

LOVE'S LANDSCAPES



Don't Read in the Closet 2014

ACCIDENTAL KARMA

Katies Crewman

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Love's Landscapes

An M/M Romance series

ACCIDENTAL KARMA

By Katies Crewman

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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[Morning mist background 6](#);

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Photo Description

Two men:

Photo 1: The first is a slim young man in ripped jeans, black T-shirt, and hoodie. He leans on a chain-link fence, fingers gripping the wire, staring out at the camera. His strong face is framed by a mass of wavy, long, blond hair.

Photo 2: The second man is older, perhaps in his late-thirties, with short-cropped dark hair, and an elegant look, despite his sweatshirt and loose, casual jacket. He's turned to his right, smiling slightly.

Story Letter

Dear Author,

Everyday I take the train to school. When the warning lights and signals announce the train, he's there on the platform. I don't know where he comes from, maybe he does the park'n ride (I'm trying to not be too stalkerish). Always gets into the same car as me, usually one seat over and across. Still in his seat when the train reaches the university's station. He's never there on my trip home. I've smiled, he just stares, not a 'fucking fag' stare, I think it's a 'who me'?

Today I went to school early for a study session; I was sad to miss him, there wasn't many people on the platform. I had my board with me, as always, and when I stopped, I heard three claps. There he was, like he was stalking me. I know he probably thinks I'm a kid, but I'm twenty-two and I'm tired of this dancing around.

Sexy goofiness is good, no bdsm, please, very low angst if you must.

Thank you.

Sincerely,

Averin

Story Info

Genre: contemporary

Tags: age gap, grad student, humorous, injury, medical personnel

Word Count: 10,470

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It was all the motherfucking possum's fault. I swear!

Now if you were my dear, supportive dad, you might point out that noodling around on my skateboard on the el-train platform was a pretty stupid move. The thing is, it's not reckless if you're good enough. And I am that damn good. Nine hundred and ninety-nine times out of a thousand it would've been all right.

After all, I've been doing it right here almost daily for the last month, waiting for the train. I've found out where the crack in the concrete becomes just wide enough to snag a wheel. I know about the downhill slope to the north end of the platform. And when the warning lights and signals announce the train, I'm smart enough to pick up the board and carry it. I'm not reckless. But I was also not expecting God to drop a possum on my head.

It was early, and there weren't as many people as usual, so maybe I got a bit carried away. But every trick was working, sharp as glass, slick as ice. I'd just done a casual full Cab when I heard slow clapping. I turned my head, and it was him—the hot guy from the train. I'd figured I'd miss seeing him today, given that I was heading in extra early. But there he was, dark eyes shining with what looked like appreciation. I was so surprised I rolled closer to the stairs than usual, staring back. And then the possum dropped from a tree branch and landed right beside me.

God, I hate those things. It's Chicago, so you see them sometimes on a fence or in a yard. They look like giant mutant rats, all naked tail and pink nose and beady black eyes that stare at you bold as brass. Ugh.

So I yelled. Anyone would have. I'm not girly despite my long hair, but this was fucking freaky! I yelled, the possum hissed and darted in front of me, and I had the choice of running the board into it or turning toward the stairs. I should have flattened that damned possum.

I hit the top of the stairs trying to pop my board and catch it, and for the first time in eons I missed and went headfirst down the steps. And put my hands out to break my fall. Yeah, I know better than that, too—know how to roll with it

and take the damned hit on a shoulder. But between *him* where he wasn't supposed to be, and God doing marsupial-dropping, my reflexes were shot to hell. I hit with both hands, and shooting pains went up my arms. I think I screamed then.

The next bit was a confusion of pain and thumps and the world spinning around, but when it settled, I was snuggled in against someone solid. A deep voice was saying, "Stop. Don't move. Don't try to get up."

I said, "Huh?" then realized my feet were scrabbling, trying to push up like they had a life of their own. I made them stop, and then the pain really hit. I managed not to scream again, but I had to pant though my teeth, little whines escaping my mouth.

The man said, "Easy. Just breathe. When you can, tell me what hurts."

I took a few more wheezy breaths, and then a few more, and managed to say, "My wrists."

"Okay. What about your head?"

I had a head? I tried to pay attention to something other than my arms. Head, yeah, okay. "Not much. Bumped."

A woman's voice said, "Should I call 9-1-1?"

My rescuer said, "Yeah. Do that."

"No! Wait." Broke graduate students don't have spare change for co-pays. I've wiped out enough over the years to know that sometimes the first shock and pain fades to just bruises. Although sometimes it doesn't.

"Make the call," my rescuer said in that lovely deep voice, then he lowered it to add softly to me, "You've broken one wrist for sure, and you have a big bruise on your forehead. You need x-rays."

"Fuck. Fucking damn it! I have a study session. I have..." *An exam Monday and papers to grade and an essay. Hell. Shit!*

"You have to hold still and get checked out." The man's hands on my head and shoulder kept me motionless on my side, pressed against his knees. "You'll just make it worse if you try to jump up."

Belatedly, I realized that this voice and those hands belonged to *him*. The guy I'd watched, morning after morning on the train, one seat over and one across. We'd never talked, never exchanged more than a quick look now and

then, but I'd been aware of him for weeks. I was sure he'd been aware of me too, just from how fast he turned away if I smiled. And wasn't I making a *great* impression now?

There was a shaking rumble I recognized as the train coming in. I managed to say, "I'm okay. You'll miss your train."

"You're kidding, right?" He didn't move, although his grip on my head eased to more of a gentle rub. "I'm not just leaving you here. Are you going to hold still now?"

"Yeah." Experimentally I tried to move my left hand, and *hell, yeah, not moving*. "Ouchie," I said, trying for funny.

"I'm a doctor," the guy said. "I'm going to ease you down on my jacket and take a quick look, if you promise not to get up."

A doctor. It figured. I knew I'd been crushing on the out of reach older guy, but he had to be a doctor too. Although it was a bonus right now. "Okay. Not getting up."

He took his hands away, moved around a little, probably taking off his jacket, and then he slipped it under my head in place of his knees. I had an unreasonable impulse to cry when he shifted me over. I managed to mumble, "Thanks," instead.

"Lie still. I'm going to check you over." He lifted my eyelids in turn with a professional-feeling thumb, then moved his hands gently across my scalp. "Tell me what hurts."

"Arms." He pressed my forehead and I winced. "Okay, yeah, that."

"What's your name?"

"Dylan. Reddix." I tried to think past the ringing in my ears. "What's yours?"

He laughed slightly. "I'm Alasdair. What's your birthday?"

"Huh?"

His fingers trailed down to my neck, pressing here and there, and then over my T-shirt along my spine. "Answer the question. Birthday?"

"May sixth."

"Year?"

"1992."

“Hmmm.” I wasn’t sure if that was in response to my flinch when he got to my hip, or to the fact that I’m twenty-two, which is older than I look. “What’s today’s date?”

“Friday, the twenty-something-or-otherth of October, 2014. I’ve lost track.”

“Who’s the president?”

“The good guy.” I flinched again when he manipulated my ankle, but it didn’t feel worse than your average crashed-the-board bruising.

He moved my foot slightly. “You feel that?”

“Yeah. Doesn’t hurt.”

He wiggled the other one. “That?”

“Same.”

“Can you move them just a little yourself?”

I tried, and yeah, I could, although moving anything seemed to go straight to my wrists. Still, Alasdair said, “All right. That’s good.”

“Will I lose the baby, doc?” I asked.

He snorted softly. “I think that’s unlikely.” The sound of sirens cut off whatever he was about to add, and he touched my shoulder. “There’s your ride, Dylan. You’ll be fine. I’m sorry.”

“For what?” I blinked hard, twisting a little to look up at him, wondering if I missed something.

“For clapping. Distracting you.”

“Hell, I barely noticed you past the act-of-God possum.” Man, even from this angle he was a damned good-looking guy.

The sound of running feet heralded the arrival of the paramedics. The next few minutes were a painful jumble of questions, of being moved carefully and painfully onto a gurney. One paramedic picked up my backpack, and they began rolling me toward the ambulance. I hurt too damned much to protest, but I caught sight of Alasdair over the other guy’s shoulder. I said, “Wait.”

They didn’t listen, but then Alasdair held up my board where I could see it, and I was able to relax and close my eyes. If he had my board, I’d have to see him again sometime.

Sometime was about twelve hours later. I was lying in a hospital bed, eyes closed, wondering woozily how much of this the student health care insurance would cover, when someone cleared their throat from the direction of the door. Since the nurses tended to just barge in and stuff a thermometer in my ear without warning, I was curious enough to open my eyes and look over.

There he stood, my board in one hand. Looking damned hot, and it wasn't just the dizziness talking. Yeah, Alasdair was probably close to forty, but he wore the years fucking well. You could tell he worked out, not for bulk but for lean, fit muscles. I'd watched him for hours, in twenty-minute stretches, and he filled out a fitted shirt very nicely, not to mention the way he rocked a snug pair of slacks. Tonight was even better, because unlike the business casual he wore on the train, he was now in well-worn jeans and a T-shirt.

I rolled my tongue back into my mouth and said, "Um. Hi." Ooh, wasn't I a silver-tongued devil? I licked my chapped lips and tried, "Thank you."

"For?" He leaned in the doorway, not approaching.

"Caring if I was all right? Saving my favorite board?"

He glanced down at it, as if he'd forgotten he had it. "Mm. You'll have to check it. I think one of the wheel-bracket things is loose."

"Fuck. Still, it might be fixable. It's a pricey board, and I'd hate to lose it."

"You're very good with it."

It warmed me that he said so, even though I'd known he'd been watching me, a lot of mornings. "Thanks. It's a fast way around campus."

"You're a student?"

"Grad student."

"Congratulations."

"Yeah, well, four more years of ramen noodles and grading papers, but it's a living."

"Leading to better things."

"Hopefully." I tried to reach up and rub the corner of my mouth, which felt icky and crusted, but I barely moved the damned wrist, and it zapped me. I wheezed, because I had no breath to yelp. Motherfucking ouch!

Alasdair came over quickly. "What do you need? Water?"

I couldn't ask him to wipe my face, but water would be good too. "Yeah. Thanks."

He held a cup, aiming the straw between my lips. It tasted too damned wonderful to make flirty gestures with the sucking. Not to mention I hurt too much to even be thinking of sex. Every swallow was manna from heaven. Eventually I pushed the straw out with my tongue. "Thanks. Really."

He set the cup on the little table and looked at me with kind eyes. "How badly did you wreck yourself?"

"You mean how bad did the possum from hell wreck me?" I wasn't taking the blame for this one. "Broke one wrist. The other is just a severe sprain. At least three weeks in the left splint, six in the right cast." I wasn't sure which was more of a problem, frankly. The cast was less bulky than the straps of the splint and actually hurt less right now.

"Anything else? What about your head?"

"A few bruises and assorted nothing. They're keeping me under observation for a possible concussion, but my head is pretty hard." Thick as a brick, according to Dad. A damned good thing since I'd whacked the side of it on actual bricks.

"Better than it might have been." He reached out as if to touch my face but aborted the gesture. "You're going to have a nice shiner."

I tried a little laugh. "Maybe it'll make me look tougher. That might be a good thing."

"Why would you want to look tougher?"

"Well, I dunno. The hair. I like it, but some people think it's pretty girly. You know, faggy." I said the word deliberately, watching his eyes.

He frowned. "No one who actually looks at you would think you're a girl. And no one better say 'fag' around me. It seems like some of the young guys are trying to reclaim the word, but I'm old enough to just hate it."

Well, that answered half my questions. Definitely gay. I tried to catch his gaze and hold it. "How old?"

"Too old." He backed up a step, which wasn't my plan. "I'm glad you weren't hurt worse. Seeing you go down those stairs was..." I waited to see what word he picked, but he came out with, "startling." Which didn't seem encouraging.

Still, he stopped there, two steps back, and didn't just go. Our eyes met, like they had so many times on the train, held for a moment, till one of us looked away. And met again. After several seconds he said, "So, when do you get out of here?"

"Tomorrow morning."

"Who's picking you up?"

I sighed, because yeah, there was the rub. "No one."

"What do you mean?" The frown was back full force. "How are you getting home?"

"There's this thing called the el-train? Perhaps you've heard of it?"

"You can't ride the train with both arms in splints. Don't you have family? Someone?"

Unexpected tears came to my eyes, because no, I didn't, and the train was just the top of the list of things I couldn't do with both wrists immobilized. I had no idea what the *fuck* I was going to do about it, but I jerked my chin up. "I've been on my own for years. I'll work something out."

"Friends?" he persisted. "Where are you living? How are you going to manage? Do you have roommates?"

"I've got a room in a house. I wouldn't call the lady who owns it a roommate." Mrs. Campbell tolerated me because I was quiet, tidy, and my rent made it possible for her to stay in the little home that her retirement income wouldn't stretch to cover. But I was expected to keep to my tiny back bedroom and be invisible.

"You can't lift anything," Alasdair pointed out, as if I hadn't already got the picture. "Hell, it'll be tough enough just opening doors. You can't cook, can't clean."

"Thank you, Einstein, for that masterful analysis," I snapped, because my arms fucking hurt, and yes, I knew that. "I'm still working on how to wipe my own ass."

"Well?"

He looked at me as if I should be able to solve this. Which I might have, if I hadn't just moved to a new state, a new school, a big department where the grad students were busy and friendly, but not my personal friends. I'd barely

been in Chicago a month. I missed Andy, and Sue, and Gloria, and Cody with an ache that made me nauseous. "I'll figure something out."

"You could hire someone."

I started laughing, because my stipend barely covered food and rent, and I might lose that if I couldn't student teach like I was contracted to, plus I already had more loans than I'd ever pay off, so no, I couldn't *hire someone*. My laugh began sounding odd, and the shaking made my arms catch fire, but I couldn't stop and I couldn't breathe and I managed to growl, "Get the fuck out of here," at him, before I totally lost it.

When I could open my eyes again, he was gone, and a nurse came bustling in and gave me a shot in my fluid line that I didn't want but didn't have breath to refuse. The night was a jumble of restless, nightmare-filled sleep, broken up by having my pupils checked, my finger pinched for oxygen, and my sanity checked. The sanity was questionable, but otherwise I was doing fine. By midmorning I'd been spoon-fed god-awful oatmeal that you could sell for glue, sponge-bathed, dressed like a giant doll, slings had been rigged for both arms, and I was waiting to get my promised discharge exam.

I wasn't sure how I was going to manage. For a few really soul-sucking minutes I wondered if I might have to call my dad after all. But he would insist I come back home and give up the grad-school nonsense if I wanted any help at all. I'd rather put up with a lot more than a few weeks of pain and fuck-awkwardness to stay here and stay out of that trap. I straightened my shoulders. I was resourceful. Innovative, even. And I had low standards for things like cleaning and eating. I'd get by.

The doctor showed up close to lunchtime, by which point I'd been reduced to seeing how long I could hold my breath before my vision went dark. I'd hit seventy-nine seconds when there was a knock on the door. I blinked hard and looked over. A woman in a white coat gave me a dubious look. "Hi, Dylan, I'm Doctor Toma. You're looking flushed. Is there a problem?"

"Oh. Um." I'm sure I got even more flushed. "No, not really. Just, um, hot in here."

"Really?" She came over to my bedside and pushed my call bell. "I'll just have the nurse check your temp again, before we discharge you."

Once we'd established that no, I didn't have some odd fever, she gave me a quick exam and declared me broken-wristed and useless-handed, but otherwise

ready to go. I lied about having someone to help me at home, and they didn't demand details. The nurse went through the discharge orders. It seemed to be a lot of, "*Don't do this with your wrist,*" and, "*Don't do that with your wrist.*" Eventually she stopped and tucked a batch of papers into the pocket of my waiting backpack. "Make sure you go through that with your caregiver, so they know your limitations. And remember, if you feel nauseated, dizzy, have vision changes or confusion, or any of the other symptoms we discussed, get medical help. Your pain med prescription is in there too. Get that filled right away. Pain inhibits healing, so it actually makes you get better faster if you treat the pain."

I said, "All right," and "Uh-huh," in the appropriate places, and slid a felt-tip pen around with my feeble fingers to make a kind of signature on six different pages. No doubt I was signing away my first-born child to the hospital for payment, but then I was never going to have kids. Finally she said, "I'll have someone get you into the wheelchair, and when your ride arrives we'll get you out of here, all right?"

I was about to tell her I'd meet my nonexistent chariot out front when Alasdair's deep voice said from the doorway, "His ride is here now."

I stared at him. "I wasn't expecting..."

He gave me a sideways smile. "I know. But hey, I had the day off, and I own a car. So here I am."

"Why do you ride the el then? If you have a car?"

He looked away. "In Chicago? Driving's a hassle and parking's expensive. Come on, let's get this show on the road."

I said nothing as the nurse arranged my wheelchair, and Alasdair hung my backpack on his shoulder and retrieved my damaged board from the little closet. But I had my doubts about that offhand explanation. Down in the Loop, sure, driving was crazy. But up here in Evanston, it was suburban enough. If I'd had wheels, you wouldn't have caught me riding the el.

His car was a nice Lexus, boring but comfy as hell. He held the door and steadied my elbow as I got into the passenger side, then he put my stuff in the back seat and walked around. I watched him through the windshield. He was wearing jeans again, and they proved he had nothing to be embarrassed about in the ass department. I yanked my gaze away as he got in.

"Where to?" he asked.

I gave him the address, but he just sat there and didn't put the car in gear. After a minute I turned, to find him studying my face. "What?"

"Just. You're really going to try to get through the next three weeks with no hands and no help?"

"I have hands." Even if one was useless and the other almost.

He shook his head. "You'll end up hurting yourself if you try to do too much."

I had to laugh, because that made it sound like I had a choice.

He started the car then and eased out into traffic. I spent the fifteen-minute drive trying to make plans. I needed to e-mail my advisor and let him know what happened. E-mail my teachers and ask for extensions on the papers that were due. Ask how I could take the damned test on Monday with no hands. Ask if there was a way to keep my teaching assistant stipend if I couldn't grade papers for three weeks. Or maybe that was something I could manage, if I wrote slowly with a felt tip. The memory of my signature, scrawled with my wrong hand, didn't make me optimistic. Stock up on ramen noodles. At least those packages were light enough I could probably lift them...

Alasdair pulled over at the curb in front of the house and turned off the car. I glanced at him. "Thanks, man." And realized I was trapped, unable to fit my hand into the door handle. "Could you...?"

He got out and came around to open my door. Getting out wasn't too bad, but then I had to wait while he retrieved my backpack. He held it up, and I winged my sling-supported left arm out in invitation to hook it on. But instead he glared at me. "No."

"What? My shoulder's fine."

"Yeah. Then you get to the top of the steps and have to get out your key."

"Oh." *Fuck*. "Might be smart to get it out first, huh?"

"I can't let you do this."

"Do fucking *what*?"

"I'm coming in with you," he said, "And you can tell me what you need me to pack. And then you're coming to my place for a week or two."

"Now wait just a minute. Are you crazy?" I stared at him. "You don't know me from Adam."

There was a glint of humor in his face. "I'm pretty sure Adam was the guy who offered to blow me in a club last year."

I choked. That was totally unexpected, coming from Dr. Straitlaced. And it definitely meant he was out. And probably meant he was interested. Which would have had me cheering two days ago, but now gave me pause. "Just what did you have in mind?"

He shook his head. "Nothing like that. Look, you're hot, but you're much too young for me. I'm not coming on to you. But I can't stand the thought of you bumbling around, trying to decide whether to use your broken wrist or the strained ligaments to open a damned door."

"I'd figure it out."

"I'm sure. But your answer would probably slow your healing and cause you a lot of pain." He assumed a humorous tone. "I'm a doctor. That goes against my medical code of ethics. I couldn't stand the guilt."

"You don't owe me anything."

"I didn't mean it that way. Just that I can help. And I want to."

"Oh."

As I thought about it he added, "No strings."

I still hesitated. Was it a sad comment on my life that I was certain anything I was offered for "free" came with a catch? Or was that just realism, to be suspicious when a hot, well-off, smart man was willing to give house room to a guy like me? I might have been eye-fucking him for weeks, but it was pretty damned scary to have my hands literally tied like this.

After another silent minute, his face fell. "Well, you don't have to. Come on. At least I can get you settled at home."

"No!" I hesitated. "I want to say yes, but it's tough, you know? I don't see what you get out of it."

"Company, maybe? I've lived alone a long time, and it's lost its charm. I wouldn't mind a guest for a bit."

"I'll be one hell of an inconvenient guest."

"But decorative. Or maybe it's karma." His expression turned inward. "I got help once and it made all the difference. I'd like a chance to pay that back."

That made more sense. I wanted to believe it. "Okay."

"And I wouldn't mind getting to know you. The guy who can be reading Nietzsche one week and Spiderman the next has to be worth a conversation or two."

I hadn't realized he'd taken notice of my books. I'd been looking elsewhere, I guess. "Yeah. You too."

He reached in his back pocket and took out his wallet, flipping it open for me to see his driver's license. "There. Check it."

I peered closely. *Alasdair North*. So Alasdair was his first name. I hadn't been sure, but it suited him. A birthdate of March, 1970, which made him exactly twice my age. An address not that far from here, which fit with him taking the same train. "Okay."

"You can give someone my name and address if you like, for security."

I laughed. "You're the one who should be worrying. A grungy grad-student skater-boy? I might take you for every penny."

"I'm not worried."

"No?"

He smiled at me. "Remember that little kid, four or five years old, that you let try your board for a few minutes when the train was late?"

"Oh." I dropped my eyes. "He was a cute kid. I'm usually not interested in kids."

"Remember the woman with all the shopping bags that you helped carry on the train? Remember how you almost got shut out helping her carry them off at her stop?"

"Um."

His smile got softer. "I'm not worried."

He'd obviously been watching me as closely as I'd watched him. I turned away. "Come on in to *Chez Reddix*. Student living at its finest."

I told him which pocket the keys were in. He let us in the front door, then followed me to my room. When I fumbled with my door, which *was* freaking stiff, he reached past me and opened it. I eased in first, hoping that it wasn't too much of a pit. For a wonder, it wasn't, although I hadn't made my bed before

running out early yesterday. But I'd done laundry Wednesday, so all there was on the floor was one pair of socks—pretty close to the hamper—and a T-shirt on the chair. And the trash had gone out Thursday, so it didn't smell too stale.

I looked around, trying to see it like he would. It was a bare little room. A single bed, to make space, even though at almost six feet tall I wouldn't have minded something bigger. A dresser, a little table with a microwave and mini-fridge. A kettle, because coffee is the elixir of life. A cheap mirror, because sometimes I do care what I look like going out the door. A bookshelf of cinderblocks and boards, with everything from textbooks to comics on it. Not much else. It was fairly tidy now, but when midterms hit, it wouldn't be.

"Looks like my first student apartment," he said calmly. "But cleaner."

"Oh. It's not bad. The rent is cheap."

He nodded. "You have a suitcase?"

"Under the bed."

He hauled it out and coaxed me into telling him what to pack. I'd have done my own underwear, thank you kindly, except that when he'd grabbed some T-shirts and a sweater from the top drawer, he pulled open the bottom one and started scooping socks and briefs without comment. At which point it would have looked freakier to yell "stop" than to let him do it. When we'd packed my schoolbooks, a couple weeks' worth of clothes, and my laptop, he paused. "Clean out the fridge?"

Before I could protest, he pulled it open. There was a quarter-jug of milk, an unopened package of bologna, half a loaf of cheap white bread, and a tub of margarine. He glanced at me. "A minimalist. Well, other than the milk, that all might keep a couple of weeks."

I swallowed back explanations and excuses. "Yeah. You could dump the milk." I pointed to the tiny stained sink in the corner of the bedroom.

He didn't even raise an eyebrow, just poured out the last of the milk, rinsed the jug, and tucked it into the trash, then tied off the bag and set it by the door. "Anything else?"

A sudden wash of dizziness hit me. "Wait. Just wait." I sat limply on the bed.

Alasdair came over and squatted at my feet, looking up into my eyes. "Are you okay?"

I wanted to rub my face but fucking couldn't. "Why are you doing this again?"

"Because you look like you could use a friend. And maybe I could too."

"Oh."

He didn't push, didn't say anything more while I sat there, blowing off the weird wobbles and spins my brain kept spiraling through. *He's crazy. You're crazy. He wants something. You're a suspicious excuse for an ungrateful brat. He has to want something. Couldn't it be pretty excellent, to be what he wants? And if not Alasdair, then who will give a rat's ass if you can't open your door in the morning?* Eventually I said, "I have a few things in the bathroom."

He stood easily, the muscles in his thighs flexing through the worn denim of his jeans, and picked up the suitcase and the trash. "Lead the way."

On the short drive to his place, I kept taking little glances at him. His face was familiar, lean with strong bones and an elegant, narrow nose. His hair was cut short without any special styling, just neat with a hint of curl. If there was grey in it, I couldn't see it. There were a few lines at the corners of his eyes, and the grooves around his mouth were deep enough to be the remnants of years of laughter and tension both. But his skin was fine, his mouth thin but beautifully shaped, and he had those damned musician's hands, surgeon's hands, long slim fingers that I'd dreamed about more than once. He was hot as hell, for all his forty-four years.

His house was small, but set well back in a garden that was landscaped with expanses of bark-chips, big neatly-trimmed bushes and clumps of hostas. There were thick green hedges on each side, so when we pulled up to his garage, the neighbors were out of sight. I felt a momentary flash of anxiety again, but his smile was proud. "And this is what I call home." He drove into the garage, closed the door, cut the engine.

He leaned across me to pop my door, and for a moment we were close together, shoulders brushing, his hair inches from my mouth. But he sat back and got out like he hadn't noticed. "You take care getting out. I'll get your bags."

I eased out, straightened, and bumped the door shut with my hip, then followed him inside. The interior was a bit like the gardens, not large but cool and tidy. The floors were polished wood, the walls a soft cream color, the

woodwork stained oak. It was like no place I'd ever lived, not Mrs. Campbell's little room, nor the crowded dorms, nor the knick-knack filled apartments and crowded townhomes I'd grown up in. It was peaceful.

"Doesn't feel like you could cut loose and make a racket in here," I said flippantly, to hide how welcoming it felt.

His face fell. "Well, I'm not much of a racket kind of guy."

"Neither am I," I said quickly. "I don't know why I said that. Well, I've been told I can get loud in bed."

That put an easier look on his face. "Since that won't be an issue, I guess this might suit you, then?"

"It's great."

"I like it. I've owned it for a few years now. Long enough to fix it up a bit." He hefted my suitcase. "Come on this way. I bet you're ready to lie down."

I was feeling a bit like a used condom, limp and sticky and pathetic. The bed in the spare room looked really inviting, and when he pulled back the covers and helped me into it with his hands on my shoulders, I went willingly. He knelt to take off my shoes, and I lifted my legs up on the bed and breathed through my nose a few times.

"What script did they give you for pain relief?" he asked.

"I'm not sure." I waved at the backpack where he'd set it on the floor. "It's in there."

"We should have made a stop." He bent to get out the paperwork. "Percocet. I'll head out in a bit and fetch it."

"Too much trouble. This is good." I closed my eyes. I wasn't moving off this nice, soft bed anytime soon. *Nice* bed.

I heard him go out and was jolted when his voice came at my elbow. "Sit up for a moment."

I whimpered at the pain that stabbed my wrists, and he said, "Sorry. I didn't mean to startle you. Here, let me ease you up for a second." I felt his closed hand behind my shoulder.

I sat up with his help and opened my eyes. He had a glass of water with a straw in it. When I was steady, he eased his hand from behind me and opened

his fist to reveal a couple of capsules. "Take these for now." He held them to my mouth.

There was no good reason for me to hesitate, except... except. He waited a beat, then smiled. "Suspicious bastard. But that's smart, for a good-looking kid like you. Wait." He left and came back with a bottle of ibuprofen, showing me that all the capsules looked the same.

"I'm not a kid," I growled.

As I finished speaking, he popped the medication in my mouth. "You are to me. Water." He touched my lips with the straw. I drank, and then he eased me down again.

"I hate this," I muttered. "I freaking can't stand being helpless."

Alasdair sat on the edge of my bed. "When I was fifteen, I fell off my horse—"

"You had a horse? I knew you were a plutocrat."

"Big word." He tapped my lip with a forefinger.

If it weren't for the wrists from hell, I'd have nipped at it. "Columbia graduate. Scholarship. Dean's List." Maybe that sounded like showing off, but I really wanted him to take me seriously.

"What major?"

"Psychology, actually."

"Mm. I can see that. You watch people."

I mostly watched you. I just nodded.

"So anyway, I fell off my horse. Tore the ligaments in both wrists."

"Wow, we're like twins. We should totally have hot sex."

He choked. "Not if we were twins."

"What? Twincest is fucking hot."

"Yuck?" He stared at me, looking momentarily at a loss.

"I'm messing with you," I said. "Although if Joel and Benji wanted to take a break from their music and get it on, I would definitely watch."

"I don't need to know who or what that's about," he muttered. "Where was I?"

“Falling off your horse like a total spaz.”

“You fell down the stairs.”

“Maybe I’m a total spaz too.”

“So you want to hear this or not?”

I wanted to bug him some more—to see his eyes flash, and amusement chase across his features—but I didn’t feel up to it. “Yeah, shoot. I mean, talk on.” I almost did the airy hand-wave with that but was strongly reminded not to. “Ow. Fuck. Ouch.”

“Hold still, you dummy.” His palm on my shoulder was gentler than the words though.

I kept my eyes closed and breathed through it, as his fingers gently massaged my shoulder. “Yeah, okay. Talk.” I missed his touch when he sat back.

“Well, there’s not much more to it. Two wrist surgeries, and a month spent with my mother wiping my ass. Plus I’d just figured out I was gay, and I had a bunch of new stroke material. Except...”

I managed a chuckle. “No hands.”

“I got good at humping the bed, propped up on my elbows.”

“Where there’s a dick, there’s a way.”

He smiled. “Anyways, when I saw you at the bottom of the steps, with both wrists starting to swell, I remembered that summer vividly.”

I couldn’t resist. “And decided to save me from having to hump the bed for relief?”

Just like that, I’d gone too far. I could feel him pull back behind some formal curtain of Dr. North-ness. He stood quickly. “You should get some rest. I’ll check up on you in a little while.”

I wanted to protest his doctorly departure, but I didn’t have the energy or the inspiration. Not to mention, nothing of a sexual nature was possible until the pain in my arms went down a notch or six. So I closed my eyes and let him leave the room without comment. Except that as I heard the door begin to close, I called, “Thank you. Seriously.”

I don’t think he answered me.

For the next two weeks, Alasdair was helpful and amazing and distant. Keeping me clean and fed and healthy was awkward as hell, even though he brought me the most amazing device from a medical supply shop. It was a toilet-paper holding, curved forceps thingy for wiping my own damned butt. I could have kissed him, even if I hadn't already wanted to kiss him.

But still there was a lot he ended up doing for me. I found out that he was an ophthalmologist. That made me feel even worse about the nursing stuff, but he said he'd done his share of patient care in med school. He never showed any sign of distaste. Or desire, dammit. I had high hopes for the sponge bath, but he really meant bath. And since I was still too sore to get properly hard just from random touches, it was no fun at all.

The first Monday, he gave me a ride to campus, where I spent the day proving to various profs that I really was walking wounded and negotiating options and extensions. I told them all I fell down some stairs. I didn't mention either the skateboard or the possum. The one made me sound inept. The other made me either cursed or deluded. By the time Alasdair picked me up in the late afternoon, my head was throbbing almost as much as my wrists, and I fell asleep in the car on the drive home.

To his house. Not home. That quiet, comfortable little house with all the green around it was just a temporary refuge. One I was very grateful for. I kept trying to tell Alasdair that, and he kept muttering something about "*Pay it forward.*"

I spent most of the week in Alasdair's study, using his voice-to-text software to write my papers at a slug's pace. At least I was doing something though. In my own room I'd have gone crazy. Or starved to death first, since we found I couldn't even lift a cup of water without dropping it for the first few days.

"You really did save my life," I told Alasdair at dinner Friday. I was carefully raising a light plastic spoon full of food with my left hand, trying to use all shoulder and elbow motions. It was a messy business, and I had an old towel wrapped around my neck. I maneuvered the spoon to my mouth and sucked in most of the chili from it. "I'd have probably been found in my room, a withered, desiccated, ugly mummy."

Alasdair muttered, "And that would be a terrible waste."

When I grinned, he added, "Of a fairly bright mind, of course." But it gave me some hope.

After two weeks things were a hell of a lot better. I was down to taking just ibuprofen, mostly in the evenings when the pain flared up from doing too much all day. Still, I felt well enough that I started noticing the good stuff—the way Alasdair's thighs flexed when he squatted to clean up something I'd spilled, again. The way the lines at the corners of his eyes deepened when he laughed, making him look even sexier. The way his sweatpants hugged his ass when he bent to look in the refrigerator at breakfast.

He was still doing ninety-nine percent of the work around the house, although I could at least look after myself better these days. I did what I could, spending time on the computer, awkwardly one-finger typing and using my pinky on the track pad, to find jokes and humor sites for him, and fluffy news items to make him smile. In the evening, when he was done reading journals and checking case notes, he'd sometimes come sit next to me at the desk and check out the stuff I'd found. He had the greatest laugh, deep and surprised, like being entertained was somehow unexpected.

We talked too, mostly about psychology, which he knew a fair bit of from some med school classes, but also other stuff. I managed to figure out that he'd been looking up skateboarding on the Internet since the first time he saw me, and I teased him about teaching him some moves as soon as my bones healed. He acted appalled that I'd ever get back on the board, but there was a sparkle in his eyes that made me determined to get him on one too someday. Even if he insisted on sixteen kinds of safety gear. I found him some good videos of guys doing hardcore tricks, to inspire him.

He had Saturdays and Sundays off. That third Saturday, we had a late breakfast, and then he said, "I'm going to the farmer's market. Want to come?"

I thought about it, but I had other plans. And seeing him spend the equivalent of a week of my grocery money on two bunches of kale would just wig me out. "Nah. I need to finish a paper." Which was true enough. I always needed to finish a paper.

He looked a little disappointed, which I secretly liked. "Well, I'll see you in a couple of hours then."

When he'd gone, I went into the bathroom and cleaned up as best as I could. I still couldn't shower safely, but I did a good wash-up in the tub—including an attempt at getting my hair clean—and put on fresh clothes. Brushed my teeth. I was trying to comb my damp, tangled hair and cursing, when he came in the front door. He called, "Dylan? You okay?"

"In my room," I yelled back. "Give me a minute."

"I'll put the food away."

He appeared in my doorway before I was done with the comb. I looked up at him from where I sat on the bed. "Hey, find any good legumes?"

"A few." He smiled and came over to sit beside me and took the comb from my awkwardly angled hand. "Here. Let me do that."

I sighed in relief and turned away slightly, so he could reach the back of my head. This wasn't quite what I'd planned, but it might work. For a few minutes he worked the comb through my hair with silent concentration. I wear it past my shoulders, and it has some curl to it. Two weeks of an occasional pass with a brush had left it badly snarled. Alasdair's fingers tugged and smoothed as he worked.

After a while he murmured, "You have great hair. That was the first thing that caught my eye, you know. The contrast between this gorgeous, curly, wild mop and the kind of lean male energy you have on a skateboard. It was damned sexy." His hands stilled for a moment, as if shocked at what he'd said.

Before he could withdraw, I said, "You know what caught my eye with you? The style. The confidence. And the look in your eyes whenever you caught mine. You were sex and control, all wrapped in one package."

"I didn't mean to be," he muttered, but he went back to combing carefully.

"Why not? It was hot as hell. I jerked off thinking about you the very first night."

"You what?" He slipped, digging the comb into the back of my neck, but I managed not to make a sound. "Why? I'm way too old for you."

"Bullshit." I leaned back enough to get my shoulder against his chest. He didn't let me fall. "I'm not some virginal kid. Not sixteen or even eighteen. I'm a college graduate, and I've been having sex with guys for nine years."

"Nine!"

"I was precocious." I leaned harder. His hand was frankly stroking my hair now, though I wasn't sure he knew it. "I've always liked older men. Someone I could talk to, not just screw. I like their confidence and experience. I like being taken seriously. I've always been kind of old for my years."

"That goes with the brains," he murmured.

I winced, wondering if I'd made too big a point of being smart, trying to seem like his match. But he hadn't said it sarcastically. "Maybe. Anyway, guys my own age just don't interest me. But you?" I turned enough that we could look at each other. "You fucking mesmerize me."

For a second we just looked at each other, but when I leaned in, he didn't dodge. I kissed him slow and easy, giving him a chance to say no. Instead he made a soft sound and opened his lips. I slipped my tongue against his in soft exploration. A minute later his fingers tightened in my hair, and he took control.

I admit, sometimes I'd wondered how much experience Alasdair really had. He was so solitary, so self-contained. But someone somewhere had given him the advanced course in kissing. He took over my lips and mouth, hot and demanding. He controlled me with his hands in my hair, tilting my head so we fit perfectly together. When he finally drew back, I had to struggle for breath.

"Wow. Oh God, yes. I wondered if I was just imagining you were interested in me."

"Imagining. Hah." He kissed me again. Then he pulled me in and down tight against his shoulder, as if it was easier to talk to the top of my head. "That first day I saw you, I was hard for most of the ride to work. My car was in the shop, and I hadn't bothered to get a rental. That's why I was taking the train. Then there you were, with the sun on your hair as you rode that skateboard along the platform. The morning light showing off how you looked, how you moved. You and the damned board, all hard, punk tricks."

I couldn't help a little sound of satisfaction. "You liked that."

"Hell, yeah. You were way too young, of course. I figured you for eighteen. I told myself I could look at some straight skater kid for kicks and it didn't mean anything. Then you got on, stuck the board down between your feet, reached into your backpack, and pulled out *Maurice*. And gave me a look over the top of the pages."

I rubbed my cheek against his shoulder. "I remember. You looked startled to catch me eyeing you."

"More like stunned. There you were, hot, athletic, smart, and most likely gay. All the tumblers were coming up a winner. I could almost hear the slot machine bells ringing. And then the next day you were reading Nietzsche. Then

you let that little kid try out your board. Well, it only took the shop four days to fix my car. But I kept on riding the train.”

“Wow.” I tipped my head up to kiss him under the jaw. He’d shaved recently, and the skin was silky smooth. “I’m flattered.”

“You should be.” He hugged me. “I was obsessed and trying not to admit it. I told myself the train was economical. Ecological. I told myself I was studying human nature. Hah.”

“Well, you were. My nature, which was to get on the train behind you, so I could watch your ass.”

“And I watched yours getting off.” He sighed and loosened his grip. “I’m still much too old for you.”

“Fuck that.” I twisted around and slid off the edge of the bed to my knees. I was careful but still grateful when he reached down quickly to steady me. I said very slowly and deliberately, “I have wanted you since the first moment I saw you. And now I know you, I want you even more.”

“Dylan.” He put out a hand to touch my face.

I leaned in to nuzzle between his thighs, and he turned further, spreading his legs. I rubbed my lips over the bulge in his jeans and murmured, “About time I saw this.” I tried to use my mouth to open the button. Well, it’s not as easy as it sounds. Alasdair let me fumble for a minute, then slid his fingers in to flick the thing open.

I caught the tab of his zipper in my teeth and slowly, slowly pulled it down. Arching my neck, humming slightly. Catching my tangled hair in the fucking zipper teeth. I let go of the tab and tilted my head, trying to get free. Instead, I wrapped myself in tighter. “Fuck,” I muttered. “Fuck. Do not distract the guy combing your hair until he’s fucking done!”

Alasdair laughed and worked my hair free. He lifted the mass of it in one hand at the nape of my neck. “Go on, Rapunzel.”

I arched an eyebrow up at him. “You’re wrecking the seductive mood, you know?”

He arched his hips and the hard rise of his cock pushed his fly further open. “See anything looking wrecked?”

“Maybe not.” I bent to run first my lips and then the edges of my teeth along that cotton-covered bulge. He moaned nicely for me. I leaned in, nibbling and

sucking over the head, tasting a first hint of salt through his boxers. But the angle was crap. I said, "Maybe if you stand up."

"All right." He pushed to his feet. I found myself too close in, my face jammed up against his groin. His thigh brushed my shoulder and I began tipping sideways, without a hand to catch myself. My nervous little yelp was definitely not a sexy noise. Luckily, Alasdair grabbed my bicep to keep me from face-planting on the rug.

He stared down at me, and I met his eyes. I'd bet my face was six shades of red. But he didn't laugh. Instead he gripped my arm securely, went down to one knee beside me, and kissed me. "How about a bed?" he said huskily. "And naked. No zippers? No hard floor?"

"God, you're so fucking smart. No wonder you're a doctor."

He kissed me again. "I have plans for that mouth."

With his help, I struggled to my feet, and we both lay down on the bed. Alasdair undressed me first, murmuring appreciation as he kissed my chest, my stomach, sucked over my hipbone. When I was naked, other than the damned splints, he paused.

"Now you," I said.

"I'm twenty years older. Out of shape."

"Bullshit again. I've seen you in a tight T-shirt. I've seen you working out on the rowing machine in the den. You may not have a six-pack, but neither do I. I'd put your abs up against mine any day." I arched up enough to kiss him, even if it jarred my wrist when I dropped back. "In fact, I'd love to put your abs up against mine. But at least you have to let me see you. I've been waiting too damned long for this."

He moved his fingers nervously over the buttons of his polo shirt for another moment, then shrugged and yanked the thing off.

"Oh, yeah," I murmured. He had a very sexy chest. Not built and cut, but a great shape with small, tight nipples and a mat of dark curls across it. "Hair," I said. "I love a guy with hair. I can't believe all the idiots who wax it all off to look like Ken-dolls."

Alasdair bent and kissed me. "Good. Because I'm not waxing even for you." He slid off the bed and stripped the rest of the way while I watched. He looked great. Sure, his stomach had a little softness to it, but just enough to be

mature and sexy and real. His legs were strong, and his ass curved from the base of his spine in just the right way.

“Someday, when I can actually use my hands, I want that ass,” I said.

He glanced at me, looking surprised, but then he grinned. “I think that could be excellent.”

“You bet your aforementioned ass it will be,” I told him. “Now come here.”

He took two slow steps over and slid in, propping up on one elbow beside me. “Demanding in bed?”

“Sometimes.” I tried to wriggle down enough to get my mouth where I wanted it. It was fucking frustrating to move like a spastic inchworm, but he figured out what I needed and got us positioned.

“I can’t believe this is happening,” he murmured as I slid my mouth deep around his cock.

“Wha’?” I mumbled around a wonderful, hard mouthful.

“You, in my bed.” He stroked my hair, supporting my head on his hand. “You know, the Friday morning when you fell, I took the earlier train on purpose to avoid you. I’d decided it was time to quit obsessing. I was going to take the train when you *weren’t* on it. And if *economical* and *ecological* lost their luster without your sexy ass to watch, then I’d admit that I’d been in it just for the view. And go back to driving.”

“Mmm.” I hummed around him. *Damn, I’d almost lost this without ever having it.*

“But then there you were.” His hips were starting to pump, slow thrusts that pushed his cockhead deeper over my tongue. I tasted more salty-sweet precum and sucked harder. Alasdair groaned “And then you fell.” The breathless edge of his voice was sweet to hear. “And I just about had a heart attack. And then you needed me.”

I pulled off to say, “And wanted you.” I tongued into his slit, then sucked him down again. I wanted to cup his balls and rub his taint, but this time I’d have to let my mouth and tongue do the whole job. The way he groaned and bucked as I worked him against my palate suggested that would turn out just fine.

“And wanted. Me.” He was breathing harder now, his hands less gentle on my head. That was okay. I didn’t need gentle. I needed his taste and feel, his

want and need, letting me have him this way. “God. Yes. Dylan. Oh, man, that’s good.” His voice was rough. “I just meant to help you. I was going to stay strong. But you didn’t let me.”

I pulled off again. “That wouldn’t be strong. Just pigheaded. And wrong. This is perfect. Now quit talking.” I plunged deep, sucking hard. If I did this right, he wouldn’t have breath for words. A few minutes later, I’d reduced my sexy, cerebral doctor to caveman grunts and occasional nonsense syllables. He gripped my skull, fucking my mouth fast and controlled, never deeper than I could take, but fast enough that I couldn’t swallow, could only suck and lick and drip and moan and take it and love it. At the last moment he pushed me off and came in spurts on my chin and neck.

He shook, and laughed breathlessly, muttering, “Oh, God! Oh, hell, yeah.” Slowly his grip on my head loosened, and he reached for tissues to wipe my face. “I made a mess.”

“That’s okay. Although I’d have swallowed.”

He eased me up the bed to kiss me. “But until you get tested again, I won’t. And I wanted this to be fair.” We’d talked about that stuff early on, the doctor in him coming out. He got tested every three months, as a medical professional, even though as an eye doctor he rarely dealt with blood. My last test was two years back, though.

“I’m fine with your hand,” I said. I was about ready to hump the damned bed after all.

“I said fair.” He slid down the bed in his turn, far more gracefully than I had. His hand closing on my erection made me gasp and buck. Then his tongue slid up my shaft, and the perfect wet heat of his mouth closed on me. As he began to suck me, proving that he was expert at this as well, I thought that this was the best thing I’d ever known. This, right here. This place, this man, us in bed together. Not just the wonderful climbing tension of his mouth on me, but the sparkle in his eyes. The way he tweaked my nipple to make me gasp, and the way he smacked my butt to make me laugh.

So before the sweet, wet, deep loving he was giving me took me past the point of coherent thought, I decided that the next time God decided to drop a possum on me, I’d have faith that the good Lord knew exactly what He was doing.

The End

Author Bio

Katies Crewman loves a challenge. Especially along the lines of “Can you write a story in twenty-four hours or less?” She happily plunges into the fray, creating guys, scenes, and possums, from the slightly warped recesses of her authorial brain. She has a great time getting them down on paper. The results have to speak for themselves.