

A close-up photograph of a man's torso. He is wearing a dark blue, textured suit jacket over a light purple and white vertically striped dress shirt. He is also wearing a dark blue bow tie. His hands are positioned at the waistline of the jacket, buttoning it. The background is a plain, light-colored wall.

# The Best Man

OLLEY WHITE

*A Love is an Open Road Story*

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# Love is an Open Road

*An M/M Romance series*

## THE BEST MAN

By Olley White

### Introduction

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

### What Is Love is an Open Road?

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 is an Open Road*.

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.

Each year, a dedicated group of Volunteers from the M/M Romance Group work hard behind the scenes to bring these stories to you. Our Editors, Formatters, Proofreaders, and those working on Quality Assurance, spend many long hours over a course of several months so that each Event is a success. As

each and every author also gives freely of their time and talent, it was decided that all edits suggested may be accepted or rejected by the author at any given time. For this reason, some stories will appear to be more tightly edited than others, depending on the choice of the author.

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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# THE BEST MAN

By Olley White

## Photo Description

An image, captured through a partially open window, shows two men laughing. One, in a modern suit and hat, has his eyes squeezed shut and his chin is being grasped by the other. The second man is shirtless. Although the image is obscured by dappled light on the glass, they look to be in their own little world.

## Story Letter

*Dear Author,*

*What is our story? How did I fall for someone so different from me? All I know is he makes me laugh and he makes me feel more alive than I've ever felt.*

Please have fun with the prompt and feel free to take it in whatever direction you would like. I would prefer something sweet, but it's not a requirement. Please, nothing too kinky.

*Sincerely,*

*Maya*

## Story Info

**Genre:** contemporary

**Tags:** baker, best man, blue balls, British, humorous, slow burn, wedding

**Word Count:** 16,941

*Acknowledgements*

I would like to thank Maya for this prompt. I fell in love with the picture and the happiness I saw in the faces of the two men. The two men soon became Robert and Seb, and while they were sometimes awkward about telling me their story, it all came out eventually. When they weren't making me cry (with frustration), they were making me laugh.

As ever, I owe thanks to my family for letting me be absent (in mind if not in body) while I let these two tell me their story.

Huge thanks to SheReadsALot for her wonderful beta skills and all round encouragement, I can honestly say this story would not exist if it wasn't for her. Thanks Nico too, for beta'ing a story I then abandoned. All that work and you didn't even call me names. Mwah. Thanks all round to the unicorns who put up with odd questions and strange ramblings from me on a regular basis. Of course, any quirks I (unfairly) blame on me being a Brit.

And of course thank you to the MM group and the DRitC moderators, editors, proofreaders and formatters, who work so hard to make this amazing event happen. I particularly owe a lot to Jaime—whose turn it was to go comma wrestling for me—every change she suggested improved this story, thank you. And lastly, a special thanks to Raevyn, who must have the patience of a saint. Either that or a very large bottle of wine. :)

# **THE BEST MAN**

**By Olley White**



## Chapter One

*Softly, softly catchee monkey. Or, how do you say no to your best friend?*

*Robert*

All around him, patrons of the Red Lion chatted and laughed and poured yet another pint/glass of wine/cocktail of choice down their necks. Friday night, even in a small town like Newton Lyme, was not to be sneezed at. The end of the working week, and one for the road became something different. A “yay, we made to the end of another week” or an “I’m going to get bladdered tonight” or a “night out with the girls/boys”. Socialising, forgetting, rewarding survival of another week in a godawful job—whatever the reason for getting pissed up on a Friday night, the one winner in this small town was the Red Lion.

Robert though, well he’d rather be anywhere else but inside this quintessential English pub. Anywhere other than with his best friend. Anywhere that wasn’t the place where he was going to be asked to be best man. Again. Seriously, there was a limit to the number of times a person could stand up in front of a crowd and make funny. Especially when that person hated the limelight with a passion.

And Robert did—hate the limelight that is. He was pretty much your typical nerd—or geek, or whatever term was currently acceptable for describing the shy guy who’d rather be doing anything that did not involve large crowds, socialising or being trendy (cool? what word did kids today use?), whatever it was, Robert was the polar opposite.

Sipping from his Coke, he smiled at Benjy and hated himself a little for dreading the question that was coming. They’d been best friends for a lifetime, and Robert knew how nervous his friend was. The stubborn streak inside him that wanted to say NO (but wouldn’t have the guts to) was at least putting up a bit of a fight and making things a tad awkward. Even while he did it though, Robert was not proud of this.

“So, Livvi said yes,” Benjy said, as he peeled the label from his bottle of beer, “an autumn wedding would be perfect.”

Robert offered another small smile. It was about all he could summon at the moment. Benjy didn’t seem perturbed by the lack of enthusiasm and ploughed straight on.

“Anyway, it doesn’t leave us very long to arrange things so I wanted to ask you straight away...”

Robert grimaced. He knew what was coming.

“...will you be my best man?” Benjy swallowed and then rushed on, not letting Robert form an answer.

“I know you swore when Rhys got married you would never do it again. I know you loathed being Ryan’s best man and said Ray was the worst groom ever. I know that Rick’s wedding put you off for life... but I have nobody else to ask. Even if I didn’t want you standing by my side on the most important day of my life so far, I wouldn’t have anyone else to choose. It’s not fair that all your brothers married before me and got to ask you first. You’re my best friend, Robert, and I can’t imagine getting married without you beside me.”

And there it was, the winning shot. You aren’t someone’s best friend for life without knowing exactly how to grab them by the heart and get them to do what you want.

“I’d be honoured,” said Robert... and there was more than a grain of truth in the statement. He *was* honoured that Benjy cared enough to ask, that Benjy wanted him by his side. He loved Benjy with a love that only long-time best friends knew. The kind of love that went from kicking a footie around together at primary school, to entering maths competitions in secondary school, to standing by each other during first bouts of lust and love and heartache. The kind of love that encompassed all the little bits in-between that get forgotten in the grand scheme of *life*, but are the bits that make Robert and Benjy who they are today.

Honoured or not though, he still hated the whole best man gig with a passion. Why didn’t people elope anymore?

“Really?” The doubt in Benjy’s voice hurt a little, if Robert was honest. Even though he understood exactly where it was coming from: Benjy had been the one to hear him moan constantly the last four times he’d done this.

He raised his pint and swallowed down the last dregs before answering. “Of course really. Wow, Benjy, you’re getting married! That’s like all grown up and stuff.”

Benjy gave him a nervous grin, hands still picking at the label on his bottle. “I know, but we are nearer thirty than twenty, Robert. I guess it had to happen sooner or later.”

Robert just raised an eyebrow. The chances of him getting married were slim to none, though the odds were better than a couple of years ago if only for the fact same-sex marriage was now legal. Of course, it didn't solve the whole "finding someone who wanted to marry him" part of the equation.

"You'll find someone..." Benjy started.

"Don't. Just don't." Robert waved his hand as if he could physically stop the words from leaving his friend's mouth. "Don't become one of those couples who think the whole world needs to be coupled up. After the whole Terry thing, I'll be happily single for the rest of my life. It has its advantages you know—I can stock what food I want, read when I want, game when I want, stay in... go out... et cetera, et cetera, et cetera."

"Just because Terry was a complete wanker doesn't mean all men are, Rob." He paused and then groaned. "Ooh god, now I sound like Livvi when she has the girls over. I swear she told Jenny the exact same thing after Jason dumped her."

Rob smiled and winked at his friend. "It's downhill now, mate. First you start copying her advice, then you finish each other's sentences and then... then you dress alike." He pulled a face emulating the soon-to-be victim in a horror film.

"Fuck off." Benjy threw the label he'd patiently peeled off at him and then went to get in another round.

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Robert's end of terrace was quiet when he let himself in, as quiet as it had been since he'd split up with Terry six months ago. Though they'd never officially moved in together, enough of Terry's stuff had migrated across from his damp flat in town that it sure had felt like it at times.

*Not* having actually made it official meant kicking his cheating arse back out of the house was easier, but it didn't do anything to help with the emptiness he only felt on evenings like this. Evenings when he wanted to share the news, when he wanted to cuddle up to someone special and create their own memorable moments. Evenings when he wanted to fuck someone into the mattress.

That was pretty much anytime after alcohol had been consumed. Thankfully, he wasn't a big drinker because a few pints and he was anyone's. Except he wasn't, because he really didn't do one night stands—or steamy

encounters in the loo of the nightclub. It all sounded good in theory, but in practise he'd never quite managed that easy seduction of the quick fuck. Drunk just made awkward *more awkward* as far as he was concerned—and nobody found awkward a turn-on, whatever the hot-geek-romance books tried to sell you.

Desolate and grumpy, he didn't even bother turning on the lights as he headed to his bedroom and tumbled under the quilt. His hand would have to do for now. Again. He let images of hot, sweaty bodies writhing together run through his head, and as his orgasm crested and faded, he fell asleep. He'd regret not showering and brushing his teeth in the morning—but that was six hours away and not a cause of concern right now.

Saturday rose, bright and early and altogether far too cheerfully as far as Robert was concerned. His head was banging—and so was his front door. Or more to the point, someone was banging on his front door. *Naff off*, he thought, before pulling himself out from under the covers and legging it down the stairs.

“Come on, bro, let me in,” called Rhys. The impatience in his voice told of someone who'd been up since the crack of dawn and considered the current time of... Robert squinted at the kitchen clock as he passed... nearly nine thirty to be halfway through the day.

“Fuck you, Rhys,” he grumbled as he opened the front door. “I remember when you considered any time before midday on Saturday a ridiculous time to be out of bed.”

“Yeah, well that was before I had to take Josie to swimming lessons at half eight and drop Riley at footie training.” He spoke with the voice of someone who had been dragged unwillingly into the world of Saturday mornings and was prepared to pull everyone he knew along with him. Suffering in silence was not Rhys' style.

Robert knew there was no point in even trying to make a counter argument, so instead he flicked on the kettle and dropped tea bags in two mugs.

“Late night?” asked Rhys, sweeping his gaze over Robert. That was pretty much the point Robert regretted not showering or brushing his teeth. He felt like something had crawled in his mouth and died, and he'd put money on not smelling much better. Brothers don't count as normal people when it comes to being in an embarrassing state though; they might hold it against you at some point, but there was always pretty much the guarantee that you'd seen them in an equally poor situation. It meant a lifelong bro code of not giving a fuck and keeping your gob shut.

“Benjy’s getting married.” He knew the sourness he felt at the situation showed on his face the second Rhys started laughing.

“Let me guess... you’re best man?”

Robert flicked him the V, then nodded. He fished the tea bags out of the mugs, added milk and sugar, and passed one over. “Yes” was his only reply before he savoured the tannin-coloured nectar that surely was a gift from the gods.

Rhys laughed and started whistling “Always a Bridesmaid, Never a Bride”. Robert contemplated flicking him the V again but decided it was too much effort.

“Best man, not bridesmaid,” he finally uttered when his cup was three-quarters drained. “So, to what do I owe the pleasure of your ugly mug at stupid o’clock on a Saturday morning?”

“I’m making Mum her veggie boxes today, and you, my dear little brother, have been volunteered as help.” Rhys stretched out his legs and grinned at Robert.

“Wha... no way... Rhys.” Robert scowled. “Why can’t Ryan or Rick help? You know they’re better at that crap than me.” He slurped the last of his tea and moved across the kitchen, dropping two slices of bread in the toaster and switching the kettle on again.

“Ryan and Sarah are on holiday, as well you know. Rick is at work today, overtime, and before you suggest it, Ray is not dragging his arse all the way across two counties when you are right here and can help. I’ll do the tricky bits, I just need a general labourer.”

“A bloody mug, you mean.” Robert muttered under his breath, although they both knew he would do it. Their mum had wanted some wooden veggie boxes ever since she’d seen them on some gardening programme she watched.

Two hours later, with the early August sun burning on his back, three splinters in his left hand and a plaster wrapped around a nasty cut on his right palm, Robert was seriously considering taking away the television when he left, lest his mother come up with anymore bright ideas that found him painfully engaged in manual labour on a Saturday morning.

“While I finish off this, can you go and get the compost to fill them with?” It was kind of a rhetorical question as Robert was not going to be able to smooth off the rough edges at the top like Rhys could. Sighing, he grabbed his keys and wallet and headed off to the garden centre. Even he knew better than

to go to any of the commercial giants. Instead, he turned off the main road to a small local nursery that had anything and everything you could ever want garden wise. Including the best advice, as long as you didn't mind waiting and chatting with Mr Timpson, the owner, for a while.

"Ooh, young Robert Carmine, as I live and breathe," Mr Timpson said as soon as he saw Robert wandering through the piles of bagged compost. "How the devil are you, boy? It's been an age since I've seen your face around."

"I'm good, thank you, Mr Timpson. I've just been busy at work." He smiled. "You know how it is."

"Aye lad, that I do. I still don't know that I hold with being shut up in an office all day, mind. It can't be as good as the fresh air of an honest job like gardening." The twinkle in his eye took any sting out of the words. Robert had had a very brief stint working for Mr Timpson as a teenager; it had ended in a weeding disaster. The kind of weeding that was actually spraying all the gentleman's carefully grown... something or other, he couldn't recall. They hadn't been weeds though, no matter what Robert had thought.

"Well, we both know I'm better off in an office than in the garden. Hence the lost look on my face as I try and decide which compost to get."

Mr Timpson moved closer and took the details from Robert of what they needed it for and how much. Rhys had written it all down on a piece of paper as if Robert were still a child, he was used to being babied by his big brother though.

"*Aah*, this one here will be the best for your needs. Three bags should do it." Three bags? Robert looked at the enormous bags and wondered how the hell he was going to get it back to his mum's. The Saab really wasn't designed to be a mobile garden centre.

"Have you got a tow bar on that car of yours?" Mr Timpson asked, correctly interpreting the look on Robert's face. Thirty minutes later found him pulling slowly out of the garden centre with a trailer towed behind his car. He'd tried to explain to the old man that he'd never pulled a trailer before, but Mr Timpson had insisted it wasn't that hard once you got used to it, as long as he remembered it was there and he was longer than normal. Robert wasn't convinced.

The back roads were actually not too bad; he could crawl along until he'd got used to the extra bits attached to his car. Turning on to the main road, though, was a different experience altogether. There were plenty of gaps in the

traffic, but he didn't trust his acceleration rate with the extra load and ended up waiting until there was nothing in sight before he pulled out. It was like he'd been driving a week, not ten years.

Checking in his rear-view mirror that the trailer was still attached, he gently lowered his right foot, speeding up, before shifting up the gears. At last, he got it into fifth and was doing a steady sixty. The trailer was still attached, load intact, and frankly, he was counting that as a win. Finally, he started to relax. The sun was shining, the window was down letting in a lovely breeze, and one of his favourite tunes was playing on the radio. Turning it up, he sang along. *Yeah. This is the life.*

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## Chapter Two

*Crash, boom, bang*

*Seb*

“Um, next left, then it’s the fourth house down the road,” Livvi said, peering at the piece of paper Benjy had scrawled directions on. “What if they don’t like me, Seb?”

Seb grinned. “Of course, they’re going to like you, Livvi. I’m the only one allowed not to like you. Brother’s privilege.”

“I’m serious, Seb. These people are like Benjy’s family, it’s important that they like me.”

“And I’m serious too, Livvi. Of course, they’ll love you. Take a deep breath.” He flipped the indicator lever down and swung the van onto Mill Lane where, according to the scrap of paper Livvi was clutching, Benjy’s pseudofamily lived.

The road was long and tree lined, with fields on both sides and the occasional house dotted in between. Nothing like the terraced two bed that Seb lived in. He was immediately envious; town had its advantages, but he had always fancied country living.

The road curved to the left, and the houses were set back a little. Seb couldn’t tell quite where the house was they were going to, so he slowly pushed down on the brake and crawled along. “Can you see where the place is?” he asked Livvi. “It’s gotta be here somewhere. According to these instructions anyway.” They both politely avoided talking about how the last set of directions Benjy had left them had sent them half an hour in the wrong direction when he’d mistakenly written “turn left” instead of “right”.

“I can’t see the numbers,” Livvi said. “The houses are too far back.”

Seb frowned and turned to look, across his sister, out of the passenger window.

“That one,” Livvi shouted making him jump.

“Alright, Livvi, I am right here, you know.”

“Yeah, well I think you missed it,” Livvi snapped, a sure sign she was more nervous than she was letting on. Seb almost rolled his eyes, then he remembered how supportive his sister usually was and stopped himself.



“Okay, I’ll turn around. No worries, calm down, Livvi.” He checked his mirror, braked and executed a three-point turn his driving instructor would have been proud of. “See, no probs, Bob.”

The road was empty as he pulled up to the driveway and swung in. Following it down to the end, he turned right... and saw a trailer backing up to him about half a second before it hit. A loud crunch sounded. He jolted forward, just about stopping his head from connecting with the steering wheel. Livvi called out, a surprised rather than pained tone to her voice, and he sat still, shocked, for a couple of seconds before turning to check she was okay. She nodded at his unasked question, and they both opened the doors to the van and got out.

Leaving the door open, he reached the front of the van just as the driver of the car attached to the trailer did. The breath left his body in shock, though at that moment in time, Seb couldn’t have said whether it was caused by the damage done, or due to the fact that the man standing in front of him was the most gorgeous man he had ever seen.

“I am so sorry. Fuck. Mate, I’m really sorry...”

The man was taller than Seb, with beautiful hazel eyes currently widened in a look that was either panic or horror. It was hard to tell. Any anger Seb may have felt at the possible damage to his van dissipated at one look of those eyes. Vans could be fixed, no one was hurt. At least, he didn’t think so.

“You’re not hurt, are you?” he asked. The man shook his head. Seb wanted to ask him more—what his name was, did he want to go out for dinner, had he ever considered a relationship with another man. But his mouth dried up, and before he could unstick his tongue, they were seemingly surrounded by people.

“Rob, you pillock, what have you done?” An older man, who was no doubt Rob’s brother seeing how much they looked alike, spoke.

“I...” he floundered.

“Really, it’s not a problem, it’s just a bit of superficial damage to the bumper, a garage will be able to sort it out.” He risked a glance at Livvi who sent him a look of unbridled relief that he guessed was because he wasn’t making a fuss.

“Are you all right, Robert?” she asked.

“Fine, Livvi. I’m so sorry, what are you doing here—oh, and congratulations.” Thoughts seemed to spill out of Rob’s mouth incoherently, as though his brain was ahead of his mouth, and Seb loved it.

“Benjy said he’d meet us here, I thought he’d arranged it?” Livvi said.

“Nah,” the other brother interjected, “Benjy’s family, he doesn’t have to arrange to come round, he just turns up.” He grinned at them both before addressing Rob again. “Rob, you’re going to have to move the car forward so we can see what the damage is.”

“Okay, Rhys, I’m not completely stupid.” Colour flushed in Robert’s face, and Seb’s stomach clenched.

“Seriously, don’t worry about,” Seb called after him. “It’s just a little superficial damage to the bumper and grill.”

Rhys smiled wryly. “Or, unfortunately, it could also be a damaged radiator and oil cooler.”

That made Seb pause. “Shit, really?” He knew how to put diesel in the thing, how to top up oil and water, and check the tyres were legal, but really, that was as far as his mechanical knowledge went.

“Don’t worry, I’ll have a look at it, seeing as it was my idiotic brother that ran into you.”

With a low creak, the trailer pulled away from where it was nestled in Seb’s front grill. The bumper had a crack down the middle, and the grill was crumpled inwards.

Before Seb could say anymore, the sound of another car could be heard pulling into the drive, coming to a stop behind his van.

“Benjy!” Livvi said. Reaching for her fiancé, she pulled him into a hug.

“Hey, beautiful.” He hugged her back. Seb watched as realisation dawned on Benjy’s face that all was not well.

“What the... what happened here?” he asked, looking at Rhys.

“Your best man.”

Rhys and Benjy exchanged looks. The kind of looks that asked “what the hell has he done this time?” The kind of looks that spoke of a long acquaintance and several dilemmas of this kind.

“Mr Timpson thought it would be a good idea to let Rob loose with a trailer.” The look on Benjy’s face said it all really—and Seb had a strange compulsion to jump to the defence of the man he didn’t know. After all, his supposed best friend and brother were doing a great job of knocking his morale.

“Really, it’s not a problem. It was probably as much my fault as it was Robert’s.”

“It really wasn’t, you know.” Robert made his way back and stood surveying the damage with the others. “This is all on me. I was too busy checking I wasn’t going to hit the fence.” His arm flailed in the air, indicating the fence along the left side of the drive. “I didn’t even consider there might be someone else coming up the drive.”

He looked at Seb, apology written in every blink of his eyes. *God, those eyes.* It took Seb a second to compose himself, to stop himself thinking of the soft hazel, not quite green, not quite brown, of his eyes. Of the lashes, thick and dark; of the laugh lines feathering slightly from the corner.

“You never said we had visitors, Rhys, hallo, everyone.” A woman in her early sixties joined them. Robert and Rhys’ mum Seb guessed. “Oh. What’s happened?” She looked at the front of Seb’s van, concern etched across her face.

“Rob!” Benjy and Rhys said simultaneously.

“Rob!” his mum echoed. “You’ll take a look, won’t you, Rhys? I’ll go and put the kettle on. Hallo, Benjy dear, who have we here?”

It didn’t take a genius, Seb thought, to work out where Robert’s scatterbrain train of thought came from.

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Somehow, five minutes later, Seb found himself in a large farmhouse style kitchen, a cup of tea in one hand and a custard cream in the other. Benjy was talking to Rob’s mum—“call me Martha, dear”—introducing Livvi and Seb.

“So, I asked Seb and Livvi to meet me here because I have something to tell you.”

Martha uttered a small gasp.

“I asked Livvi to marry me, and she said yes.”

Benjy beamed, and Seb was once again glad his sister had found someone so special to marry. He was pretty sure Benjy would walk across hot coals for her—and while she wouldn’t let him, because she was perfectly capable of walking across her own hot coals, it was nice to know that her fiancé cared enough to want to.

Martha's small gasp turned into tears of joy, which extended into huge, warm hugs for all of them as Benjy kept explaining. "Seb here is Livvi's brother and will be giving her away, and Rob is going to be my best man."

Introductions and hugs mixed with more tea, and soon platefuls of sandwiches and cake, as Martha eked out every bit of information she could about the forthcoming wedding.

Seb found his eyes kept wandering across the room to the curly-haired, hazel-eyed Robert. Occasionally, their eyes met, and his stomach clenched. He'd never felt more like a teenager since he'd stopped actually being a teenager. Congratulations were still floating around, in amongst bites of ham sandwiches and tea, when Rhys came in and spoke to Seb.

"Looks like it is only superficial damage. I work at Baxter's in town, if you don't mind me working on it in the evenings, I'll sort out the grill and bumper for you. It won't take long, and it's the least I can do." He glared at Rob. "Don't worry about the cost, Rob and I will sort it. Better than going through the insurance company and adding to next year's premium, right?" Seb really couldn't argue with that, but it still didn't feel right.

Nodding, he agreed a time to drop the van off and then got pulled into the conversation happening around them. And if his eyes happened to stray to Robert more than once, well he could claim it was just because he was interested in the rest of the wedding party. Couldn't he?

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## Chapter Three

*A pint of lager and a packet of crisps.*

*Robert*

Friday night found Robert in the Red Lion, again. Twice in as many weeks, this was pretty much a record for him; as far as he was concerned, his pubbing days were long gone. Maybe not quite as long gone as his clubbing days, but a quiet pint on a Sunday was definitely more his style.

Benjy had asked him to come again, said they needed to sort out best man-type stuff. Robert wasn't convinced. Then Benjy said the magic words—"Seb is going to meet us there." Robert's heart had jumped, and he'd agreed to go. He'd tried to sound nonchalant about it, but Benjy had been his best friend for far too long to fall for that crap. He was also his best friend for a reason, and had dutifully kept his gob shut.

Sitting with Benjy, he nursed his pint, doing everything he could not to constantly watch the door to see when Seb arrived. Just because he had a huge teenage-style crush on the bloke didn't mean he had to act like a teenager about it.

"Livvi's chosen lilac and grey apparently, so that means our cummerbunds and stuff have to match. This shade"—he held out a scrap of pale purple material—"is what the bridesmaids will be wearing."

"Benjy, you know I have no idea about this stuff," Robert said. "I get up and fling on the first thing I find. The only reason I wear suits at all is because it's part of the office dress code." A dress code he hated, jeans and a tee were much more comfortable.

"Neither do I mate, that's where Seb comes in." The raised eyebrow suggested Benjy thought Seb might fit in somewhere else rather nicely too. "He's sort of artsy with the cakes and that, so he'll be able to help with this kind of stuff."

"Oh, and here I was thinking you were inviting me along for my charming personality."

Robert jumped. He'd been so intent on not watching for Seb to come in that he had actually missed his entrance completely. Looking up, he smiled at Seb and felt his stomach flip. *Hot damn, he looks good.*

“We totally invited you for your charming personality,” Robert found himself saying. “The artsy side is just a bonus. A bonus I didn’t know about,” he added, looking pointedly at Benjy.

Benjy grinned and shrugged. “Pint?” he asked Seb. “You can ask him all about it while I get the next round in.”

Seb slipped onto Benjy’s newly vacated bar stool and looked around the pub. “Would you believe I’ve never been in here?” he asked Robert. “I don’t very often come into Newton Lyme, even though it’s only a few miles away, never really needed to before.” He looked straight at Robert and smiled. “Though, I have to say, the attractions are definitely making themselves more obvious now.”

Robert felt his face flush with heat. Despite all his affected nonchalance, he was acting like a teenager, whether he wanted to or not.

“It’s not too bad,” he said. “I’m not really a pubs and clubs kind of guy, I’m afraid.”

He felt like he was confessing something. Like every sentence he uttered could make or break whatever this might be. Taking a sip from his pint, he looked around the pub. Round the couples and the groups of friends. He let the hum of conversation wash over him and internally shook himself; he was not here to flirt with Benjy’s future brother-in-law, he was here to help his best friend sort out his wedding.

“Don’t worry about it,” Seb said, leaning in closer and sending all Robert’s resolve to not flirt away. That had to be the shortest resolution in the history of resolutions, and some of Robert’s New Year’s ones took some beating. “Clubs are fun when you’re eighteen. I found they kind of outlived my interest by the time I got to twenty-seven though.”

“So what is it you do that is so arty?” Robert asked, not so subconsciously leaning a little closer. He traced the condensation that was falling down the pint glass with his fingertip as he waited for Seb’s reply.

“I co-own Camber Confectionary with Livvi. We travel to country shows and both local and farmers markets selling our wares. Cakes and metal designs are what we do. Here,” he pulled his mobile from his pocket and flicked through to a bunch of photos. “The metal art is all Livvi, and the confectionary is me.”

Robert took the phone and looked through pictures of contemporary metal sculptures, all small enough to fit into the average sized garden, and then jars and mini sacks full of cake mix.

“Wow, these are great. I bet they’d make great Christmas presents.” It was only part way through August, but (for the first time in his life) Rob was already mentally constructing a list of presents he could get for nieces and nephews—and there was a metal owl he was sure would look great in his mum’s garden.

“Christmas is a busy time for us,” Seb allowed. “It’s the rest of the year we have to keep the books balanced!”

“Got you some crisps, hope salt and vinegar are okay.” Benjy returned, plonking a tray with three pints and bags of crisps in front of them. He didn’t try and reclaim his bar stool, instead standing beside Seb, raising an eyebrow at Robert when Seb wasn’t looking. “So guys, suits. What do you suggest Seb?”

Robert turned to Seb, waiting to see what he would come up with. And if he happened to notice the way Seb’s eyes were darker in the dim lighting of the pub, or that his jaw was covered in a very nice five o’clock shadow, well, he wasn’t to blame for being observant.

“I suggest giving the ‘top hat and tails look’ a miss.” Seb took a mouthful of his pint, and Robert watched the line of his throat as he swallowed. How could that be so sexy? “You’re getting married outside right? So I think too formal would make you uncomfortable and is unnecessary.”

“I like this guy already,” Robert said to Seb, smiling. One of the worst things about *all* his brothers’ weddings was dressing up in monkey suits.

“How about we meet in town and see what we can find?” Seb looked at the other two. Robert, at that point, was pretty much willing to agree to anything Seb suggested. He couldn’t remember the last time he’d found someone so attractive.

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Saturday in town suit shopping was... nowhere near as bad as Robert feared it would be. Seb avoided the three commercial wedding attire shops in town and led them both to a tiny shop down a narrow alley that Robert didn’t know existed—despite having lived here his whole life.

The shop was full to the brim of clothes: suits, dresses, formal wear and casual wear. For fashion lovers, it was a veritable treasure trove. The woman

standing behind a large wooden counter, which seemed to be both a work and till area, beamed as Seb made his way in. In contrast to the storm of the shop, which was full of colour and patterns and materials and a thousand accessories all quirky and unique, the woman was calmness personified. Her dress was a muted shade of green, her demeanour composed, and she exuded an air of quiet control.

“Seb, it’s so great to see you. What can I do for you?”

Seb leant forward and pressed a kiss to the woman’s cheek. Robert didn’t let himself think about how those lips would feel pressed to his cheek. He *didn’t*.

“Hi, Claire. Livvi’s getting married to this lucky guy.” Seb pointed to Benjy. “And we’re after some wedding outfits.”

The conversation evolved into colour and style, and Robert really did switch off from it. He wandered round the shop while the other three talked. In one corner was a rack of waistcoats, some elaborately embroidered and some bright contemporary colours. Another alcove had a display of bow ties that even Robert, with his lacklustre appreciation of fashion, admired.

He’d made his way to the very back of the shop where he was trying on variety of hats and using a mirror to pose in. A fedora and he was Indiana Jones, a trilby and he was Frank Sinatra. He’d just put a pork pie on and was doing his best Walter White impression when a hand on his back and a soft chuckle startled him.

“Didn’t pick you for a *Breaking Bad* fan,” Seb said. “Or a thespian.”

Robert could feel the heat rising in his face; he didn’t need the mirror to tell him he was blushing.

“*Breaking Bad* is the best,” he said, slipping the hat off and putting it back on the shelf where it belonged. “And my thespian dreams died in year four when I fell off the stage during my starring role as Joseph.”

Seb laughed, his eyes crinkling around the edges. “I can beat that: year nine production of *A Midsummer’s Night Dream*, I was Lysander, and the costume department decided tights were the way to go under a short tunic. They split completely as I leapt about the stage. Livvi still has it on DVD somewhere.”

Robert grinned. “Oh, really?” He raised an eyebrow. “I do think I should get to know Livvi better, I mean she is marrying my best friend...”

“You wouldn’t dare!”



Robert just grinned wider. Before he could reply, Benjy joined them, a couple of different suits hanging from his arm. His friend shot him a knowing look before handing him an outfit to try on.

If he had ever wanted to know what it felt like to be one of the characters from *Sex and the City*, Robert reflected god knows how many suits later, he was pretty sure he knew now. Between him and Benjy traipsing in and out of the changing room, it was surprising a rut hadn't been worn in the carpet already. Although "changing room" was kind of stretching the truth. The thin curtain strung up blocking off a corner of the room just about offered privacy.

"I like that one," Claire said. "What do you think, Seb?"

Robert waited for Seb's appraisal. After the fifth time Seb's eyes strayed up and down his body and took in every length and contour, Robert managed to stop blushing. Almost. There was something about the way Seb raked his gaze up and down Robert this time, though, that made Robert feel as if he were standing there naked. It was a look of pure lust, and Robert liked it very much. Very much indeed.

To be fair to Seb, he did also turn and check how the suit looked on Benjy, but although he studied the groom-to-be, it was not with the same intensity he had paid to the best man. Seb was so different from Robert. Not just from Robert, but from everything Robert usually found attractive in a man, it made Robert feel a step out of time with himself—and that was both scary and exhilarating.

"I agree, these suits are great," Robert said. "What do you think, Benjy, does this feel like the right wedding outfit to you?"

Benjy nodded, a look of relief on his face.

Robert's relief at the wedding plans going smoothly disappeared with the next words out of Seb's mouth.

"Well, that's the suits sorted. Next up; the stag do."

If there was one phrase guaranteed to make his heart sink faster than the words "best man speech", it was "stag do".

Damn.

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## Chapter Four

### *Adventures in babysitting...*

*Seb*

A club was out, he knew that without even asking. Strippers also, not so much. For one thing, Livvi would kill him if he let a half-naked woman anywhere near Benjy. For another, he had absolutely no interest in seeing women strip—though to be honest, he wasn't all that interested in the idea of a male stripper either. He liked his men stripping just for him in the privacy of a bedroom.

“Stag do?” Robert repeated as Benjy finished finalising the suit details with Claire.

“Yeah. I know it's part of your duties to organise it and everything, so tell me to back off if I'm overstepping the mark here. I wondered, though, how you felt about go-karting?”

“Go... karting...?”

“Yep, you know, little karts that race round a circuit.”

“I know what a go-kart is,” Robert said. “It just isn't something I'd have thought of for a stag do.”

“I've been a few times and noticed one of the things they offer is a stag event. I didn't think Benjy seemed like a club or stripper kind of bloke.”

Robert laughed. “That is definitely true. Karting isn't something I would ever have thought of, but it sounds absolutely genius to me.”

“*Sshh.*” Seb nodded to where Benjy was making his way over to them. “I'll get your number and ring you to make arrangements, okay?”

Robert smiled his thanks, and they changed the subject, listening to Benjy pass on all the details of suit related information, which Claire had shared with him.

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When Seb wrote down Rob's number, he'd been thinking of it as an excuse to get in touch with him again. Normally, he wasn't shy, and if he wanted something—or someone—he just went for it. It felt different with Robert though, for a couple of reasons.

The second he'd looked into his hazel eyes, wide with the horror of having crashed into the van, he'd been smitten. Apart from being the sexiest man Seb had ever seen, in a totally-not-aware-of-it way, tall and uncomfortable with it, hair that curled in every direction, brownish-green eyes to drown in... he was utterly, endearingly, scatty. Yep. Seb was smitten. And a smitten Seb was one that wanted sex. A lot. Lots of sex, a lot.

Even Seb wasn't stupid enough to let his lust-filled groin potentially ruin his sister's wedding though. He loved Livvi too much for that. His usual course of action—find 'em, fuck 'em, forget 'em—wasn't going to work with Rob. He still wanted to see the other man, even without the possibility of some quick—or slow, definitely slow—bedroom action in the near future.

So, with number in hand, he thought he'd call in a few days regarding the karting. Maybe see if he could swing arranging a meetup to smooth out the details. What he hadn't expected was to see him, polish cloth in hand, when he went to pick his van up from Baxter's with Rhys sitting, feet up, drinking a mug of tea and helpfully pointing out the areas Rob had missed.

The van looked pretty damn good, Seb thought. Though not as good as Rob did with a smudge of something across his nose and wearing a pair of overalls clearly a size or two too big.

“You didn't have to do that.” Seb walked over to Rob.

“Yeah. He did.” Rhys piped up from where he was sitting, a smirk on his face that made Seb glad he didn't have older brothers.

“No, you really didn't. It was absolutely due a clean and valet anyway.”

“It's all done,” said Rob, wiping a hand across his brow and leaving another streak of dirt. “It was the least I could do seeing as I was the one who backed into it. I couldn't fix it, so—” he shrugged “—when Rhys suggested polishing where he'd worked on it, I thought I may as well do the whole lot. I hope you don't mind.” A look of panic flitted briefly across his face, as though he was worried he'd done something wrong.

“Mind? I could kiss you.” Seb didn't linger on *that* thought. “I've been meaning to book it in somewhere for ages; you really didn't need to do it, but it looks amazing.” And it did. It sparkled, the Camber Confectionary signage bright, and the company phone number fully visible again.

“The repairs were easy enough, so there shouldn't be any problems. Just bring it back if there are.”

“Thank you. How much do I owe you?”

“Nothing. If my twat of a brother hadn’t run into you, there wouldn’t have been anything to repair. The bill is completely Rob’s.”

Seb turned and looked at Rob. “I can’t let you pay for it; honestly, accidents happen, right?”

Rob smiled; it lit up his whole face before he raised an eyebrow and said wryly. “Don’t worry, no actual money exchanged hands, I just owe him in babysitting for the next...”

“...all of eternity. Starting this Friday,” Rhys butted in. “I love my kids, but I need some quality alone time with my wife, if you know what I mean.”

“*Ugh*. I really don’t want to know what you mean,” Rob said.

Seb grinned. “Eternity seems slightly extreme.”

“You try having a kid who won’t stay in their own bed at night, then you tell me it’s extreme. My balls are so blue, they’re indigo.”

“That is way too much information,” Rob said, blushing.

Seb just laughed, feeling a touch of pity for Rhys. “That I can understand. Maybe I can join you, Rob, and we can sort out the stag do properly. If Rhys doesn’t mind? I know nothing about kids though; be warned.”

“Fine by me,” said Rhys, raising his hands. “As long as the house is still standing when we get back and I’ve had some *alone time* with Zoe, I’m more than happy.”

“You really don’t have to,” said Rob. He hesitated. “But it would be great if you wanted to. We could make all the stag do arrangements, and I wouldn’t be the only victim of Josie’s hair salon.”

Seb frowned and then decided not to ask. It meant he got to spend Friday with Robert.

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Josie’s hair salon... Yeah, apparently he should have asked. Though one look at Rob curled up in a hysterical ball on the settee almost made the humiliation of having his own blond locks covered in glitter gel and spiked with various brightly coloured hair accessories just to finish it off worth it. Almost.

“He looks great; doesn’t he, Uncle Robert?” Josie was a five year old menace. The devil disguised as an angel.

“The best, Josie. In fact, I think we should take a photo so we can always remember when he looked this good.”

“Don’t you dare.” Even as Seb said it, he knew he only sounded half-hearted—he liked the idea of Rob having a photo of him, even it was one of him looking like a right prat. It was too late anyway; Rob had whipped out his phone and snapped a photo before the protestation had left Seb’s lips. “That had better not end up on Instagram...”

Rob just grinned and then climbed off the settee and scooped up his niece. “Say goodnight to Seb, Josie; it’s time for princesses to go to bed.”

“That didn’t take long.” Seb was surprised when Robert descended the stairs less than ten minutes later. The fact that he was leaning over the kitchen sink, using washing-up liquid to try and rid his hair of the glitter Josie had so liberally applied, was only slightly awkward. “Sorry, I know I’m making a mess,” he said as water splashed onto the side, “I’ll clear it up. This is trickier than it looks.”

“You could have used the shower, you know,” Robert said, laughing. “Also, I’m not sure washing-up liquid is the best thing for your hair.”

“I didn’t want to disturb Josie. I didn’t know how long she’d take to settle.” Seb filled the cup he was using to rinse his hair with warm water and tipped it over his head—then cringed when he felt the water splash over the kitchen counter and draining board.

“Just hold on a sec,” Robert said behind him before leaving the kitchen, and judging from the way his footsteps hit each carpeted tread lightly, darting upstairs. He was back in a jiffy, taking the tea towel Seb had placed around his neck away and wrapping a fluffy bathroom towel there instead.

“Give me that cup,” he said. Seb stood still while Robert filled the cup again and carefully tipped the water over Seb’s head. The water landed where it was supposed to that time, seconds later the smell of pine filled the kitchen, and Robert’s strong fingers were rubbing through his hair.

God, how could a pair of hands feel so good? Robert had a way of rubbing his head in that perfect zone between too rough and too light. It felt so good.

Seb couldn’t help the groan that escaped his lips. He squeezed his eyes shut and hoped that Robert hadn’t heard him. He was chatting on about Josie settling

well because Riley wasn't here to wind her up. Oh, and he might have promised her she could give Seb another makeover soon.

Managing to assemble his thoughts a little, Seb said, "Oh no, I think next time, it's definitely Uncle Robert's turn."

Robert chuckled as he rinsed the shampoo out and wrapped the towel around Seb's head. Seb missed his hands already. "Maybe," Robert conceded. "I bet I rock the guyliner look!"

Seb agreed. He agreed a lot and would probably use that image later for some alone time.

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"This is the place I was thinking of," Seb said when they'd managed to clean the kitchen up and Seb's hair had been towel dried.

"Let's have a look." Robert settled onto the settee beside Seb so he could see the laptop. Seb started as their knees brushed together, causing his laptop to wobble. He and Rob both reached for it, and their fingers touched. Electricity zipped through Seb. He wasn't used to this... this tension. He'd never fancied someone and not just gone for it. There wasn't another person on this planet he would put a stop on some potential nooky for, nobody but his sister.

Forcing himself to take a breath and ignore the volcano building in his centre, he talked Rob through the different karting packages and helped him list the pros and cons of each.

It took longer than he expected to hash out the details, but between them they worked out what was, hopefully, going to be the perfect stag do.

"He will love it." Robert leant back and sighed. "I'm so glad you thought of it, I would probably have just got his mates to meet down the Red Lion or something."

Seb chuckled. "Going out isn't really your thing, is it?"

Shrugging, Rob swung a leg onto the coffee table in front of him. "I don't dislike going out per se, but clubs tend to be full of drunken idiots—young drunken idiots at that. It was fun at eighteen; the novelty has definitely worn off now though."

"*Aaah*. Yes, the folly of youth, when a hangover is just a blip in the morning and not an entire day with a headache. Who needs clubbing when you can put on a warm pair of slippers, drink a nice cuppa, and watch *Corrie*."

Rob glanced down at the hand he'd stretched out to reach for his cup of tea and snorted. "I'm not quite ready for *Corrie*... but you can't deny the sensibility of a decent pair of slippers." He arched an eyebrow, and Seb felt a little bit of his heart give up and surrender.

He sniggered at the image of Rob in a flat cap and crochet shawl sipping tea and moaning about the younger generation. "We're not quite over the hill, yet, mate."

"I know. Seriously though, I'd rather have an evening in the pub, or go to the pictures, or to the beach, or for a hike. Pretty much anything appeals to me more than clubbing."

Was Rob flirting? Was he suggesting, albeit in a roundabout way, that they go on a date? Seb liked the idea of sitting in a darkened cinema with Rob, sharing a tub of popcorn. He also liked the idea of walking along the beach with him. Or hiking. Or having a quiet pub meal together. Even as he felt more of his heart mush up, he realised this was way out of character for him. He wasn't a slut, not by a long shot, but he definitely enjoyed a hook up more than dating. Something about Rob, though, made him want to get to know him better. Was it just that he'd put him off limits for Livvi's sake? The kind of want-what-you-can't-have syndrome. Or was he developing genuine feelings for Rob? Feelings he'd not really contended with before?

"Maybe, when this wedding is over, we can do one of those things?" Seb's heart leapt into his throat even as the words fell from his mouth. He forced himself to look at Robert, to try and gauge his reaction. The faint blush that tainted Robert's face and neck was definitely good, he decided.

"I'd like that," Robert said quietly.

Two months. Seb could wait that long. Couldn't he?

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## Chapter Five

### *Going stag...*

#### *Robert*

The smell of petrol pervaded the air, and conversation trackside had to be loud or it was swallowed by the revving of engines; it was without doubt the best stag do Robert had been to. Hands down. No contest. *Ding, ding, ding, we have a winner.* And he was pretty sure he was not alone in his thoughts. Seb was a genius.

Rob looked around at the group, careful not to let his eyes linger too long on Seb. Or, to be more precise, careful not to let his eyes linger too long on the sight of Seb in his overalls. Because Robert didn't realise he had a thing for men in overalls until he'd seen Seb in them. Now though. Now he knew—and was thankful for his own set of overalls to disguise just how interested he was.

Go-karting was bringing out the competitive side in the men. Even Shy Patrick, whose nickname kinda gave away his personality type, was getting into the winning spirit. They'd already done practise laps and were now in the last laps of an elimination race. It was Benjy and Ryan, Robert's younger, oh-so-competitive brother, in the final lap.

Everyone else had driven competitively until they'd come up against Benjy; then, by unspoken agreement and varying margins, they'd let him win. With some, like Robert, there was no actual "letting" involved. Driving just wasn't his thing—it was fun though. Ryan, on the other hand, was a competitive little shit. They were neck and neck in the last corner. A few of the lads were calling out for Benjy; Robert was willing Ryan to just let his foot off the throttle a little, for all the good it would do.

Then, just before they crossed the line, Ryan lost control of his car and skidded into a tyre wall. A marshal was there within seconds, and Ryan climbed from the kart and waved to let them know he was okay. The lads cheered for Benjy, who, once he'd removed his skid lid, looked for all the world like the cat who'd got the cream.

Seb looked over at Robert and grinned. "He did that on purpose, didn't he?" Seb asked, sidling up beside him.



“I wouldn’t put it past him,” Robert admitted. “It would be his style to seem like he was going to win and give at the last second. Benjy won’t realise and will think he genuinely won.”

They walked over to Benjy and gave him congratulatory slaps on the backs, like all the guys were. Then they waited while the organisers handed out certificates, and a cheap winner’s cup to Benjy, before heading in to get out of their overalls and helmets.

The room they’d hired at the track for the meal and booze part of the do wasn’t posh—but it was nice. Tables, a bar and an array of comfier seats was all there was. But really, it was all they needed. MTV was playing on a huge widescreen TV on one wall. Seb followed Robert to the bar.

“It’s going okay, isn’t it?” he asked as they waited for their drinks.

“Better than okay,” Robert said. “Thanks, Seb, I’d never have thought of this, and I certainly appreciate your organisational skills.”

“No problem at all. It’s been fun. Well, except maybe the makeover...”

“Aww, don’t say that, Josie’s been asking Rhys when Uncle Robert’s friend can come and have his hair done again.” Robert grinned. “You’ve got to admit, you *did* look good.”

“Fantastic,” Seb intoned. “Move over, Gok Wan, hey?”

They took their beers over to Benjy and the others. “Having fun?” Seb asked the group as though he’d known them his whole life and not just met some of them a couple of times.

“The best,” answered Benjy. “I couldn’t have thought of better if I’d planned it myself, Robert. Thank you.” He reached across and pulled Robert in for a hug. “I knew I’d chosen the right best man.”

“As much as I’d like to take the credit,” Robert said, slapping Benjy on the back before releasing him from his grip, “I really can’t. It was all Seb’s idea. I agree though, it’s been a fab day.”

“Well, thank you, Seb. Obviously I’ve chosen well in the brother-in-law department!”

“Well we toyed with the idea of a strip joint, but I wasn’t sure who Livvi would kill first in that situation: me, you, or Robert.”

Benjy looked at Seb and then at Robert; then with an exaggerated wink, he said to Seb, “I can see why you didn’t want to take that risk.”

Even if he wasn't staring at Robert with exaggerated eyebrow action, Robert would have understood what he was implying. A blush crept up his face, but Seb just laughed and said, "Exactly."

Robert's heart thumped. Did that mean Seb was interested in him? He hadn't really given any indication of that... or maybe he had, and Robert was just putting the touches and shared looks down to Seb's outgoing personality. He didn't have time to ponder it though, as waitresses started setting out the buffet and encouraging the guests to fill their plates before finding a seat.

He found a seat next to Seb. Though he'd worked out that Seb was the kind of bloke who never met a stranger, Robert still felt an obligation to stay with him as one of the few people he actually knew. At least, that was the excuse Robert was telling himself as he pulled his chair in.

He didn't get much chance to talk to Seb though, as Rhys sat next to him and monopolised the conversation. It was nice; he didn't see as much of his brothers as he'd like really, but his entire being was conscious of where his thigh was brushing against Seb's with every little movement.

Rhys suddenly stopped midsentence. Robert couldn't really say what Rhys had been talking about because Seb had just shifted a little, and their legs had momentarily intertwined. Rhys looked at him for a second, eyebrows drawn looking between him and Seb. Robert's heart spiked as he saw the dawning realisation on his brother's face.

He shook his head, willing Rhys—who wasn't known for his subtlety—to keep his gob shut. Kicking him under the table, he glared and started talking very determinedly about what Rhys was going to wear to the wedding and whether Josie was going to be at the ceremony or just the reception.

The smirk that spread across Rhys' face was not particularly reassuring, but he did go along with Robert's change of conversation, and Robert supposed that was at least something to be thankful for.

Robert reached for the bottle of red wine, pouring a glass full, hoping it would settle his nerves a little. The longer Rhys kept his mouth shut, the easier Robert felt. It had nothing to do with the glass that kept getting filled and was so easy to drink down.

At some point between the main buffet and the dessert buffet, Robert found himself in conversation with Seb. It was easy, natural, as though they'd been friends for years.

“Tell me about Camber Confectionary,” Robert said, leaning towards Seb so he could hear over the loud buzz of conversation and music.

“There’s not much to tell, not really.”

“Are you kidding me?” Robert let his mouth drop open in exaggerated surprise. “You own your own business. At any time that is impressive, but with the way the economy has been over the last few years, it’s pretty amazing.”

“Actually, believe it or not, I think the downturn in the economy really helped us. People still wanted nice things, and we kept our prices super low when we started. We essentially worked for just enough to pay our basic bills. We appealed to the crowd who wanted to go upmarket and could no longer afford it. It was all Livvi, really, with her bespoke garden art. She’s very talented.”

“But you make cakes, right?”

“No. Jars of cake mix. I fill jars with the ingredients for various cakes and cookies and attach the recipe. I pretty up the jars and, voila, great presents. I usually try out different recipes at home, and if they’re successful, add them into our selection. I bake samples and take them to the shows and markets, a kind of try-before-you-buy enticement.”

“I bet you have some very long hours?” Robert asked, sipping some more wine.

“Long hours and lots of travel. But the plus side is we also can have several days between markets. All the holidays are busy, especially Christmas, but that is a good thing. I love that we’re our own bosses, and Livvi is a dream to work with. She just wants to do the art really, so I get to arrange everything else.”

“Sounds way more interesting than what I do,” said Robert. Which was true, but he still loved his job with the council. It might not be the most popular place to work, but he liked to think that he was helping people with what he did every day. “Shall we go and get dessert?”

The table was laden with pretty much every dessert imaginable. Which, for sweet-toothed Robert, was a dream come true.

“How do I choose?” he moaned, looking at a lemon cheesecake and then a bowl of Eton mess.

Seb laughed. “It’s only dessert, Rob. Not a life changing decision.”

“How wrong you are,” said Robert while eyeing a chocolate mud cake.

“For god’s sake Robert, it’s only food.” Rhys and Ryan were standing behind him. “You’re better off just choosing something for him”—Rhys directed this remark to Seb—“or you’ll be here a long time.”

Seb seemed to think this over. “What are your favourites, Rob?”

Robert shrugged. “Maybe the lemon cheesecake and the Eton mess.”

Seb grabbed two bowls, piled one with lemon cheesecake and one with the meringue marvel that was Eton mess. “Come on,” he said.

“Wow. You really are bad at decisions, huh?” He slid into his seat and placed both bowls between them and passed Robert a spoon. “We can share,” he added before diving into the Eton mess.

Robert followed his example, more than a little thrilled at the intimacy of leaning close and sharing dessert. They were soon down to the last few bites of cheesecake, and Robert won the battle of the spoons, scraping his round the bowl making sure every last crumb was his. He raised his eyebrows at Seb, laughing at the exaggerated pout Seb was sporting. Slowly he lifted the spoon towards his mouth, teasing Seb with moans about how delicious it was going to be. At the last minute, he widened his grin and offered the spoon to Seb. Seb smiled and wrapped his hand around Robert’s on the spoon handle, guiding it towards his mouth.

*Damn.* The way he wrapped his lips around that piece of silverware and slowly sucked the pudding from it left Robert in no doubt that he would, one day, like those lips wrapped around his cock.

Seb’s gaze locked with his. His hand, still clasped around Robert’s on the spoon handle, tightened imperceptibly. His thumb slowly stroked the underside of his hand. Shivers wended their way down Robert’s spine. The room was crowded and noisy, full of stags well on their way to getting drunk, but for Robert there was only Seb. Seb, with his sense of humour, sparkling eyes and the world’s best organisational skills.

He lowered the spoon slowly, trying not to break Seb’s grip with his hand. Fuck. The things he wanted to do Seb. Starting with his mouth. That plump, luscious mouth. Then his neck... Robert could imagine kissing Seb’s neck, sucking and marking it with his teeth. He would leave his mark, let the world know he’d been th—

“Rob.” Seb’s voice was low and for Robert’s ears only. “Do you want to get out of here?” There was no mistaking the implication in Seb’s question. And

Robert did; he wanted nothing more than that. He nodded, not trusting his voice to form a coherent sentence; all of his being was consumed with want. Seb let go of his hand, and he dropped his spoon into the bowl with a clatter. He was just pushing his chair away from the table, certain his eyes reflected the lust he saw in Seb's, when Benjy clapped him on the back and dropped into the chair beside him.

Sometimes the fates really were just arseholes.

“Hey, Benjy. Having fun?”

“The best.” Benjy leaned forward and swept him into a bear hug. “I don't know how you managed it, Robert, but this really has been the best day of my life. Soon to be topped of course by my wedding day, but still it was pretty special.”

Robert forced himself to smile. “Like I said, it's really Seb you have to thank. You know me, couldn't organise a piss-up in a brewery.”

“It was teamwork,” Seb chimed in, his hand squeezing Robert's knee under the table. “I'm glad you're having fun, Benjy. I'll leave you two to talk, best man and groom.” Then he stood up and walked away. Robert's heart ached. His groin ached. He was half hard and tipsily lust filled. He forced himself to remember that today was about Benjy. About his best friend's upcoming wedding.

It took pretty much all his willpower not to get up, follow Seb across the room, and snog him in front of everyone. Taking another sip of wine, he let himself concentrate on Benjy. If it was anyone else, he probably wouldn't have succeeded, but Benjy had been with him through thick and thin pretty much his whole life. Robert wasn't going to drop Benjy at *his* stag do just because he was feeling horny.

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## Chapter Six

*The devil and the deep.  
Or, the person most likely to eff up your love life is you.*

*Seb*

The litany of words that spewed from Seb's mouth as he showered the next morning would have made a sailor blush, and it wasn't because the water jetting down on him was nowhere near warm.

If it wasn't for Benjy, he'd have gotten to know Robert so much better last night. So. Much. Better. And he wanted that more than anything else at the moment. He did. But now he was sober and under the spray of an *icy* shower, his big head was doing the thinking, and it was telling him how making a move on Robert was not a good idea. Livvi was too important. Awkward after-sex interactions between the best man and the one who was giving the bride away would not for a happy wedding make.

Turning off the shower, he grabbed a towel—glad for its line-dried roughness—and briskly rubbed himself dry. It wouldn't do him any good to think about what might have happened, *what he wanted to happen*. He'd spent the night switching between cursing Benjy a blue streak and thanking him for interrupting. Then he'd remembered the way Robert's eyes had lidded with lust, and he'd tossed off, coming at just the thought of Robert with him.

Now though, now he had a market to get to. Not the best timing the morning after a stag do, but probably exactly what he needed to stop him dwelling on thoughts of Robert. Customers, other traders and, of course, Livvi with her wedding chatter would be enough to take his mind off Robert.

He hoped.

Setting up at a market was actually one of his favourite bits, but in deference to his late night, Livvi had taken on the setting up, and when he rolled up at eight o'clock, the market was already buzzing with early morning customers. Sliding behind the stall, he dropped straight into his trader role, selling the goods he loved.

"Did you have a good day?" Livvi asked when they finally had a lull.

"It was great," Seb said as he arranged the samples he had left to look more tempting. "Benjy seemed to enjoy it."

“Any strippers?” Livvi asked casually, fiddling with one of the owl ornaments that were proving popular at the moment.

“Liv, would I do that to you? Or to Benjy? I want him to have use of his knackers on his wedding night.”

Livvi laughed. “Good point, well made.”

“The racing was fine though; it was really fun. Benjy won, naturally.”

“Naturally,” said Livvi. “I ain’t marrying no lame arse.”

“I won’t tell you that there may have been a little fixin’ going on then.”

“As long as he didn’t figure it out, I don’t give a damn,” Livvi said without missing a beat.

Seb just smiled his agreement. The lull in the market would disappear at twelve when the lunch crowd popped in. He really loved the market. It may seem a chaotic place, but at its heart was a well-oiled machine made up of stall holders and professional marketers—a sadly dying breed. Salt of the earth types, they would probably be described in a novel, which always conjured a picture in Seb’s head of hardworking but uneducated villagers.

Nowadays, though the hardworking part was certainly true, the lack of education most certainly wasn’t. Marketing strategies, super-fast calculations, product placement, sales techniques... they were in the tool kit of every trader. It was part of what Seb loved about his job. Taking a product people didn’t know they wanted and selling it to them. Brightening days.

He usually loved the customer interaction, but today he was only thankful for the way it stopped him from thinking.

“The slipper stall’s doing well,” he said to Livvi. Eleven o’clock was granny hour. The pensioners came in two lots: the early birds, there as soon as the market opened, and the midmorning crowd. The midmorning crowd tended to shop at the fresh fish van, the slipper stall and one clothes stall that sold the most godawful ugly nightwear known to man. They didn’t, however, appreciate premade jars of cake mix when they all had recipes that had been in their families for generations. Nor did they appreciate the kind of metal garden ornaments that Livvi designed.

“Yeah. Good for John,” she said, referring to the slipper seller. “I heard he’s retiring at the end of the year.”

“Well, if he’s selling his stock off cheap in December, you all know what you’re getting as presents.”

Livvi death glared him. “Don’t you bloody dare, I’ve got enough pairs from Grandma. I daren’t throw the flaming things out because you know she’ll ask about them the second I do.”

Seb smirked. His sister’s hatred of slippers was well documented by everyone except their elderly grandma who bought her a pair every year, thinking it was her job to look after Livvi since their parents were killed. Unfortunately, it was only the warmth of her feet that seemed to worry the elderly woman.

“The ginger spice cake samples are almost out. I’ve sold four jars of that mix this morning,” Seb said, doing a quick stock take. “Adding in the nutmeg and cinnamon seems to have worked really well.”

“I’ll try a sample of that then.” The voice was quiet, but Seb would know it anywhere.

“What are you doing here?” He looked up at Robert. Robert who looked freshly showered and as though he’d had a better night’s sleep than Seb.

“I thought I’d check out Camber Confectionary, maybe scout for some Christmas gifts.”

Seb snorted. “Christmas is six months away; you strike me more as a shop-on-Christmas Eve type of bloke.”

Robert affected a wounded look. “That cut deep,” he joked, shaking his head. “I feel I’m gaining a reputation as unorganised.”

Seb just raised an eyebrow.

“Okay. It may be a fairly well deserved rep,” Robert conceded. “Though even I would balk at the idea of fighting Christmas Eve crowds. The weekend before however...” He trailed off, grinning again.

“You’re as bad as Benjy,” said Livvi, making her way round to the front of the stall and hugging Robert. Before she could join in the conversation though, some customers came over to talk about commissioning a piece from her, and she left the two of them alone.

“So, the ginger cake...” said Robert after a slightly awkward pause. A pause where Seb was thinking about how last night could have—should have—progressed.

“Ginger and spice,” said Seb, scooping up a sample and offering it up to Robert without thinking about it.



Robert accepted the offering, the warmth of his mouth closing round Seb's fingertips and sending a shiver down Seb's spine.

"*Mmm*. Oh my god. Seb. Did you really make this?" Robert leaned forward and scooped up another sample sized bite. "As a self-confessed dessert lover, I'm telling you this is delicious. The best ginger cake I've ever had. What are you doing selling cake mixes? You should be running your own bakery."

Seb's gut clenched. That was his dream, it always had been, but funding... well, money had been tight, and the business he'd started with Livvi was the closest he'd come to his secret dream.

"Nah. Who'd keep Livvi on the straight and narrow? She's about as organised as you are, Robert."

Robert shrugged, grinning.

"So what other cakes do you recommend I try?"

"Here." Seb scooped up a piece of Victoria sponge. "I know, it's just a Vicky sponge, but..." He trailed off as, once again, Robert's lips closed around his fingers. Seb could have sworn there was no need for his tongue to sweep across his fingers like that. He forced himself to list prime ministers. The market was *not* an appropriate place for a hard-on.

Robert chewed, swallowed and groaned. He actually groaned. Right there in the middle of the crowded market. His eyes were closed, and the noise reverberated in his throat. It was literally the most sexual sound Seb had ever heard. And that included those heard uttered when he was actually having sex. Holy fuck. He was in serious trouble.

*David Cameron, Tony Blair, John Major, Margaret Thatcher...*

"That is the best bloody Victoria sponge I've ever tasted. And I have to tell you, Seb, my mum makes a pretty mean cake. Who do you think I inherited my sweet tooth from?"

Seemingly impervious to Seb's reactions, Robert chatted on, trying and commenting on every different sample Seb had. Seb kept his fingers to himself now; not even Maggie Thatcher was going to help if he let them near Robert's mouth for a third time.

"Okay. Well, I think I want a jar of each mix. Everyone can have cake mix as part of their Christmas presents." That brought Seb back to the present. He didn't even try to swallow back the laugh.

“They have a pretty long shelf life, Robert. But honestly, I’d put off buying them until a bit closer to the time.”

Robert chewed his lip, thoughtful for a second. “Okay. Do you take advanced orders?”

“Sure.” Seb found an order form. Five months was the longest advance order they’d taken... but if it meant he still got to see Robert in the winter, he was all for it.

“Why don’t you show Robert round the market?” Livvi asked as she finished up with her customer. “I can handle the stall for a while.”

“But you already set up by yourself this morning,” Seb protested, though a coffee sounded like nectar from the gods at that moment in time.

Livvi waved a hand dismissively. “Not a problem. You look like you seriously could do with a coffee, Seb, and besides, in three weeks you’ll be covering for me. When I’m on my honeymooooon!” She sang the last word, her eyes lighting up as they always did at talk of Benjy or her upcoming marriage.

“I’d kill for a coffee right now,” Robert said. And so Seb found himself leaving the stall and wending his way through the crowd.

They grabbed takeaway coffees and sat on a low wall near the edge of the market. Late August and the weather was perfect. Sunny, temperatures in the low twenties with none of the humidity they’d suffered throughout June and July.

“If it carries on like this, Benjy and Livvi will have perfect weather for their wedding.” Robert leant back, raising his face to the sun, the gentle breeze ruffling his hair.

Seb didn’t answer, just watched as the breeze played with Robert’s hair.

*Three weeks*, Livvi had said. Three weeks until the wedding was over and done with. Three weeks until he dared risk asking Robert out. (Who was he kidding, he had no plans to actually go out anywhere with him. That first night he hoped was going to be spent locked in a bedroom somewhere). He just had to get through the three weeks first.

“Benjy’s a right cock blocker. I’m sorry, if it was anyone else but him I’d have blown them off.” A smirk spread across his face. “Not quite in the same way as I hope to blow you off though.”

Fuck.

“Robert. You can’t just come out and say things like that in public,” Seb said, looking round to see if anyone could have overheard. He could only pretend annoyance though, because he was damn glad that he and Robert *were* on the same page.

*David Cameron, Tony Blair, John Major, Margaret Thatcher...*

“It’s probably a good thing. I want you, Robert, I really do...”

“But?” Robert sat up straight and looked at Seb.

“But I want to get the wedding over with first. I... I... I can’t risk starting something with the best man just before the wedding that might potentially ruin Livvi’s big day.”

The words, said aloud, sounded stupid to his own ears, and he wondered if he’d just managed to put the kybosh on the whole thing. He really freaking hoped not. He waited for Robert to ridicule him, or best case scenario, try and make him change his mind.

He was surprised when, instead of laughing, Robert looked thoughtful and said, “I hadn’t really thought about that, but it makes sense. Benjy and Livvi deserve the best day they can have, and we’re not exactly hormone addled teenagers with no self control.”

It was at that point (Seb admitted to himself much later) that the scales had tipped from lust into something a little more for him. Was there anything sexier than someone putting another’s needs first?

“I was hoping you would talk me out of being sensible!” Seb complained. He drained the last of his coffee. “I really should get back to Livvi; she’s been an angel already today.”

“Fair enough,” said Robert. “Though I’d like to point out you’re purposely letting your balls turn a metaphorical shade of azure for your sister, the least she can do is let you slack off a bit.”

Seb laughed and stood up. “The trouble is, Robert, I’m not sure how long my self-control will hold out if I sit here much longer.”

He chucked his cup in a bin, winked at Robert, and headed back to work. Doing the best to ignore the ache in his balls and the one in his heart.

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## Chapter Seven

### *Bottom's Up*

#### *Robert*

Three weeks had never, in Robert's whole life, managed to pass so quickly and so agonisingly slowly at the same time. Yet here they were, the day before the wedding. Or "the day before Seb", as Robert was calling it to himself. He couldn't believe Benjy was getting married tomorrow. He couldn't believe he was going to be able to finally taste Seb's lips.

"Earth to Robert," said Benjy. "Hey, where did you go? I'm the one who's supposed to be a million miles away and made of nerves today, mate, not you."

"Just can't believe it's almost here. You're almost a married man." Robert took a sip of the beer he was nursing, swallowing around a lump in his throat. He may have done this before, but it was different with Benjy. Benjy was his peer, the friend he'd grown up with. It felt like the end of an era.

"Things won't change that much, I promise. I mean, Livvi and I already live together: how is it going to change things? I'll still drag your arse here on a Friday night for a pint." He indicated the interior of the Red Lion.

"It will change, Benjy. Marriage means permanence and thinking about kids and stuff. It's good though, things are meant to change. Right?"

"Right," agreed Benjy. "I can't believe how smoothly the last couple of months have gone. I know we're only having a small do, but there hasn't been one hitch. It's gone perfectly. Here's to weddings and happiness," he said, somewhat sappily, before raising his pint of beer. "Bottoms up."

Before he could down it though, his phone rang.

"That'll be the scheduled bridal meltdown," Robert joked, unable to imagine cool-as-a-cucumber Livvi having any kind of meltdown.

Apparently, even the mellowest of mellow brides were entitled to at least one wedding induced panic though, and Livvi was definitely in the midst of hers.

Damn Benjy for tempting the fates.

The colour drained from Benjy's face as he listened to his bride-to-be. Robert had no idea what was going on, but he could see that Benjy was not in a position to make a coherent judgment. "Put it on loudspeaker," Robert hissed.

“We cannot have a wedding without a cake, Benjy, we just can’t,” Livvi was saying. “I don’t mind that we’re having a small affair, but I need a wedding cake. It’s important.”

“Hang on Livvi. Back up a bit,” said Robert. And Livvi did. She explained in barely controlled panic how the flat above the cake shop had left a bath tap running—somehow—and it hadn’t been discovered until a great wodge of ceiling fell through into the shop below. All over their cake storage.

“It is not salvageable, and nowhere else is going to have a cake ready for tomorrow. Not at this time on a Friday night.”

A sob escaped at the last word. Benjy paled even further while he comforted Livvi and told her he really didn’t care about the cake, or any of the rest of it, as long as she was there and wedded him. All that Benjy needed was her and him and a vicar to officiate.

Livvi, sniffled over the phone. His words soothing her a little.

“Look, Livvi, I’ll sort this out. There will be cake at your wedding, okay?” Robert told Benjy to go and comfort Livvi and leave the rest to him. He had a plan.

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He arrived at Seb’s front door, laden down with the ingredients Seb had listed for him to buy.

“You can do this, right?” Robert asked as Seb opened the door and ushered him in.

“We can do this,” Seb replied.

“Don’t rely on me, mate; I know nothing about cooking.”

“Baking.” Seb grinned. “Nope, but you have use of a car and can be my GD.”

“GD?”

“General dogsbody. Okay, here’s what I’m thinking.”

Seb’s place wasn’t big, but the kitchen was decked out with stainless steel appliances and was impeccable. Even Robert could see it was a room of which he was proud. Open on the marble-effect breakfast bar was a laptop with the image of a wedding cake in the middle of it. Three tiered; it had white icing, with bands of lilac that matched the cummerbunds perfectly. To finish it off, there were some carefully crafted calla lilies on each level.

“How the hell are you going to do that all in one night?” Robert looked at the creation on the screen. It was beautiful—stunning—but there was no way that could be achieved in less than a day.

“It’s actually one of the more simple designs. It’s totally doable; have a little faith,” Seb said. Then asked, “How are you at sugar craft?”

Robert opened his eyes wide. “Please tell me you’re kidding?”

Seb smiled sheepishly. “I did hope that you might be able to make a start on the lilies while I get baking the cakes.”

Robert shook his head vehemently. “No way, Seb. I have no artistic ability whatsoever. Also, I can’t bake.”

“Firstly, when we’re done with this crisis, with this whole wedding, we’re going to have a little talk about your self-esteem levels, Robert. So far you’ve told me you can’t do this or that or the other—when what I actually see is a gorgeous, talented, kind, funny chap in front of me. I’m not going to force you to make calla lilies now though. Okay. If I get the cakes on the go, I can get to the sugar craft when they’re baking.”

He started laying out the ingredients from the bag. Robert watched as he started weighing flour and sugar, when an idea struck him.

“Give me that icing, Seb. I may be hopeless, but Mum has handmade and iced every cake in our family for years. Some of the designs us kids wanted would have seemed impossible to mere mortals, but they didn’t faze my mum. If anyone can whip you up a bunch of calla lilies, it’ll be her.”

Seb nodded his agreement, and Robert packed up the icing and went to his mum’s. By the time he returned nearly four hours later, definitely the wrong side of midnight, bearing a tub of carefully crafted flowers, Seb had three cakes of varying sizes cooling on the side.

He also had flour dusting his face and caught in his hair and eyelashes, a streak of purple across one cheek, and smelt like vanilla. He looked edible.

“Calla lilies.” Robert held the box carefully in the air. “Where did the purple come from?” He put the tub down and pointed to Seb’s cheek.

“Food colouring. I’ve coloured some fondant icing to make the coloured bands with. I’m also going to use some to paint in the lilies. I know technically they should just be yellow for the stamen, but I want to add a trace of lilac here and there to tie them in.”

As Seb produced some tiny paintbrushes and set about decorating the flowers, Robert flicked the kettle on and searched out some teabags. He tidied round the kitchen while he waited for it to boil, every now and then letting his eyes stray to where Seb was concentrating on decorating the flowers. The tip of his tongue poked out the corner of his mouth as he transformed the plain white icing into individual lilies.

“You are amazingly talented,” Robert said when Seb paused to sip his tea.

“So are you. I may be able to paint a few bits on a lily, but this tea... this is pure talent. It’s perfect. Thank you.”

“Glad to be of help. It’s not hard though; anyone can make a brew.”

“You obviously haven’t had Livvi make you a cuppa then. My advice, if she ever offers you a hot drink, always take the coffee option.”

“Noted,” said Robert, laughing. “Is there anything I can do to help?”

“Hmm.” Seb stood and checked the cakes. “How are you at rolling out marzipan and icing?”

“Now that I can do.” Robert took the proffered rolling pin and started rolling sheets of marzipan, which Seb deftly draped across the cake, followed by layers of fondant icing. Robert watched, open mouthed, as Seb hid any imperfections behind lilac bands and calla lilies. As the hand on the kitchen clock crept towards four a.m., Seb added a soft silver sheen to the cake and called it done.

Exhausted, yet in that weird hyper place that overtiredness takes you, Robert high-fived Seb. He knew the grin that was splitting Seb’s face in two was reflected on his own face. “You did it.”

“We did it!”

“We did it,” Robert conceded.

“Seriously, Rob, I couldn’t have done it without you.”

Robert shrugged. “I didn’t really...” he started.

“Don’t you dare. You bloody well did. It was your idea to call me, your idea to get your mum to make the lilies. You ran around collecting ingredients, tidying the kitchen, being the GD. Without you, this would not have happened, and I don’t want to hear you start to deny it.”

Robert shrugged. Accepting praise was something he found incredibly awkward, especially when any fool could see that Seb had been the one to save the day. Not him.

“How am I going to convince you?” Seb asked. Robert just stood there feeling more awkward by the second.

“God, you’re perfect,” Seb said softly. “Utterly perfect for me.”

Robert’s chest tightened and his stomach clenched. Before he had time to process the thought though, Seb had moved forward, closing the gap between them and placing his lips tentatively on Robert’s.

Robert felt like a dying man being granted another breath. Wordlessly, he tangled his hands into Seb’s T-shirt and pulled him closer, opening his mouth and letting Seb in. Robert had never yearned for something as much as he had been yearning for Seb’s kiss, and if this was delayed gratification, then Robert was a convert.

Every single nerve in his body was alive. Seb tasted of tea and vanilla. He smelt as sweet as sugar, with a musky undertone that was all him. His chin was scratchy with stubble and it brushed pleasingly against Robert as they kissed deeper and harder, needier and wanton.

“I want you, Rob. Not tomorrow or next week or after the wedding. I want you now. Please tell me you’re on the same page.”

Robert groaned and then pushed Seb back towards the breakfast bar, kissing him deeper and letting his hands roam across Seb’s body. Hands found their way under clothes and across nipples: pinching, twisting, flicking. Robert’s body had never felt so alive.

“Shower?” Seb asked breathlessly as he pulled back from Robert.

“God yes!”

The water was warm; it caressed tired aching bodies, but it was Seb’s touch, washing, exploring and mapping Robert’s body that was making him weak kneed. Pine scented shower gel was spread carefully down his back and across his stomach. Strong hands teased nipples and massaged thighs. Robert was as hard as a rock, but Seb refused to touch Robert’s aching cock.

“Seb,” he moaned, reaching for Seb’s own hard dick.

“Soon,” said Seb, moving away from Robert’s grasp. He moved away entirely, using his hands on himself, washing the most intimate places of his



own body. Just watching those strong hands circling the cock that Robert wanted so badly, had pre-come dripping from the end of Robert's dick.

"Seb," he repeated, feeling insensible to anything other than the need for Seb's hands, Seb's mouth, Seb's cock.

The smile that Seb offered him while he purposely carried on cleaning his own body was teasing and lusty, and Robert took the hint. Snatching up the shower gel, he made short work of cleaning himself. He used the shower to rinse off the suds and pulled Seb from the cubicle.

In Seb's bedroom, they fell onto the bed, and Robert pinned Seb beneath him and started to explore his body using just his mouth. He sucked on Seb's earlobe and then kissed a trail down his neck. The other man bucked beneath him, and Robert sighed at the friction it caused on his aching cock.

Together, they discovered what felt good. Seb, usually so in control, lost all semblance of coherency when Robert finally made it down to his cock and encircled it with his mouth. Using his lips, he pushed back the foreskin and tongued the slit. Sucking deep and hard, he let the head hit the back of his throat.

Fuck that felt good.

Seb moaned beneath him, bucking again and again into Robert's mouth. He felt so damn good. Having his lips stretched wide and his throat gently fucked. It was everything he'd dreamt about and more.

Reluctantly, Robert pulled back. He lowered his mouth and sucked gently on Seb's balls. The sounds he pulled from Seb just by using his mouth were beautiful. He trailed lower still, licking back from Seb's tight balls towards his arse.

Encouraging Seb to hold his legs up, Robert let his tongue trail across Seb's hole. Wide, wet strokes soon became tighter, smaller, more controlled until his tongue penetrated Seb.

Seb writhed beneath him, calling his name. Robert took this as a sign that Seb was enjoying himself as much as he was. He let his tongue fuck in and out until Seb had loosened up enough for him to slip a finger in as well. A couple more strokes like that and he pulled back.

Seb looked beautiful spread across the bed as he was: legs raised, hole exposed.

“Top drawer,” he said.

Robert found the lube and condoms.

“I need you hard, please, Rob. I’ve waited so long.”

“Christ, Seb.” Robert lined himself up and pushed into the tightness that was all for him.

He slowed, waiting, enjoying the tight grip Seb’s arse had on his dick. Then Seb pushed up, and together they found a rhythm. Slow became hard in a matter of heartbeats. Time and waiting had left them both needy. Both wanting. Both willing to give and needing to take.

The night was old, but the morning was young, and the rising sun couldn’t have sparked brighter than the white light Robert’s orgasm caused. He was lost. Lost in the brightness and the aftershocks when Seb called out, his arse clenching tight, and hot come splashing over both of them.

It was beautiful.

It was perfect.

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## **Epilogue**

*From this day forward.*

*Robert*

The bridal chorus started to play, and a shiver wended its way down Robert's spine. The church, with its smell of old wood, furniture polish and history, echoed with the notes floating from the aged organ.

Robert gave Benjy, standing beside him, one last look; then they turned together and watched the bride make her entrance. Dust motes swirled in the coloured glow of the stained glass windows as Livvi made her way into the church and down the aisle. With every step closer to Benjy she took, the grin on her face grew wider and wider—something Robert would have noticed if his eyes had been on the bride and not the man escorting her.

His gaze, though, was fully on Seb. His heart beat faster as their eyes met briefly; then Robert shook himself mentally and forced himself to concentrate on the wedding of his best friend.

After all, they'd only been apart for an hour, and he knew in his heart that what they'd found was not something that was easily lost.

He knew in his heart he'd fallen in love, and one look at Seb told him he wasn't alone. Today was a new start for all of them.

From this day forward, he had the rest of his life to learn all there was to know about the man he loved.

**The End**

## **Author Bio**

Books with romance, books with sex,  
Voodoo books and books with hex,  
Fantasy, mystery, humour and crime,  
Young adult, adult adult and kids from time to time,  
In all their shapes and all their sizes,  
I love books in all their guises.

*Olley White is the pseudonym of Lori Powell, an English gal who likes reading too much, housework too little and her family the perfect amount. As she writes YA books under her actual name and doesn't want a youngster stumbling across the ~~smut~~ more adult books she writes, she thought an AKA was the way to go.*

## **Contact & Media Info**

*Free samples of her writing are available on both of her blogs.*

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