric in the lobby, and Ricky and other employees wear a black armband.

It feels like a long wait during those two weeks. Since we're living on my part-time salary, Ricky loans us enough to manage until I get my first paycheck from Wolcott, and I work on a budget with Luna to make sure it will last. She's not happy with my new schedule—"When will I ever see you if you're working nights, Cruzito?" and I hug her shoulders and assure her she can talk to me whenever she wants. She's also job-hunting for the summer, though she's hoping for a position with one of the dance companies in Aldhurst or even a show at Lakeview Park, the amusement park in Payton Wells, twenty miles to the north on the lake shore. I tell her even if she just takes admission tickets, it's enough to help.

For my final project, I decide to do the library after all, and when I hand it in my professor says, "I didn't see your name on the class roll for next year, Mr. Morales."

"I have to postpone my degree for a while," I reply, and he gets the same troubled expression people tend to get when I explain my situation. "Family things."

"Then I'll look for you the year after," he says, and I smile and say I hope so.

My first night at the Wolcott, there's a uniform waiting for me, as well as a badge that says "Cruz Morales" in raised gold letters. The uniform is beige and brown polyester, with brass buttons on the shirt and a nightstick hanging from

the belt. I get a locker of my own to leave my street clothes in, and the building's laundry service will have a clean uniform waiting for me every shift.

The first night, I spend with Mina and Douglas to learn the monitors, and walk around with her to check the doors and do spot-checks on the business floors. The apartment floors require some finesse, she tells me. We respond when a resident calls, but unless there's an immediate threat, we're not supposed to engage with criminals. We're to call the police instead. "We don't get break-ins or robberies often," Mina says. "The biggest problems tend to be drunk and disorderly when residents have parties. Then I feel more like a bouncer than a security guard."

We take the private elevator to the residential floors and Mina tells me a little about each person or family that lives there, like the Carsons, who have three little girls who like to play tea party in the lobby on rainy days; or Mr. Lloyd, newly divorced and enjoying it enormously with a new woman every night; or the newlyweds, Mr. and Mrs. Fuller, who kiss during the entire elevator ride to their floor every night.

The biggest apartment on the thirty-ninth floor belongs to Mrs. Margaret Wolcott, widow of Mr. Stephen Wolcott. "Did you ever meet him?" Mina asks me as we go past their door.

"Never, but Ricky used to tell us about him."

"He was lovely," says Mina with a sigh. "He made a point of learning all our names, and he was always so kind. Last Christmas he gave every building employee a five-hundred dollar bonus. It's like he knew he was going soon and wanted us to remember him fondly."

"Nice," I say. "What'd you do with yours?"

"College fund." She pats her baby bump.

"What about Mrs. Wolcott?" I ask as we go down the carpeted hall. "Is she going to stay here?"

"I assume so. She hasn't told us otherwise. We're keeping a closer eye on her now, too. She has a personal assistant that you'll get to know, and her grandson who stays with her sometimes. Douglas says they've always been close."

By six a.m. it's a struggle to keep my eyes open, but I manage to stay awake during the entire shift and figure it's just a matter of getting used to the hours. I sleep a little when I get home, and Luna makes me empanadas for my lunch,

wrapped in paper towels to keep them warm. At the Wolcott, Mina brings me a large cup of coffee from Brewsters, the coffee shop in the lobby, kisses my cheek and tells me good luck and to call Douglas if I have questions, and leaves me to it.

So I drink the coffee, watch the monitors, and spot-check the floors.

And that's the job.

It's easier than washing cars, or carrying seedlings, or frying burgers, or anything else I've done. I can read or study while I'm at the monitor bank. They ask me not to listen to music through headphones, but I can tune the lobby music to any satellite channel I want, as long as it's not too loud. Every ninety minutes I get up and walk around, so I even get a little exercise. The main elevators get little use after eight p.m., the freight elevators are used only when people move in or out, which means hardly ever; the private elevators are quiet after two.

The first week, it's a struggle to stay awake. I drink too much coffee and by morning I'm wired and buzzing. Dad and Luna tiptoe around the house when I get home, until finally I tell them I can't sleep unless they act like normal people again. I buy wax earplugs and stop drinking coffee after two a.m., switching to ice water instead. Sleep is glorious.

The second week, I make friends with the women who own Brewsters, and they start preparing a large cup for me to pick up just before they close at ten every night. I bring my textbooks and my laptop, and try to keep up with my studies, even though it'll be months before I'm in a classroom again. I recreate exercises from the books and set challenges for myself to design projects mentioned in the local news, and hope that I'm not too far behind my classmates by the time I can get back to school.

I'm starting to get to know the residents, too, and their various drivers and bodyguards and personal assistants. I even meet Clarissa, the assistant to Mrs. Wolcott—a severe woman in her mid-fifties who talks in the pseudo-British accent of a classic movie star and wears her blonde hair swept back from her face with two tortoiseshell combs no matter what the occasion. She gives me a long list of medications Mrs. Wolcott takes, and a longer list of what to do and who to call, should Mrs. Wolcott need help or collapse when Clarissa isn't around. "She's taken the death of her husband very hard," Clarissa tells me, "so we're keeping a close watch on her." She sniffs. "That grandson of hers is no help, even if he says he's here for her sake. Malcolm never lets us know when he's coming, so she sits and waits for him all day. So thoughtless."

My curiosity about the mysterious Wolcott grandson only grows. I can't tell what manner of man he might be—he cares for his grandmother, it would seem, but his care is an absent sort. Even Douglas tells me I probably won't meet Malcolm King, since he's bound to go back to his travels before much longer.

“What does Malcolm King do?” I ask, and Douglas answers with a sigh.

“Race yachts, climb mountains, explore jungles—anything foolhardy and dangerous, he does it.”

He seems like the type to appreciate my dream job, and I sketch a roller coaster that might make someone who likes taking risks happy, with lots of banked curves and an inverted corkscrew.

Third week.

When I arrive at the Wolcott, Tyson says, “Mrs. Wolcott's grandson moved into 39 F today. He wanted to be closer to her, I'm told. So that's one less empty apartment we'll need to inspect.”

“I heard he was leaving town,” I say, as I glance over the list of empty or currently-on-vacation residences. Sure enough, 39 F is no longer on it.

Tyson shrugs. “If he is, he's not going any time soon.” He picks up his things and tells me good night, and I'm on my own again.

Three a.m. and everyone who is coming home tonight is already there. It's just me and the lobby, the satellite radio quietly playing Enrique Iglesias, and my book on roller coaster design open in my lap. I'm not reading it, though, and instead am daydreaming of designing the next classic ride and the thousands—no, millions—of roller coaster enthusiasts who will stand in line for hours to ride it and will speak my name with reverence...

The revolving door turns, which gets my attention at once, and as I watch, in come two dark-haired men, so absorbed in kissing each other that they almost take the door in its complete circuit. They stop and get out, laughing, their arms around each other, and cross the lobby to the residential elevators. They gaze into each other eyes the entire way.

I sigh, trying not to feel envious. While I enjoy sex as much as the next twenty-one-year-old man, I often feel like I'm waiting for something to come into my life and make it—not whole, not exactly. Fuller. And I certainly wouldn't mind someone to gaze at me like these two men are gazing at each other, like it's only a matter of seconds before they're all over each other.

One of the men happens to glance at me with an absent, “Hi, Mina,” and then he does a double-take. “*Cruz?*”

“Hi,” I say in an exhale, unable to get out anything more because he’s Mal, my rescuer from the Zephyr. The pieces click into place—Mal is Malcolm King, and his grandfather who died the night we met is Stephen Wolcott. I feel a spark of jealousy, wondering if he met his current companion at the Zephyr and if he would have brought me home with him if we’d met there again. Then I put on my most professional smile and say, “Mr. King. Welcome home.”

“Yeah,” he says, still studying me. “How long have you worked here, Mr. Morales?”

“Three weeks, graveyard shift. I’m sure you’ve been here too early in the day to have seen me before.”

“Right,” he says slowly. His companion looks from me to him and back expectantly, and Malcolm says, with a shake of his head, like he can’t quite believe he has to do this, “this is Cruz Morales, the, um, night watchman. This is—” He gestures to his friend.

“Paul,” his friend supplies.

“Paul. Does he have to sign in?”

“No, Mr. King, not if you’re going to the residential floor.”

“Right,” he says and gives me one more perplexed look, and then leads Paul to the private elevators.

I close my book and shove my hands through my hair, trying to keep myself calm. My fingers catch in the hair band that holds my ponytail and I curse as I untangle them, and have to pull out the band and smooth back my hair all over again.

Malcolm King. I’ve kissed Malcolm King. Worse than that, he’s kissed me, and probably won’t appreciate the reminder of his slumming—because, of course, that’s what it was, why else would he be at the Zephyr when men of his kind go to Glass Onion—sitting at the security desk five nights a week. He’ll probably complain to Douglas in the morning and I’ll be out of a job, because no matter how nice Douglas is to me, and no matter how long he’s worked with Ricky, his loyalty is to the Wolcotts, not to the Morales family.

As I’m pulling back my hair and tucking the little ponytail into my shirt collar, I happen to glance at the monitor for the private elevators. One is empty,

of course. The other holds Malcolm King and Paul. They're making out with an intensity that makes me envious, Paul holding Malcolm against the wall, Malcolm's hands pinned over his head.

As if he knows I'm watching, Malcolm opens his eyes and stares at the security camera. He smiles a little as Paul starts kissing his neck and his hips start moving against Paul's in a sensual, unmistakable rhythm.

My face grows hot. He knows, he *knows*, doesn't he, that I would risk this job and my family and my dreams, besides, for the chance to be going up in that elevator with him? Was it written that obviously on my face? Could he hear it in our brief exchange of words? Was I that obvious a month ago when we met at the Zephyr, that if he'd asked me to come home with him, I would have gone?

It's not until he blows a subtle kiss at the camera that I look away. I don't look back until I see from the corner of my eye that the elevator is empty.

And then, slowly and deliberately, I leave the security desk and go to the posh men's restroom across from the main bank of elevators. I go into one of the stalls and jerk myself off as quickly as I can, remembering the feel of Malcolm King's lips and his body between my legs, and trying not to imagine the cool wood of the elevator behind my back as he kisses me into oblivion.

The next month is a test of my patience if ever I've had one. While Luna is doing all right—she found a position with a dance company for the summer, possibly for credits when the school year starts again—my dad still spends most of the day in bed or watching *telenovas* on the couch, and only eats or takes a shower when one of us prods him to it. Ricky and Cristina help when they can, but they have their own family to worry about. Mateo will be going to college soon and is taking all of the entrance and advanced placement exams he can, and that costs money and time.

The worries about Dad would be enough, without the mounting situation with Malcolm King on top of it.

I didn't hear a word from Douglas about Malcolm King complaining about me, so that's one concern I can put aside; but that doesn't mean Malcolm King leaves me alone. Oh, no. He comes home every night with a different guy and greets me cordially at the security desk, asks after my family and if there are any messages for him, while his companion for the night kisses or paws him blatantly, as if he dared them to be as obvious as possible.

That, I can handle. I've dealt with the public. I can be icily polite in the face of extreme rudeness with the best of them. What happens after that is making me crazy, because after the chitchat in the lobby, Malcolm takes his man for the night to the private elevator and makes out with them all the way up to his floor. What's worse, he watches the security camera as much as he can, as if he wants to be sure that I see every moment and he wants to know what I think of his performance.

What's worse than *that* is that it's working.

Despite my efforts to take care of it myself, he's got me so frenzied that it's a wonder I don't haul him over the security monitors and have him right there on the gray marble floor. The more calmly I try to behave in his presence, the more passionate he gets with his dates and the more amused he looks when he glances at the security camera. I'd pity the men he brings home every night if I didn't envy them so much. They're playthings in the hands of a sexy, confident man, and I often ask myself if they do it because sex with Malcolm King is worth the indignity of being tossed aside in the morning.

Or maybe they all think they'll be the one he asks to stay.

In a folder titled "Thermodynamics research," I write notes to myself. I title them all *Don't Sleep With Malcolm King* and number each one. The notes themselves say things like, *You don't want him to break your heart* and *He'll only hump and dump you*. I write myself a new one every time he brings home another man and the way they carry on sends me to the men's restroom again. By the end of June, there are twenty-three notes in that folder.

Twice during this time, on Saturday night I go out to Glass Onion and pick up a man with the closest resemblance to Malcolm that I can find. It's a poor substitute, but at least it gets me through the next few weeks without giving in.

A rainy Sunday afternoon, and I'm prowling around the house, trying not to yell at Dad to get out of bed already, when Luna shoves a cup of spicy hot chocolate in my hands and says, "Porch. Now."

We huddle in the mismatched wicker chairs on the screened-in back porch, mugs of hot chocolate in our hands, and she gets the whole story out of me with little prompting. There are a few things I leave out—my sister does not need to know how often I've been glad the security camera in the lobby restroom is not pointed at the stalls—but I tell her about the creep in the club, Malcolm's many men, and how much I want to be the one on the elevator with him.

And then I sit, my arms crossed over my knees, my cup loose in my fingers so I can drink from it with minimal effort, and watch the rain.

Luna sips, a frown between her brows, and says, “What’s wrong with wanting to have sex? I know you do, Cruzito.”

“In itself, nothing,” I say. “But I don’t want to be a notch in his bedpost, or an ethnicity crossed off his list. You’d be surprised how many guys hit on me just because they haven’t slept with a Latino yet.”

“And it has nothing to do with how pretty you are,” she says, and I glare at her, before letting my hair fall over my face and hide me from her view.

“And if I do and he decides he doesn’t want me around anymore, he could get me fired,” I say, pulling my hair out of the way again.

The teasing look leaves her face. “Do you think he’d do that?”

“I don’t know. I don’t really know what kind of man he is, except Douglas says he likes to take risks and he moved into the Wolcott to be closer to his grandmother. But I can’t risk that kind of thing happening. This job’s too good and we need the money too much.”

Luna sips her hot chocolate and watches the rain. Despite the fact that it’s July, it’s chilly on the porch, and she’s wearing layers of T-shirts and thick woolen socks on her feet, peeping from beneath her jeans. We haven’t had much chance to talk lately, between her rehearsals and classes, and my shift at the Wolcott, and I’ve missed her. She’ll be sixteen in a few weeks, and she’s become a true beauty. I saw how many boys were smitten with her at her *quinceañera*—she’s only grown lovelier in the last year.

“You’re beautiful, Lunita,” I say quietly, and she looks at me with a pleased smile.

“Thank you.” She shifts closer to me, her head resting against the back of the winged chair. “Tell me something.”

“Sure.” I settle back in the chair too, and put my empty mug on an upturned crate we use as an outdoor end table.

“Is your problem with him that you think you don’t deserve him, or you think he doesn’t deserve you?”

I open my mouth, then close it. I honestly don’t know.

“I think if you want him, you should do it anyway. He saved you from that awful man—he can’t be a bad man himself. I think you’re so ready for people to hurt you that you don’t give them a chance to show you they won’t.”

I have nothing to say to that. I wish I had more chocolate so I can drink instead of answering.

“I suppose it’s not romantic,” she muses. “But I suppose romance is something that comes on a different path than desire.”

“Not always,” I say, though I know much more about desire than romance, and I trust romance even less than I trust Malcolm King.

I have the Fourth of July off, so Luna, my cousins, and I go to Lakeview Park. We ride the coasters all day—especially the Grizzly, the enormous woody, until I can’t drag anyone to ride it with me anymore. At nightfall we go to the picnic area, where we grill burgers and eat potato chips and watermelon, and watch the fireworks show.

As I lie on the grass, Mateo and his girlfriend talking quietly to one side, and Aron and Luna talking on the other, I wonder if Malcolm is in the park to see the fireworks too, or if he watches them from across the lake. Does he like roller coasters, like me, or are they too tame after his life full of adventure?

No matter, I tell myself, and try to focus on the lights flowering in the sky.

The next night I’m back to work and the thunderstorms return. The thunder is loud enough that I can hear it from the other side of the lobby, and I’ve turned down the music system so I can hear the storm as I watch the rain coursing down the windows.

It’s almost midnight when the revolving door turns to admit Malcolm. This is no longer unusual. He’s alone, and that’s unusual enough for me to sit up straight and watch him cross the lobby to stand in front of the bank of monitors. He’s wearing a sweatshirt under a denim jacket, and his shoulders and the top of his hood are dark and damp, like he’s been walking in the rain. He puts his hands on his hips and we gaze at each other before he says, “Did you have a good Fourth?” and I say, “Still raining, I see,” at the same time.

He smiles a little. “Still raining.”

“I had a good Fourth, Mr. King. Did you?”

“Would have been better with better company.”

I don’t know what to say to that, so I just clear my throat and shuffle my notes and book together, looking at the monitors again to keep myself from imagining climbing him like a tree and inhaling the scent of rain from his skin.

“Well,” he says, “good night, Mr. Morales,” and I nod, not trusting my voice.

He goes to the private elevator, and I breathe easy again once the doors slide shut. Not going to make a fool of myself tonight. I know I should feel triumphant, like an addict earning his thirty-day chip, but all I feel is empty.

That's when I glance at the monitor for the private elevator. My mouth drops open.

Malcolm King is dancing. Slowly. Rolling his hips, swaying his shoulders, shrugging off his lambswool-lined jacket.

It's a sensuous sight, one that would stop anybody in their tracks to watch, and I am transfixed. That he's comfortable in his body is obvious from the way he moves. If we were at a club, if he were moving like this on a dance floor, I'd be proud to be his partner. I'd move with him, match him step for step.

But we're not partners on a dance floor. He's a Wolcott. He's never worked a day in his life, and I'm a kid from the sketchy side of town who thinks fifteen dollars an hour is a good wage.

I'm scowling at the monitor when I realize Malcolm's dance is changing. Even more sensual, even more sexy, his hands running over his chest and thighs, through his dark hair.

And then he looks straight at the security camera and pulls off his hoodie, then his white T-shirt, revealing a body that is strong and slender, a deep chest, a flat stomach and bracketing hips.

He puts his hands on the fly of his jeans, gives the camera another glance, and then they, too, come off.

The doors slide open to the thirty-ninth floor. He gives the camera a wink and a smile, and, clad only in his blue briefs, steps out.

I don't know how long I sit there, my mouth still hanging open. It's not even the audacity of this move that does it, or the beauty of his body. It's the little pattern of freckles on his smooth abdomen, like the Big Dipper flipped upside down.

I've seen that pattern before.

The summer my mom left, my dad didn't get out of bed for three weeks. I was fourteen and Luna was eight, and Tío Ricky said we all needed to get some

exercise, so he took us to the Wolcott Building to use the pool and the rooftop garden. Technically, the pool was being cleaned and no one was supposed to be swimming in it, but Uncle Ricky said his boss would look the other way.

My cousins are nearer to Luna's age than mine, so they played and splashed around and amused each other, but I got bored after a few laps around the pool. Tío Ricky had said we could use the garden, too, so I took my towel and left the pool area, hoping to find a grassy, open space where I could lie in the sun. There was plenty, along with multi-colored flowers and rows of trees. There was even a community garden, where people were growing things like carrots and raspberries.

I spread out my towel on a grassy patch under some trees and lay down. The leaves danced overhead in the faint breeze, and the sky was bright blue, peaceful and pretty. I tried to relax, to close my eyes and sleep a little—between school and my part-time job (which would become a full-time job in a few weeks, when summer officially began) and looking after my father and Luna, I hardly had time to sleep—but it was so hard to unclench everything enough to even close my eyes.

I was concentrating so hard on enjoying myself that when an amused voice said, “Working hard, I see,” I sat up like someone had blared a vuvuzela in my ear, and saw a boy standing at my feet with his hands on his hips and a smile on his face that I would have thought of as teasing if I knew him better. He was maybe four or five years older than me, also in swim trunks, a towel slung over his shoulder and sunglasses perched on his nose.

I said, gasping a little from surprise, “I’m Ricky Morales’s nephew. He said it was okay.”

“Well,” the boy said as he spread out his towel beside me, “if Ricky said it’s okay, then it’s okay.”

He sat on the towel and spent a few minutes smoothing coconut-scented sunblock onto his skin. He offered the tube to me. I took it, and spread some on my shoulders, chest and face. He watched me do it, too, until he noticed me noticing and then looked away.

“How come Ricky hasn’t brought you over before?”

I shrugged. “He thought we needed it today. There aren’t any good places to swim in our neighborhood.”

“You’re not swimming,” he pointed out.

"I swam a little." I ran both hands over my wet hair.

"Hm." We both lay down and sunbathed in silence for a while. He lay with hands behind his head, still wearing his sunglasses.

I don't know why I blurted out, "My mom left."

He turned his head toward me. I couldn't tell if his eyes were opened or closed, but it seemed like he was listening, so I said, "She fell in love with another man. My dad thinks I don't know—my sister doesn't know—and he's telling everybody she went on vacation. But she's gone. She took her suitcase and all our money."

"I'm sorry," he said softly.

"I hate her," I said vehemently, and he sat up.

"Don't say that," he said. "You don't hate her. You're angry, and that's understandable, but that will fade. And who knows? Maybe she'll come back."

"I hope she doesn't. I hope she never comes back. I hope she stays away forever."

He looked away from me. The other buildings on the block were older and smaller than the Wolcott, some of them Art Deco structures, with delicate arches over the windows and doorways; most of brown brick and narrow windows, leftovers from a more industrial age. It was a beautiful view—one of the reasons why I chose this particular patch of grass—and I got the feeling that it was the boy's favorite thing about the garden, too.

He said, "You don't want that. You want to see your parents. You want them to see you. I hope she does come back and I hope when she does, you forgive her."

"You don't understand," I muttered.

"Probably not." He wrapped his arms loosely around his knees. His toes wiggled in the grass. "My parents are around and are still together, but you'd never know if you spent a night in our house." He smiled at me, careless and crooked. "Not that I want to play 'my problems are bigger than yours.'"

"Good." I imitated his pose, my arms around my knees, my feet together. We were close to each other on the grass, and he smelled good, like coconut and sunshine and wind.

I'd only recently realized that I liked boys more than girls, that I didn't want to kiss girls the same way I wanted to kiss boys, and as we sat together in the

faint breeze and dappled shade, I realized that this boy was exactly the kind of boy I wanted to kiss, with his soft mouth and tanned skin, slender body and long legs. His dark hair was slicked back from his face, and he wore a braided leather bracelet on one wrist. There were light freckles dusted all over his skin, and the most distinctive pattern was on his flat stomach, bisected by the trail of hair that led below his waistband—four points of a square, with three more trailing from the lowest corner, like the Big Dipper flipped upside-down. I imagined myself fitting my mouth over that square and licking every corner, before nosing my way along that trail and following where it led.

I looked away. A boy like him wouldn't want to kiss a boy like me. Some boys in my year looked like how this boy looked, but most of them looked like me: still unfinished.

I wanted to touch him. I wanted to touch him so much that I clenched my hands to keep from doing it.

While I ogled him, the boy was saying, "Someday you'll go to college and leave it all behind."

"I could never leave my family behind."

"You don't leave your family behind. You leave the situation behind. Your family—that will stay, whether you want them to or not."

"I don't see how," I said. I was a freshman in high school. College seemed a thousand years away.

"You will. I did. Like I said, it's not easy at home, but I come here and it's like the city takes all my troubles away." He looked at me. "Close your eyes." I closed them obediently. "Take a deep breath," he said, and so I inhaled slowly. "Imagine everything that hurts is a little gray cloud over your head."

I opened one eye to peer at him. "Seriously?"

"Yeah, dude, seriously. It's a meditation thing. My therapist told me about it."

"Okay," I said doubtfully, but closed my eyes again and pictured the little gray cloud.

"Now imagine the breeze carrying it away, out over the lake."

I tried, frowning in concentration, but instead the cloud stayed stubbornly over my head, turning darker like a summer thunderstorm.

Finally I exhaled in exasperation. "It's not working."

“Well,” he said, “I guess it takes practice to let your worries go. I wasn’t good at it at first, either.” He lay on his side, his body supple and lean, and I had to look away again to resist the temptation to reach out and see if his skin felt as smooth and warm as it looked. He said softly, “I don’t live here, but I visit the Wolcott a lot. Sometime if you want to come in and visit me too, you could have your uncle bring you back. I could show you around. This building is pretty cool. Lots of weird passages and odd little rooms.”

I whispered, “Why would you want to do that?”

He shrugged. “You seem cool,” he said and smiled at me, his head turned toward me, his eyes hidden behind the brown glass of his sunglasses, and without even thinking about it I leaned forward and kissed his friendly, open mouth.

I was clumsy at it, of course, I had never kissed anyone like this before, and went into it without much thought and with too much teeth—but his hand still slid into my hair and I held his face, and for a few minutes there was no sound on the rooftop but the wet noises of a kiss and the gentle breeze through the leaves.

And then I came to my senses.

“Oh,” he said softly when I pulled away. I was blushing so hard I could feel the heat in my face. I grabbed my towel and ran to the passage to the pool area so fast that I tripped when the towel tangled with my feet, and I barked my chin on the pebbled pathway hard enough that I felt it in my teeth and my head swam.

“Are you okay?” the boy called after me, and I said, “Yes, yes, thanks, goodbye, sorry,” as I scrambled to my feet. I ran into the passage and leaned against the wall in front of the door. I slid down the wall to the floor and wrapped my arms around my knees until the shaking stopped.

When my heart had stopped racing I went back to the pool. I was about to jump in again when Luna cried, “Cruz, you’re bleeding!”

I ran my hand over my face to find that the stinging on my chin was a deep and bloody scrape. Blood ran down my neck.

“Come with me,” Tío Ricky said and led me to one of the little supply rooms on the floor, where there was a cabinet full of first aid supplies. He cleaned the wound and put a big Band-Aid on my chin, his dark eyes concerned. “What happened while you were on the roof, Cruzito?”

“Nothing,” I said. “I tripped and fell.” I thought I should ask him about the boy on the rooftop—if the boy knew him, then he must know the boy—but I decided I wanted to keep him to myself.

When he had finished cleaning me up, we went back to the pool and I spent the rest of the afternoon playing with Luna and my cousins. When we got home, Dad didn't even notice the bandage on my chin.

I never told anyone about the boy, and what I told people was my first kiss was another kiss entirely. But I thought about him, all the time at first—wishing I'd been brave enough to stay and kiss him more, kiss that constellation on his stomach like I daydreamed—then fondly over the years, nostalgically, the way you remember your childhood crush.

I was just always sorry I never got his name.

Now with this revelation, that Malcolm King is the first boy I ever kissed, I am even more bewildered. Does he remember me? Is that why he helped me get away from the creep at the Zephyr, and is that why he was trying to make me jealous with his other conquests, or is it all just coincidence, or does he remember me fondly too and wants to see what kind of man I've become?

My textbook and laptop stay in my backpack the next night, as I doodle a handsome, square-jawed face in my notebook amid drawings of a new coaster for Lakeview Park. It's soon joined by a Big Dipper on its end, the handle pointing toward a taut navel, and I add a few dark, crisp hairs leading down to a tight waistband...

The doors to the private elevators slide open and Malcolm steps out. I put down my pencil and shut my notebook as he strides across the lobby, a look of determination on his face.

“Mr. King,” I say calmly—calm only because my hands are gripping the desk of the security station so tight I might crack it in half. “What can I do for you tonight?”

“What is it going to take for you to come up to my place?” he says in a tone completely unlike what he usually uses with me—no politeness, no teasing.

The answer is so simple it comes out without me thinking. “You ask me.”

He stares at me, his head tilted and his brows furrowed, like something that basic never occurred to him. “Ask you,” he says flatly.

“Yes. That’s usually how it’s done. Not—” I gesture to the monitors. “—whatever game you’ve been playing here.” *As much as I’ve enjoyed it*, I think, because in all honesty, I have. Who wouldn’t, in my position, enjoy a handsome man trying to get his attention?

“I wanted to be memorable.”

“Oh,” I say quietly, “you are. Trust me on that.” I pause, and he continues frowning at me. “Do you still do the cloud trick to make your worries go away?”

The frown disappears, a genuine smile taking its place. “You do remember me.”

“Now I do. I recognized your freckles.” I point to his stomach, and he laughs.

“So you remember that kiss, too,” he says with a tender look, and I wish I could believe it.

“I remember,” I say. “I remember you were kind to a sad, scared boy when you didn’t have to be, and I thank you for that.”

He folds his arms on top of the monitors and rests his chin on his hands. “I’ve thought about you a lot over the years. I’ve always wondered what happened to you. I guess I shouldn’t be surprised you ended up here, since our families know each other already.”

“I don’t think my uncle working for your father for two decades really counts as ‘knowing each other.’” I take a deep breath. “Look, Malcolm—Mal—”

“There’s a spark between us,” he says. “You felt it too. I know you did.”

“I did, but here’s the thing you don’t understand. *I can’t act on it.*” I slap the desk with each word for emphasis, and he frowns at me again.

“Why not? You’re legal and single. There isn’t anything else that could stand in our way.”

“For you, maybe.”

“But not for you? Am I reading you entirely wrong—are you not gay after all?”

“No, you’re right about that. But I also work for you—for your family, which is just as much of a problem. And you’re—” I wave both my hands at

him, trying to say without saying all the objections I have—his wealth, his status, his reputation. “While I’m nobody.”

He blinks at me, then straightens up. “Is that your—oh, Cruz. You’re wrong. You’re so wrong.” He turns and goes back to the private elevators.

For a moment I just sit there, his words echoing in my ears.

And then I get up from the chair and run across the lobby, grab Malcolm by his T-shirt and kiss him with everything I’ve got.

I don’t know if it’s what he expected or even wanted, but in a moment he practically melts into me, his hands on my neck and his fingertips in my hair. He tastes delicious, like whiskey and chocolate, dark and sharp.

When I finally pull away, I search his eyes as he smiles at me. They’re mischievous—no surprise there—but there’s also something tender in them that makes me shiver.

Nonetheless, I whisper, “Stop it.” The argument probably lacks some punch, since I just had my tongue in his mouth.

“You kissed me first.”

“I mean stripping in elevators and trying to make me jealous. Stop it.”

“Why? It got your attention, didn’t it?” He leans in for another kiss but I stop him, my hands on his chest.

“I’m more worried about who else’s attention you’ll get.”

“Trust me, Mr. Morales,” says Malcolm, leaning in again, “there is no one in this building who cares.” I can smell his cologne, cool and clean like fresh water, and I have to stop myself from leaning in and taking a good long inhale.

“I care,” I tell him quietly and remove my hands from his shoulders. “I’m not going to take off my clothes for you,” I say and swallow hard.

Malcolm tilts his head, confusion in his eyes. “Young Mr. Morales has some teeth.”

“Don’t call me that. I know you’re just making fun of me.”

He wraps his hand over the elevator door to keep it from sliding closed. “I’m not.”

“You’re just a good-time boy,” I say, and God, his lips are amazing this close up.

"I do like having a good time, but who doesn't? What time do you get off work?"

"Six a.m. And then I go home. Straight home."

"Come up to my place instead."

"No."

"Please."

I close my eyes and lean my head on his chest. My hands are shaking. My entire body is shaking. I say, "I have to get back to work," and let him go as slowly as I can.

"Hey," he says and catches me with a hand curled around the back of my head. "Cruz. At least tell me something. That night in the club, what did you call me? My seelo?"

"*Mi cielo*," I say. "It means 'my sky.'"

"That's nice," Malcolm says. "That's really nice." He lets me go. "See you, *mi cielo*."

Don't, I want to tell him, *don't pretend I'm your everything when I'm just a boy you want to fuck*, but I just smile and go back to the monitors.

I wake up the next morning to a text from Douglas:

Meet me at my office at six p.m.

Since he texts me sometimes to let me know about changes or emergencies, I think there's nothing unusual about this one.

The lobby is far more bustling than I'm used to when I arrive, the last of the office workers trickling out of the elevators, and few of them give me more than a glance as I move through them to the Employees Only section of the building. Tucked behind the alcove that proclaims this building the Wolcott and bears portraits of Joshua, Sophia, Margaret, and Stephen are the offices—the building manager's, Tío Ricky's as the head of maintenance, and Douglas's. I knock on his door and he barks, "Come in."

I find myself hesitating before I push open the door. "You asked me to come by?"

“Sit.” He points to the chair in front of his desk, and when I sit he swings around the large, flat monitor on his computer. “We did a spot-check of the security footage this morning. Want to explain this?”

He presses play. The footage is of Malcolm and me, kissing in front of the elevator. Both of us look like we're in heaven, and his fingers tenderly stroke my face in a way that I had missed during the magic of the kiss.

“Are you and Mr. King dating?” Douglas asks me when I don't say anything.

“No,” I say. “He's been flirting with me a lot, and we've kissed before.” I look at Douglas, though I could watch the looped footage of the kiss forever. “Does he want me fired?”

“No,” Douglas says, his eyebrows furrowed like the idea never occurred to him. “He hasn't said a word to me. I intend to have a few words with him, though. Look, Cruz,” he says, “I appreciate that you haven't taken advantage of the leeway we give you, but this kind of thing?” He points to the monitor. “It's unprofessional. I don't care if you dance the naked Watusi on his dining room table. Just keep it off the clock.”

“Yes, sir,” I murmur, embarrassed. “Am I fired?”

“No,” Douglas says, softening. “You'd have to actually do the naked Watusi in the lobby for that. Have you been fired before?”

“No,” I said. “Never.”

“Then stop worrying about it. You're a pleasure to have on our team. Just don't kiss Mr. King when you should be working.” He turns off the footage. “Go on, Cruz. Do whatever you need to do before your shift.”

“Good night, Douglas,” I answer and leave his office. My legs are shaking so badly that I have to sit down in the lobby for a few minutes. On the way over I'd planned to go to my favorite diner near the Wolcott to pass the time before ten, but now I just want to go home again and crawl into bed until the earth swallows me.

Despite Douglas's assurances, I feel like I'm teetering on the edge of joblessness; and even though I know the nursery or anywhere else I've worked would have me back, I want *this* job, I *like* this job, I feel at home in this job, and I know my family will be fed and housed because of this job. And I could lose it all because of Malcolm.

Tyson is behind the security bank, and in a moment I make up my mind. I go to him and say, "Tyson, I need to ask a huge, huge favor."

He rises from behind the monitors and walks to the private elevators, and uses the skeleton key to open it. I stare at him, stunned, and he shrugs. "I saw the security footage too."

"Oh, my God," I say and get into the elevator, and pull my hoodie over my face to hide my embarrassment all the way up.

As the elevator takes me up, embarrassment becomes something else—something hot and angry, like my blood is boiling through my veins. I know I shouldn't blame Malcolm, but I do. It's his fault for being such a flirt, his fault for being so sweetly sexy, his fault for being irresistible. His fault for taking his clothes off in this very elevator, where he knew only I (and a few other members of the security team) would see.

There's only one thing to do about it.

I rap my fist on his door, and don't have to wait long until Malcolm opens it. He's wearing an unzipped sweatshirt, his chest bare beneath, and tight sweatpants. He looks like he's just about to start working out.

"Cruz?" he says with equal parts confusion and gladness, and I grab his face and kiss him.

He melts into me at once, arms going around me, and he pulls me into the apartment and slams the door shut behind me.

"Cruz," he whispers as we kiss, "Cruz, Cruz," and I answer him with kisses and by tugging off his sweatshirt so I can kiss his chest. He tastes as clean as if he had just showered, and I hold him by his waist and scrape my teeth over his chest until he cries out, throwing back his head.

He grabs me by the back of my head and forces me to look into his eyes. "What are you doing here?"

"Fuck me," I answer.

"What happened to 'I'm never taking off my clothes for you'?"

"Fuck me," I say again, and jump into his arms so that he has no choice but to catch me. He does so easily, and carries me to the nearest wall so he can press me against it. He kisses my neck and my face as his hands slide up under my hoodie and T-shirt to pull them off.

He licks my ear and mutters, "Are you sure this is what you want?" and then pulls the hoodie and shirt over my head. I raise my arms to make it easy to take them off, and then wrap my arms around his neck and my legs tighter around his waist. I toe off my sneakers and they fall to the wood floor with soft thumps.

"Fuck me," I say as he kisses my neck and shoulders, "fuck me, fuck me, fuck me," as he drags my jeans to my thighs and pushes his sweats down to bare his cock, curving upward eagerly and already growing wet. He spits on his fingers and pushes them into me, and I ride his fingers, moaning as he opens me.

Neither of us pause, not for a moment, as he lifts my hips and guides his cock into me.

It's rough and raw, I can barely move, and I know I'm going to feel this for days. But it also feels glorious, Malcolm's head against my neck and his cock thrusting into me, and I chant his name as my fingers scrape his shoulders and my lips slide over his skin.

His strokes, already shallow and fast, grow erratic, and he bites hard on his lower lip as if it'll help him last a little bit longer. I dig my fingertips into the back of his neck and ghost my lips over his, and that's all it takes for him to shudder deeply down his spine and groan against my mouth.

He pants for a moment, collecting himself with his face pressed against mine, and then mutters, "Shit," and pulls out.

He sets my feet on the floor and I lean against the wall, gasping for breath, and run my hand over my face. My cock is aching and hard, and Malcolm wraps his hand around me and slides to his knees. I twist my hand into his hair and watch his mouth slide down my cock until the sight makes my legs tremble, and then I tilt back my head and close my eyes. Despite the soothing strokes of his thumbs over my hipbones, I don't look at him as I come.

I'm still coming down and trying to catch my breath as Malcolm hitches up my jeans and his own sweatpants, and carefully tucks my cock away and does up the zipper. I hold his shoulders for balance, and manage a tiny smile when he whispers, "There. You're perfect."

Then with a simple, "C'mon," Malcolm guides me through the apartment and to his bedroom. Now that I'm not in a daze of anger and lust, I notice the

light and colors of the place. Most of the apartments in the Wolcott are precisely as the decorator left them, even the ones with kids. Malcolm's is not. The furniture isn't pristine and most of the art on the walls look like souvenirs of his travels rather than something plucked from a boutique. There are books in the built-ins, several in languages I don't speak, and despite Malcolm having moved in two months ago, there are still unpacked boxes tucked into a few corners.

Somehow, that makes me feel even more at home than the deep leather furniture and the framed movie posters on the walls in French and Japanese and other languages I can't name. It occurs to me that, really, I know so *little* about Malcolm and most of it is what other people have told me. His home tells me volumes that I never would have guessed.

His bedroom is like the rest of the place, a little worn about the edges and not entirely finished, and the duvet is so thick it puffs up around us when we lie on it. Malcolm pulls over a pillow for us to share, and gazes at me until I have to look away.

He puts his hand on my hip. "I don't do that often," he says quietly. "Go bareback, I mean. And I get tested a couple times a year. There shouldn't be anything for you to worry about."

"Thanks," I say quietly. "Me, too. I'm usually a lot more careful."

"Tell me you're coming next time and I'll have a condom in my pocket."

"There won't be a next time," I say and slowly sit up. The soreness is setting in, but I refuse to feel regret. This was necessary for my own sanity.

I can almost hear Malcolm frown, and he strokes my back. "Why not? Next time we'll just be better prepared and—"

"Douglas looked at the security footage from last night," I say without turning around. "He saw me kissing you by the elevator. I'm not in trouble, I don't think, but he kept saying how unprofessional it was." I finally look at Malcolm over my shoulder. "This is me getting you out of my system, so I can keep my mind on my studies and my job."

"You won't get in trouble for kissing me in public," Malcolm says, still stroking my back.

"Not the point," I reply and get carefully off the bed, hissing a little as the movement only increases the ache.

“Then what is the point?” Malcolm says as he props himself on his elbow. The playful, hopeful look on his face is fading. “Cruz—” His cell phone, sitting on the dresser, starts buzzing, and he mutters, “God damn it,” as he gets up to answer it. I leave him to his call and go out to the living room to find my clothes.

My shirt and hoodie folded over my arm, I go back to Malcolm's bedroom to ask if it's okay if I wash up a little, and he waves at me to sit on the bed again. “Uh-huh,” he says to the caller, “I understand that, but—Douglas—”

Shit. I sit on the bed before my knees have a chance to give out. If Douglas knows I'm here—would Tyson rat on me like that? I don't want to think so—

“Listen, Douglas,” Malcolm says. “Just listen a moment. Nothing's going on between us that you need to worry about. I promise I won't—Douglas—” He stops talking with a heavy sigh, and sits on the bed beside me and takes my hand as he listens. I can hear Douglas yelling through the phone.

Finally Malcolm says, “I won't. I won't. You don't have to worry about anything with me, Douglas. I don't want that either. Okay. Bye.” He hangs up and looks at me with a rueful smile. “Well, I just got my ear chewed off.”

“He'll fire me if he knows I'm here.”

“No, he won't. Douglas thinks I've been harassing you into quitting.” He frowns. “Have I been harassing you? I didn't think of it that way.”

“It's a fine line between harassment and aggressive flirting,” I say, taking my hand away, and I pull my T-shirt over my head. “I think you've skirted it a few times.”

“Well,” says Malcolm, nonplussed, and then adds, “Don't go.”

“I need to eat some dinner before my shift.”

“You can eat here. I'll cook. I'm actually a pretty good cook—I did a semester at the Cordon Bleu.”

“I don't know what that is,” I say with a sigh, though I can guess from the context. “Malcolm, you're not listening to me.”

“I am,” he insists. “I'm listening. You don't want to kiss me while you're working. That's fine. That's probably smart. And you don't want me to flirt with you while you're working, too—and neither does Douglas—so I won't. I'll keep it to your off-hours.”

"I don't want you to even think about me," I say and get off the bed. "I told you, this is just to get you out of my system. You can go back to having sex with whoever you want, and we can be Mr. Morales and Mr. King until you move out or I get another job. It's better that way."

Malcolm is quiet as I pull on my hoodie, and then says, "But the only one I want is you."

"Too bad," I answer, and hate myself for the hurt look on his face. "You don't understand the position I'm in. I cannot jeopardize this job. I'm the sole breadwinner for my family right now, and if I get fired—"

"God, Cruz, you're not going to get fired!"

"How do you know?" I snap. "Douglas works for your family, not mine. If you wanted me out, I'd be out. If Douglas is given a valid reason to fire me, he will, no matter how much he might like me. So I'm not going to give him a reason, and if you care about me at all you won't, either."

"Of course I won't," Malcolm says. "I'm not that big of a dick." He reaches out to catch my hand. "Tell me what's going on with you."

I look at him a moment, that handsome, square-jawed face like a superhero in a comic book, and blurt out, "My dad has depression."

"Oh," Malcolm says softly and holds my hand tighter.

"I think he's had it all his life, but it's been really bad since my mom left. Every couple years he just shuts down for a couple months, and right now is one of those times. I know he should be seeing a therapist and taking pills for it, but he won't go. All he does is sleep."

Malcolm nods. I keep talking, the full weight of everything on my shoulders pouring out, and I can't stop it.

"And my sister goes to a private performing arts high school, so there's always tuition to worry about. We could manage it when both Dad and I were working, but now that it's just me—well, I have to make what I'm making here to keep her in school and a roof over our heads. She's working this summer, she's in a dance company and they pay her a little, but it's still only enough to help with a couple of the bills."

Malcolm nods again, still holding my hand.

"I've been trying to finish a bachelor's degree for four years and I'm still behind. I can only take a few classes a semester and I keep needing to take

semesters off to work full-time. My degree requires a lot of lab hours and I can't even afford a computer that runs the CAD programs I need, and I have to take next semester off *again* so I can work here, and—and—"My eyes are wet and my throat feels tight. I croak out, "I'm so tired, Malcolm."

I don't know how to read the look on his face as he pulls me to him, and he whispers, "Come here, Cruz, lovely Cruz, come here," as he pulls me onto his knee and holds me tight until my trembling stops.

"You would get along with my abuela," I tell Malcolm as he sets me to chopping tomatoes in the kitchen. "She thinks food is the solution for everything, too."

"I don't think food is a solution to anything aside from hunger," Malcolm answers. He's whisking some eggs and milk together to make frittatas, and I'm actually interested in seeing how his fancy cooking school taught him to make something so basic. "You think better when your stomach's full."

"There's nothing to think about." I bend my head enough to curtain my face with my hair. "Please respect my decisions, Malcolm."

"If they were smart decisions, I would."

I have no answer to that. I finish the tomatoes and sweep the chopped bits into a bowl, and get started on the green pepper. Malcolm pours eggs into a frying pan. He turned on his stereo at some point, just a little set of speakers hooked up to his iPod, and the music is soft and soulful.

I feel quietly despairing. I like his apartment, I like his music, and if his food tastes as good as it smells I'm going to like his cooking, too. It's like the universe took everything I want in a man and put it into one unattainable package.

Well, not unattainable, I muse as I chop the mushrooms. I've had him, after all. I just won't be able to keep him.

We sit at his kitchen table with hot frittatas and glasses of white-grape-and-peach juice—he offered to open a bottle of wine, but it makes me sleepy—and quietly eat. There's something comforting about the dish, and I wonder if Malcolm knows and made these for that exact purpose.

Malcolm says, when his plate is half empty, "Douglas called to make sure I don't make you quit. I hope you understand that."

I look up. "Oh."

"Yeah." He drinks his juice, looking at me. "You've got to stop worrying about being fired. It's not going to happen."

I shake my head. "You don't know what it's like, living paycheck to paycheck."

"You're right, I don't," Malcolm says mildly. "But I do know Douglas likes you and wants to keep you employed here, and that goes a long way. You've got to stop worrying."

"Easier said than done," I mutter. I cross my knife and fork on the plate. "Thank you for dinner."

"You're welcome. If you want to come back when your shift is over I'll make you breakfast, too." I start to remind him that we're not having sex again, and he holds up his hands. "I'm just offering breakfast."

"Maybe, in that case," I say.

He catches my hand and kisses the back. "Though if you wanted more—"

"Good night, Malcolm," I say, pulling my hand away, and I hear him sigh as I leave.

There's a shower in the employee locker room, and I use it with some regret. I'd rather keep the scent of Malcolm on me a little longer, but it's better this way.

I stashed my backpack in my locker before I saw Douglas, and I take it out to the monitor bank to meet up with Tyson for the shift change. "How did it go?" he asks me, and I cover my face with my hands a moment.

"I did what I needed to do," I reply simply when I take my hands away.

"I hope it was fun, because, *damn*, Mr. King's hot."

I smile at him. "I thought you had a girlfriend."

"I do," Tyson says blithely. "I'm in a relationship, I'm not blind." He gathers his things—he's also in school, studying pre-law—and says goodnight, and I'm on my own again.

I leave my laptop and textbooks in the backpack most of the night, doodling in my notepad instead. I try to recreate Malcolm's square jaw and warm eyes, but I've never been good at portraiture—one of the reasons why I chose drafting instead of art—and finally turn the page to design a house for him

instead, someplace with lots of curves instead of corners, and little nooks for reading or daydreaming out the window.

It's my dream house, I realize, as I darken a line. This is where I would live if money were no object and I found the perfect cradle of rolling hills. A little round house with round windows, part of it underground to keep cool in the summer, a place for flowers to grow on the roof, and a garden in the front for practical things, like carrots and fruit trees.

And then, because it's my dream house, I add a little Shoot-the-Chute type roller coaster like they had back in the 1920s, with a pulley system to haul the car back to the top of the hill, and trees that hang over the track to hide the route just enough to make it interesting.

By the time I've finished drawing, I'm not sure if it's my dream for Malcolm or for me, but it hardly matters. I'm overcome with melancholy when I look at it. I'll never live in a house like this. People like me don't get dream houses. We don't get dream jobs. And I won't get my dream lover, no matter how loudly my body is crying out for him.

YOU ARE NOT SLEEPING WITH MALCOLM KING AGAIN, I write in big block letters over the drawing, and then shut the notepad and put it away as Evan, yawning, ambles across the lobby to change shifts. "Good morning," he says, "anything happen last night?"

I'm about to snap that what happened between Malcolm and me is our business when I realize he means with the building, and just say, "Quiet, as usual," as I zip my backpack.

"Mmkay. Good night, Cruz."

"Good morning, Evan," I reply and go to the locker room.

I should go home.

I'm going to go home.

I'm not going to go to Malcolm's apartment again and tear his clothes off. Not this time. He is out of my system.

Out. Of. My. System.

Except that as soon as I slam the locker shut I get into the freight elevator, the only elevator that goes to all forty floors, and ride it to the thirty-ninth. The

entire time I'm walking down the hallway to Malcolm's apartment, I tell myself I'm only going to finish our conversation and maybe thank him for being so forthright about Douglas.

Nothing more.

He beams with happiness when he opens the door to my knock. "I thought you said it was never going to happen again."

"Shut up," I answer as I put my arms around his neck, and I take his mouth in a deep, long kiss.

We don't make it to the bed this time, either.

Not until later, anyway, and I watch him through half-closed eyes as he ambles, naked, around his bedroom and juggles two oranges and a pear from the fruit basket in his kitchen. "I learned to juggle in Malaysia," he tells me. "There was this street performer who wasn't doing so well that day, so I tried to give him twenty dollars, but he wouldn't take it until I said it was in exchange for juggling lessons."

I rub my eyes with the heel of my hand. My eyes are scratchy with weariness but I don't want to sleep. Not when there's Malcolm to watch and listen to. "I don't think the question is, so much, where you learned to juggle, but why. It's not like you're going to be busking on the streets any time soon."

Malcolm tosses the pear to me. "I don't have a whole lot of useful life skills, but maybe someday I could be a court jester."

"Barter, is that it?" I bite into the pear as he bounces onto the bed, and he starts rolling one of the oranges between his hands to loosen the skin. "*Will juggle for food?*"

"That's what I'm thinking." He peels the orange with his fingernails and the room fills with the sweet scent of citrus. "I can cook. That's about it." He parts the orange into segments and offers me half. I take them slowly—I've got the rest of my pear—and eat a few bites. The fruit is just as tangy and sweet to the taste as it is to the scent, and I'm unexpectedly ravenous—I devour the orange and pear, slurping with pleasure at the juices and the textures.

Malcolm watches me eat, his half of the orange cradled in his palm. Softly, "I'm still not entirely sure why you're here. I'm *glad* you're here. But you were so... *certain* last night."

I lick the last droplets from my fingers, and tell him, "I'm not certain of anything anymore."

He takes the core of the pear from me and drops it, along with the orange peel, into a wastepaper basket. He gets back into bed with me and pulls the sheets over us, and we curl together. I run my fingers over his stomach, and watch the way my fingers catch in the hair below his navel, rather than look into his eyes. Malcolm's breath deepens as I touch him.

Still, he doesn't speak, and so I tell him, "Luna—my sister—she says I expect people to hurt me, and so never give them the chance to prove they won't."

Softly, "And you want to change that?"

My voice is just as soft. "I don't know."

I look into his eyes at last. They are warm and dark, and the look in them is so tender that I feel I could wrap myself in that look and keep warm through the winter.

"Well," he says simply, "all right," and gathers me to him. I tuck my head against his neck and he strokes my hair, loose from my workaday ponytail, and lifts it from my neck like he means to cool me down.

It does cool me down. I breathe easily against his skin and he whispers, "Stay here, Cruzie. Sleep. It's been a long night for you. If I'm not here when you wake up, help yourself to anything you like."

"I don't need anything from you," I mutter, already struggling to keep my eyes open in this safe little cocoon.

Malcolm chuckles. "From the moment we laid eyes on each other, we knew we'd get here. We knew we'd shake us both from head to foot."

I nod against his neck.

"This is more than just sex," Malcolm murmurs. "Sometimes you meet someone and you know not only are you going fuck them, but you're going to fall asleep next to them and wake up beside them, and you're going to be there for everything in between."

My eyes open in surprise, and then I close them again and snuggle closer. "Some people call that falling in love."

"Do they?" Malcolm says, all innocence, as he strokes my hair. "That's interesting. Go to sleep, Cruzie. Go to sleep."

"Cruzito," I murmur. "You can call me Cruzito."

“Cruzito,” he answers, and then I’m gone.

I don’t go home for three days.

I go straight from Malcolm’s apartment to my shift, and straight from my shift to Malcolm’s apartment. We have sex, he lets me sleep, he makes me food, we talk a little and kiss a lot, we watch movies or listen to music, and I feel contented down to my bones. Luna texts me after two days:

Are you still alive? Are you Malcolm’s sex slave?

And I answer:

Yes and yes.

She responds with a laughing emoji and a few lines of hearts, and I just shake my head and toss my phone away so I can snuggle with Malcolm instead.

I’ve never done anything like this. At most I’ve slept over a night, but I’ve never just let everything else in my life drop away. For three days, I don’t worry about anything—not Dad, not school, not even Luna.

(Well, I worry about her a little, and text her to check in. Her reply is:

Everything’s fine, enjoy yourself

And so I put my worries away for a little while longer.)

Malcolm seems happy, too. He’s shirtless most of the time, which I like very much; and when I offer to cook he says, “I’ve got it, you just relax.” He tells me stories about his travels: he’s climbed the pyramids in Guatemala and explored the ruins in Angkor Wat, raced yachts in the Mediterranean and Grand Prix in Monaco; he’s eaten squid and shark and roasted grasshoppers; he’s met Tibetan monks, poets and painters, minor royalty.

And the sex is... the sex is amazing. He doesn’t fuck me again until I’m not sore anymore from the first time, and then he’s gentle, lubing me up and entering me slowly, and very protected. Meanwhile there are hands and tongues and thighs, and we fall asleep sticky and sweaty more often than we don’t.

When I finish my Friday-night-to-Saturday-morning shift, he asks me, “What do you want to do today?”

“Breakfast, sleep... the usual. I should probably get some fresh clothes from home.”

“But what about tonight, after you’ve slept?”

I raise an eyebrow at him. “Do you have something particular in mind?”

“We should go out,” he says. “See a movie, go out to eat?”

“Like, a date?” I say slowly, and he grins.

“Like a date.”

“Are we a dating sort of couple?”

“We are if we actually go on dates.”

I try not to smile, and fail. “What about Lakeview Park? I like the Grizzly at night.”

“Then let’s go to Lakeview Park,” he says, beaming, and I laugh and kiss him.

I’ve been so happy that I forgot it was payday on Friday, so on our way to the park I stop at my bank for a little cash and to check my balance. There’s a lot more than I expect in my account, even for a new payday, and I take out my card and put it in again to check it one more time. I’m frowning when I go back to the car, the receipt in my hand, and Malcolm says, “Bad news?”

“Clerical error,” I say and show him the receipt. “There are about five hundred more dollars in there than there should be.”

“Oh,” says Malcolm and swings into traffic. “That’s interesting.”

I study his profile as he drives. “Did you have something to do with this?”

“Maybe.”

“Malcolm,” I say sternly.

“Look, you have a lot to worry about, so I had a word with the payroll clerk and they gave you a bonus. That’s all.”

“Malcolm!” I say, exasperated. “You can’t do that!”

“What? I wanted to give you something and I figured this was the best way to get you to accept it.”

“So basically, you’ve paid me five hundred dollars to have sex with you for the last three days. Thanks. That’s just perfect.” I crumple the receipt in my hand and stuff it into my pocket.

“No,” he protests. “I want to help you.”

“You can’t—” I exhale. “Remember the juggler in Malaysia, who wouldn’t take your money for nothing?”

“Of course I do.”

“Well, same thing. I don’t want you for your money.”

He’s quiet for a while, until we’re on the freeway over to Peyton Wells and the noise and traffic of the city on a Saturday night is behind us. Then he says, “I didn’t think of it that way. I’m sorry.”

I nod, looking out the window. “I’m not angry. Just don’t make me feel like a hooker, please.”

“Okay,” he says, and I take his hand.

Our first date is pretty good, despite this. We go on all the rides we can and eat greasy amusement park food, and he rides the Grizzly with me as many times as we can before the park closes.

Sunday I do go home, just for a few hours, to get clean clothes and check on Luna and Dad. Malcolm comes with me, and I try not to see the house through his eyes—the cracked walls, the faded curtains, the cobwebs in the corners of various ceilings.

Luna hugs me tight and then looks at Malcolm expectantly. “This is Malcolm King,” I say, as proud of how handsome Malcolm is as I am embarrassed of how obviously we’ve been fucking each other stupid, “and this is my sister, Luna.”

“Hi,” Luna says. “I started to think at one point that you’d kidnapped my brother, but considering I’ve never seen him so happy, I think you ought to hold him captive more often.”

“For as long as he’ll let me,” Malcolm answers, and they grin at each other and I relax.

I check on Dad, too—cracking open the bedroom door and peering into the dark room. “Dad? You awake?”

“Mm.”

“Have you had a shower lately?”

“Mm.”

I stand there for a moment, then say, “Well, I’ve been staying with a friend for a while, and probably will be staying a while more. Call Ricky if you need me for anything,” and close the door. I ask Luna, “How is he doing?” and she sighs.

“He’s caught up on all his stories,” she says, and Malcolm’s eyebrows furrow. “I think he’s mostly eating frozen waffles and peanut butter. I leave notes for him on the fridge, but I don’t know if he’s reading them. Who knows, Cruzito? We just have to wait this out.”

“I know,” I say, and then run my hand over Malcolm’s head to make myself feel better. I give Luna some money for groceries and collect the bills that are waiting for me to pay, pack a few days’ worth of clothes and get back into Malcolm’s car so we can return to the Wolcott.

He says as we drive, “Want to make another stop?”

“Sure,” I say and put my hand over my eyes, trying to switch my mindset from worried to happy again.

I take my hand away when he pulls into our destination. It’s a car dealership, mostly Volkswagens and BMWs, and I raise an eyebrow at Malcolm. “Trading up?”

“What color do you like?” he answers.

“You’re not buying me a car.”

“You need a car.”

“I don’t need a car.”

“Your sister needs a car.”

“Luna is fifteen and doesn’t drive. Neither does my dad. We can’t afford car insurance on any of these, anyway.”

He sighs. “If you have a car of your own, you won’t have to wait around for buses and you’ll have more time for whatever you need to do. Or Luna could get around more easily—she’ll be sixteen soon, right?”

“Yeah, next month.”

“Well, then, I’ll take care of the insurance and the payments and you’ll have a better way of getting around, you and Luna both. I’ll even teach her to drive, if you don’t want to.”

“In exchange for what?”

“In exchange for nothing!” Malcolm says, throwing up his hands in exasperation. Over his shoulder, I can see a salesperson approaching us, but she hesitates at the obviously heated conversation we’re having. “In exchange for me not worrying about you and your sister!”

“It’s not your job to worry about us!”

“I’m not saying it’s my job—it’s my—” He stops a moment, then says earnestly, “It’s my *privilege* to worry about you.”

I look away, not even sure why I’m angry. I like presents as much as anyone, but this is just as bad as money I didn’t earn in my bank account. Or money I earned on my back, and the mere thought leaves a sour taste in my mouth.

“Please don’t buy us a car,” I say quietly.

Malcolm sighs, waves off the sales person, and starts up the car. We go back to his place, but when we kiss it feels mechanical and I say, “Maybe I should spend the night at home after all,” and he rubs his eyes and sighs.

“I’m trying to understand you, Cruz. I really am.”

I stroke his hair. It’s soft, no styling product in it today, and feels delicious between my fingers. “You can’t solve all my problems with a quick fix, no matter how much you want to. You can’t throw money at a problem and make it go away.”

He takes my hand and kisses my palm. “I really like you, you know.”

“I know. I really like you, too.”

“I want to make things better for you.”

“You do,” I say quietly. “You fall asleep next to me and you wake up beside me, and you’re there for everything in-between. That’s more than I’ve had before, and I love it.” I hug his neck and he closes his eyes.

“I don’t feel like I really do that much for you, in-between.”

“Between orgasms and how you feed me, I feel like a house cat—fat and sassy.”

Malcolm chuckles and pokes my stomach, and I giggle, flinching away. “Gonna need a whole new wardrobe soon,” he says with a speculative look in his eye, and I tilt my head, studying him.

“Don’t get any ideas.”

“No, sir. No ideas. What do you want to do with the rest of today?”

I know what will distract him from whatever plan he's forming, and it sounds like a great thing to me, so: “Go back to bed for decadent, middle-of-the-day sex.”

Malcolm nods wisely. “I concur.” And then he scoops me up and carries me, fireman-style, to his bedroom, while I laugh and wiggle the entire way.

A few more days pass, maybe not quite as blissful as before, but I still fall asleep beside Malcolm and wake up in his bed more often than I don't. Then it's Saturday afternoon again and Malcolm says to me, “Hey, have you ever met my grandma?”

“Never,” I say. “Just her assistant.”

“Well, you've got to meet Grandma,” he says, so after I've had a shower we leave the apartment and go down a few doors to 39 A.

I know from the building's blueprints that it's the biggest apartment in the building, with a private garden and three balconies. Malcolm knocks on the door but doesn't wait for anyone to answer, and just opens the door and calls, “Gran? It's me,” before leading me through the rooms. It's a crowded apartment, too, and much like Malcolm's, it holds many souvenirs from other countries, snow globes and books in foreign languages and framed photographs.

Clarissa bustles in from the garden. “Mr. King, Mr. Morales. How lovely to see you today.”

“Hi, Clare,” Malcolm says and Clarissa rolls her eyes. “How's she doing today?”

“It's a good day,” says Clarissa. “But do try not to wear her out.”

“Yes'm,” says Malcolm and gives me a grin, and we go outside.

You can see the entire city from the garden, as well as the lake and even the faint outline of the roller coasters at the park, and I pause for a moment to drink it in. Then Malcolm says, “Cruz, this is Maggie Wolcott,” and I focus on her.

“Hello, ma'am.”

“So you're the young man keeping my grandson in Aldhurst,” says Margaret Wolcott, offering me her hand, and I take it for a moment, not sure

what exactly I should do. She's one of those elderly white ladies that smells like baby powder and looks like she's made of whipped cream and lace. Her hand is soft in mine, and her snow-white hair is braided over the crown of her head.

"Um," I say with a glance at Malcolm. "I suppose I am?"

"I'm here to be with you, Gran," says Malcolm, and she laughs abruptly.

"Nonsense, child. I'd see you more often if you were."

"I've been a little preoccupied lately," he says with a wink to me, and I blush. "I could start visiting four times a day, if you want."

"You come when your young man is sleeping, I know," she says. She pats the arm of the empty wrought iron chair beside her. "Sit here and tell me about yourself."

I sit obediently, my hands folded together, and Malcolm sits on the grass at our feet. "I don't know what to tell you. There's not much to me."

"Incorrect," says Mrs. Wolcott. "Everyone has something about them. It only depends on what they wish to share. So, what do you wish to share?" She folds her hands on the head of her cane and peers at me. Her eyes are dark brown like Malcolm's, sharpness in their warmth.

"I'm a security guard in the building," I say with a glance at Malcolm.

"Malcolm said you're in school."

"Sort of. I'm studying drafting. I want to design roller coasters."

"Oh," she says, sitting back with a smile. "Malcolm neglected to mention this."

"That's because Cruz neglected to mention it to me," says Malcolm.

"I don't tell many people. It's a bit of a daydream. I haven't been able to go to school two semesters in a row because of money issues."

"Yes," says Mrs. Wolcott. "Malcolm mentioned that, too. And you have a sister who is studying dance."

"Yes, that's right. She's dancing with the Claude Kyle Dance Company for the summer."

"I know of them," she says, nodding. "The Wolcott Foundation sponsors them. They'll be dancing in my late husband's memorial service."

"I didn't know that."

"We're still arranging the performances," says Malcolm. "That's why nothing has been announced yet. We ought to do that soon, Gran."

"Once everything is arranged, we will." She looks back at me. "What about the rest of your family, Cruz? I know your uncle Ricky, and I believe I've met your aunt Cristina."

"There's just my dad," I say. "My cousins and my grandmother, too, but for immediate family it's just my dad. My mom is... out of the picture."

"What does your father do?"

I think, *Not much*, but say, "He's a short-order cook. It's not glamorous."

"Stephen and I used to love diners," says Mrs. Wolcott. "When we were courting we'd end the night with pie and coffee at a diner, most of the time."

"Listening to jazz," says Malcolm, smiling.

"Doo-wop, dear. It was doo-wop. Don't make me older than I am."

Malcolm laughs. "Yes, ma'am. Gran, I have a scheme and I need your help."

She turns that piercing look at him. "Oh? I do like schemes."

"I want Cruz to come to the memorial service."

"So do I."

"You don't need to scheme to get me to do that," I say, alarmed at what they might be plotting. "You just need to ask me."

"But Cruz doesn't own a summer suit," says Malcolm. "I've seen his closet."

"I have a suit," I say, though I haven't worn it since high school and I'm not sure it even fits me anymore.

"I'm thinking a pale, silvery-gray," says Malcolm, and Mrs. Wolcott hums in agreement.

"That will look lovely with his olive complexion."

"But he doesn't like it when I want to buy him things."

"Oh, dear," says Mrs. Wolcott.

"I'm right here," I remind them. "I can hear you."

“So, my scheme is, how do we invite him to the memorial service with the caveat that I’d like to buy him a suit?”

At this point, I just cover my face with my hands and curtain it with my hair as much as I can.

“I ask him!” says Mrs. Wolcott in delight, and thumps the ground with her cane. “Mr. Morales, come to the memorial service as my guest, and we will help you acquire something appropriate to wear.”

“Mrs. Wolcott,” I say with a sigh, and try to communicate silently to Malcolm that I don’t like being ambushed like this. He just beams in reply. I sigh—faced with both of them, I can hardly refuse. I tell Mrs. Wolcott, “I would love to be your guest.” I add, still looking at Malcolm, “And I look great in gray.”

“Oh, I *like* you,” Mrs. Wolcott says, and I blush and hide behind my hair again.

Shopping for the suit is not as bad as I fear. We take a Saturday afternoon and go to Malcolm’s tailor—his father’s and grandfather’s and great-grandfather’s, too, the entire Wolcott family has had their clothes made here since their cattle baron days—who takes my measurements and we discuss fabrics and colors. I get to give more input than I expected, though I find myself deferring to Malcolm because he knows how these things work.

A week later there’s a beautiful suit ready for me, that fits perfectly—falls perfectly to my wrists and the tops of my feet, not too loose and not too tight around my neck and across my chest—in a color that makes my skin glow and my eyes look deep and rich. Malcolm stands behind me as I inspect myself in the three-sided mirror, and puts his hand on my shoulder.

“You’re beautiful, Cruzito,” he says quietly, and I lean back against him.

“Sometimes, I think you’re right.”

The memorial service is the last Saturday in July, at the Wolcott Theater on the university campus. Tickets are free but limited, and were snatched up quickly by family and Wolcott employees. I would have wanted to go just to see Luna dance—being beside Malcolm, helping him through the grieving process, makes it even more meaningful. For everyone who wanted to attend but didn’t get tickets, the service will be simulcast on YouTube.

Before the service begins, I finally meet Malcolm's parents, Daisy and James. Malcolm has Daisy's eyes, and I can see how Malcolm got his height and broadness from James and his square jaw and thick hair from Daisy's side of the family. "We've heard a lot about you," Daisy says to me, and I blush a little because the only thing I can really imagine Malcolm saying is how good we are in bed.

The service is sweeter than I expected. Family members tell stories between performances by groups sponsored by the Wolcott Foundation, including Luna's dance company and a gay men's choir. I hold Malcolm's hand and look at him sometimes, and when he catches me looking, he smiles and squeezes my hand.

And I feel... good. I'm glad I'm here for all the in-between parts.

After the service there's a reception at the Wolcott Building in the rooftop garden, for the family and all Wolcott employees, the building and the construction company and whatever else that I know nothing about. I leave Malcolm talking to some of his cousins and amble around the garden until I spy Mrs. Wolcott, and join the people who come to offer their condolences.

"Hug me, dear," she says and so I bend and do so, gently. "Sit with me for a bit?"

"Of course," I say and sit in the chair beside her. A few more people come to speak to her, and then when we're alone she turns to me.

"Thank you for being there for Malcolm. I do worry about him. He's sweet, but he's unfocused."

"I know," I say with a nod. "He means well."

"He does. He just needs a way to put that meaning into action." She gives me a keen look. "I have a scheme."

"I think you often do."

She smiles, delighted. "Oh, you understand me, Cruz."

"I'm trying to, Mrs. Wolcott."

"Call me Maggie. We can be informal here. Can I enlist your help in trying to give Malcolm a little focus?"

"It depends on what you want him to do."

“The Wolcott Foundation,” she says. “We want to expand to a few more countries, ones that Malcolm is familiar with. It would mean sending him away for a while,” she adds. I bite my lip and spot Malcolm in the crowd—my tall and handsome man in his summer suit, my playful and odd sweetheart, *mi cielo*, my world. “Do you think you can bear that?”

“I don’t know,” I whisper, and my gaze meets Malcolm’s. He smiles and crosses the garden to join me.

“What has Gran gotten you into now?” he says and bends to give me a kiss.

“She wants to give you focus,” I tell him, and move over in the chair so we can squeeze in together.

“Oh?” he says to Maggie, and she smiles.

“I think, and I suspect Cruz may agree with me, that you ought to be the head of the Asian arm of the Wolcott Foundation.”

“I do like Asia,” he says, giving another look to me.

“And you want to help people,” I say. “There must be some worthy causes over there.”

“I know there are.” He taps his fingers on my knee. “Could Cruz come with me?”

“Cruz needs to get back into school,” Maggie says, “and put his sister through school, which is even more complicated.”

“That’s true,” Malcolm muses. He looks at me a moment, then says to Maggie, “I will go to work for the Foundation if you can figure out a way to help the Morales kids to go to college. Cruz, Luna, and Ricky’s kids, too.”

“Hm,” says Maggie.

“Malcolm,” I say. “We don’t need—I don’t want—”

“For me,” says Maggie. “Oh, let me play fairy godmother, Cruz. I would very much like to see a roller coaster that you design, even if I can’t ride them anymore.”

Maggie is a lot harder to turn down than Malcolm. Still, I just look at Malcolm, utterly perplexed about what to say.

“It would mean me leaving for a while,” Malcolm says. “I’d have to actually go to the countries and find the organizations that we can sponsor.”

“Love is patient,” says Maggie.

I take Malcolm's hand. “Come with me,” I say, and say to Maggie, “Excuse us,” and pull Malcolm to another part of the roof—into the fruit tree orchard, so we can have a little privacy.

“I didn't know she was going to offer this,” Malcolm says. “I never know what she's planning. Seventy-eight years old and she's still full of surprises.”

“I adore her,” I tell him, “and I'm crazy about you, and I want you to go to Asia and I want you to stay here with me, and I don't know what to do.”

“Grandpa would say when you don't know what to do, always do the right thing.”

“And when you don't know what the right thing is?”

“It's usually not the easy thing.” He takes my hand. “I want you to earn your degree and get your dream job.”

I say quietly, “And I want you to go to Asia and find some worthy causes for a while.”

Malcolm nods, his expression solemn, and his eyes are suddenly wet and bright.

“Give me a year,” I say. “A year for us to figure out if this is real. Meet me here in a year and we'll... we'll figure it out from there.”

“And if it's not?” he says with a tight smile. “What if I can't—I mean, I've never really—God, I'll miss you, Cruzito.”

“Then come back to me,” I say, and he exhales, closing his eyes.

He puts his arm around my neck and pulls me close, kisses me and whispers, “I think I love you, and if it takes a year apart to prove that, then okay. Okay.”

“Okay,” I answer, my arms tight around him.

And that is what brings me here, to the old Wolcott building on a breezy summer night. The moon is full and low over the lake and the air on the streets is hot, but I know on the roof it will be cool and calming. It always is.

Mrs. Wolcott passed away not long after her husband. No one was surprised, though the grief everyone felt was very real and still is. I still feel a pang every time I walk past her portrait in the Wolcott lobby.

Uncle Ricky still works at the Wolcott, keeping the HVAC running. Mateo got into his first choice of college, and Aron is even talking about what school he wants to attend and buckling down on his schooling to make sure he gets in.

Dad is... Dad. He still misses my mom beyond reason, only now once a week he goes to a therapist and talks about it. Last month, he even went on a date. He was home before ten, but the fact that he put on a tie and left the house is a big deal.

Luna is still dancing with the Claude Kyle Dance Company during the summer and attending the performing arts school during the winter. She intends to apply to a performing arts academy after she graduates. I have every faith that she will.

And Malcolm, my sweet Malcolm, my dear Malcolm... I assume his emails are highly censored, as they focus primarily on the villages and their needs for hospitals and libraries and schools. There must be handsome men that catch his eye, but if so, he never tells me.

That is the only reason my step hesitates as I leave the elevator. If he has done things that make him ashamed, he won't be there. I can only assume he has done what he always has done before, played around, broken hearts, danced away before anyone could catch him. If he has, I don't blame him. He's a beautiful man in a world that values pretty things.

But if he is not on the rooftop, oh, how I will miss *mi cielo*.

I pass through the pool area. An older couple are swimming sedately, their strokes evenly matched. In the deep end, a young man practices dives while his coach looks on. Small children splash in the shallow end, and the walls echo with their noise.

Myself, I've done little aside from study and work. Good words were put out for me and I found an internship with a design firm for the summer. I've learned a lot already, and they've been kind enough to grant me a few days off to enjoy my lover when he returns.

I stop and take a deep breath when I hesitate at the door between the swimming pool and the garden. I know the garden will smell of flowers and soil. I know it will be quiet, high above the noise of the city.

I do not know what else I will find. I do not know what else I will see.

I open the door anyway.

There's the scrape of a chair on the pebbled pavement, and a tall figure stands, silhouetted against the night sky.

“There you are,” he says.

The End

Author Bio

Jenna Jones is the author of m/m romance such as The Auld Lang Syne of Barnaby Sloan, Shaken and Cartography for Beginners. She lives in a small town in the Wasatch Mountains, where she reads, writes and watches a lot of movies. She enjoys her imaginary worlds.

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