

# LOVE Has NO Boundaries



Don't Read in the Closet Event 2013

# WHEN KARMA COMES KNOCKING

Jinjur Louis

## **WHEN KARMA COMES KNOCKING**

I never intended to meet him looking like this, tired, muddy, wet, and messy. I never intended to meet him at all, but here he was laughing his ass off at my miserable state. My first spoken words to him were nasty and reflected poorly on me. But he wasn't much better, laughing at another's misfortune. By the time I learned the reason behind his strange laugh, he had given me a glimpse of his true self, and I could only hope I would prove myself worthy of his love.

# Love Has No Boundaries

*An M/M Romance series*

## WHEN KARMA COMES KNOCKING

By Jinjur Louis

### Introduction

The story you are about to read celebrates love, sex and romance between men. It is a product of the *Love Has No Boundaries* promotion sponsored by the *Goodreads M/M Romance Group* and is published as a free gift to you.

### What Is Love Has No Boundaries?

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 they 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 Has No Boundaries*.

Whether you are an avid M/M romance reader or new to the genre, you are in for a delicious treat.

### Words of Caution

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

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

All rights reserved worldwide.

This eBook may be distributed freely in its entirety courtesy of the *Goodreads M/M Romance Group*. This eBook may not be sold, manipulated or reproduced in any format without the express written permission of the author.

When Karma Comes Knocking,

Copyright © 2013 Jinjur Louis

Cover Design by Goodreads M/M Romance Group

This ebook is published by the *M/M Romance Group* and is not directly endorsed by or affiliated with Goodreads Inc.

# WHEN KARMA COMES KNOCKING

By Jinjur Louis

## Photo Description

A well-built young man with longish brown hair stares sideways at the viewer. His hair is wet and hanging over his eyes. His face and naked chest are splattered with mud. He does not look happy, in fact he looks furious.

## Story Letter

*Dear Author,*

*“I cannot believe how badly my day has gone what with the rain and the mud. To top off this craptastic day, my roommate invited some friends over. The guy I have been crushing on took one look at me and laughed his pretty ass off. I really want this day to be over.”*

*This poor boy. Do you think you can make his day better? I am hoping for a HFN or maybe even a HEA.*

*Just a note: I like all stories that end well for the MCs. Contemporary, mystery, paranormal, shifter, D/s, taboo, sweet stories, BDSM, thrillers, plain vanilla, fantasy, other worlds, non-con/dub-con, really anything goes!*

*Sincerely,*

*Peggy*

## Story Info

**Genre:** contemporary

**Tags:** superhero wannabe, weird nicknames, mild PTSD, hurt/comfort, arts/crafts

**Content warnings:** mentions of rape and past abuse

**Word count:** 16,703

# WHEN KARMA COMES KNOCKING

**By Jinjur Louis**

What is that old saying? The one that says to enjoy the good times because Ms. Karma is going to come over and bite you in the ass. Okay. Maybe there is no saying that says that, but there should be. A few months ago, Ms. Karma decided that she had been treating me too nicely. Me. Mr. Raymond Mark Hanson. I was firmly established in my dream job. My bosses were a pleasure to work for. My work was appealing and kept me challenged. The pay was agreeable, more than agreeable. With my best friend as my roommate, I lived in a large warehouse style loft. Life was good.

Did I mention that my life was great? The all-American dream. All it needed was the wife, the two-point-five kids, and the dog running around in the backyard with the white picket fence. There was just a slight problem with this. I didn't want the wife or the two-point-five kids. I did want the dog. The white picket fence was up for debate. I'd be one happy camper if you replaced the wife with the hot husband. Oh, did I mention that I'm gay? Hope that isn't a problem for you. It's not a problem in my life. My parents and family didn't even bat an eyelash when I told them. My boss and co-workers teased me about the lack of a boyfriend, the same as they teased each other about the lack of a boyfriend. A few of my co-workers had even offered to introduce me to their kid's teacher's spouse's single brother, or a cousin that was coming to visit for the weekend. I refused each time. I didn't want to mix business with pleasure, and even if the person was their third cousin twice removed, it could become awkward if things didn't work out. I'd tell them that I had to take my mother to her martial arts class the exact weekend that their male relative was showing up. They'd smile and tell me that I was a good son, and my mother should be proud of me.

Strangely enough, it was those lies that got both my mother and I black belts. I told her about the potential hookups, and since she believes in total honesty, she started making me take her to lessons. So we got the black belts. It keeps me in shape.

Tom, my roommate, told everybody that I was his personal bodyguard so that they had better be nice to him or else I'd beat them up. Don't believe him. I won't beat up anybody. Well, if somebody were bashing a gay teenager, I'd come flying in with hands of steel. I'd be the superhero, protecting our gay youth from all forms of homophobia, earning the respect of the gay community. Wear the tights. Win the attentions of that cute guy who works in the artsy store on the corner. You know the store, the one with all the trendy scarves and bags. Mom told me the trendy scarves were shawls and that I was failing the gay stereotype of being a fashion snob by not knowing what they were. I couldn't care less. I was more interested in the man who worked the counter there. He was prettier than the shawls that Mom had, even if they were all handcrafted, and the owner was a world famous weaver.

He was tall, about my height if I was guessing right. Medium length hair, dark with a slight wave to it. Broad shoulders and trim waist. A great ass. Once, I spent an entire lunch hour pretending to read my book while he paced back and forth in the shop. He was waving his arms around, tossing those shawl things to another person. It looked like some crazy circus act. He would jump on a chair, stretch to grab an item off the wall, and bend over to show me that perfect ass. I took cold showers for a week after that display. I know. I was so crushing on this guy. Sue me if you haven't done the same thing yourself.

Karla, Tom's girlfriend, told me I needed to stop dreaming and walk into that shop. Tell him that I wanted to buy something for my mom and flirt a little. See if my superhero gaydar was working, and ask him out. If he slugged me, then I could be a dark, brooding superhero out saving our gay youth. If he said yes, then I would... shit, I didn't know what I would do.

Sorry, I was talking about Ms. Karma biting me in the ass. One Monday morning, my boss was standing by my office with that "Timmy is in the well again, and we can't find Lassie" look. The project that I was working on, and had almost finished, ran into a little glitch. The customer neglected to tell us some information. Critical information. I was going to have to trash my work and start over. Would I mind working a little overtime so that we could finish



the project on time? No problem. Since I was currently between boyfriends, I didn't mind working overtime. That little overtime turned into thirteen hour days. Weekends? Gone. Chances of asking my mystery man out? Zilch. Opportunities to stalk him during my lunchtime also zilch. I'm sure that he was moping around his store, wondering where his stalker had gone.

At least Tom came through for me. He made sure that I was watered and fed. He took care of the chores around the loft. He made sure that I had clean clothes for work. I asked him if he would marry me, but he laughed and mentioned something about a current girlfriend that might object at the wedding. Tom also mumbled something about going to her folk's place for the weekend. If the weekend went badly, then he would reconsider my marriage proposal.

Being the gay superhero who had just had his marriage proposal rejected, I did the only thing sensible. I went into my office and signed off on the project paperwork. The customer was happy with the result, which made my boss happy. I was still employed, so I was happy, and I decided to take the afternoon off.

During my free afternoon, I purchased a couple of bottles of red wine to give to Tom as a thank you. I grabbed a lovely bottle of wine for myself and checked out some books from my local library. Hey! After the last couple of weeks of work, I deserved a break.

Until it started raining. Fine. I like the rain. A warm summer rain lightly misting the air is pleasant, but not the frigging downpour that soaked my suit within 0.5 seconds of standing outside. In addition, who in their right mind puts wine bottles in a paper bag? The bag was useless, and I was not going to let a one hundred dollar bottle of wine drop to the sidewalk because a five-cent paper bag was soaked. Since I was almost home, I took my jacket off and wrapped the wine bottles in it. That left the library books exposed, so I took off my shirt and covered those. It worked.

Until Mrs. Kimble decided to start weeding her flowerpots at the same time I was walking underneath her balcony.

Ms. Karma is a real bitch sometimes. Or is that Ms. Fate? Never could keep those two girls straight. Hmm, I wonder if they are straight.

At least the wine and the library books were safe from the rain, and the dirt. Plus Tom wouldn't be home so nobody would be witness to my miserable state.

Image my surprise when I walked inside my apartment and saw Tom standing there with an open bottle of wine. He had said that he was going to be gone this weekend. Gone. As in not there at the apartment. Did I mess up the dates? Nope, he had said this weekend. Great.

"I had a slight mishap with Ms. Karma again." I explained as I set my wine and books on the floor. Tom flicked at the mud splattered across my chest as I stood up.

"I can see that, and you're dripping the mishap all over the floor. Why don't you go take a quick shower, and join us? I ordered Chinese for everybody. There's enough for you."

*Everybody?*

*EVERYBODY?*

*Who the hell is everybody?*

I heard a burst of laughter from inside the loft. Turning around slowly, I swore loudly. "Everybody" included Karla, a few women from her office, the renter from downstairs, and last but not least, my guy from the artsy store. He was the one laughing his pretty little ass off. *Great. I finally get to see him face to face, and he's laughing at me. He turns out to be a jerk.* "Glad I could provide a source of entertainment for you. I'm going to go take a shower now." To his credit, he clapped his hands over his mouth and stopped laughing.

With as much dignity as I could muster, I grabbed my jacket and headed towards my bathroom, forgetting about the wine wrapped in it. The jacket was heavier than I expected. It slipped out of my hand and dropped to the floor. I heard the glass break as the wine hit the tile. Swearing some more, I reached

over to open up my suit jacket to determine the damage. I could see wine leaking onto the floor, but I was unsure of how many bottles had been broken. I didn't think about the floor being wet from me dripping on it, and I slipped. I also don't remember what I said when I heard the bone in my arm snapping.

\*\*\*\*

“Winston says that he's sorry.”

I heard my roommate speaking to me, but the drugs that they had given me were quite enjoyable. The pain in my arm, well, it didn't hurt anymore. In fact, nothing in my body hurt anymore. I was quite happy.

“He's really shy and uncomfortable in social situations. Karla thought it would be nice to invite him tonight, to get him to meet more people. We felt that a small party here would be a non-threatening way to help him.”

The drugs were better than I thought. Tom was talking but not making any sense. Who was Winston and what did he have to do with Tom's girlfriend?

“Anyway, Winston is sorry that he laughed at you. He didn't mean to.”

“Who the hell is Winston and what kind of name is that?” I decided that I wanted to know. Drugs or no drugs, I wanted to know who would name their kid “Winston”. Poor kid probably was beaten up a lot. Maybe I needed to get my gay superhero outfit out and go save him.

“He's the one who laughed at you. He also drove us here since he hadn't been drinking. He'd like to apologize to you if that's okay.”

“Nah, I don't have my superhero tights on. I can't protect him from the bad guys.”

“Huh? Man, they must have given you the good drugs. Can you save a few for me?”

\*\*\*\*

My brain was still a little fuzzy about what happened after I slipped and broke my arm. From what Karla told me, they heard the glass breaking and a lot of cursing. Tom got to me first and got me upright. My suit jacket had held

the broken wine bottles together, so there was no danger of being cut by the glass. Since Winston was the only one who hadn't been drinking, he offered to drive us to the hospital, and they bundled me up into his car. Karla stayed at the loft with the rest of the party. Apparently, I swore the entire time until we got to the hospital and the doctor gave me some drugs. I smiled a lot after that. The last thing I remembered was being tucked into my bed at home and giggling when Tom kissed my forehead good night. He'd never done that before.

It was the afternoon by the time I woke up. Starving didn't even cover what I felt. I grunted a few words at Tom and Karla as I passed by. Knowing how much I depend upon my coffee to wake me up, they were used to my grunting. Ms. Karma must have decided that she had played enough games with me the day before, as there was a fresh pot of coffee waiting for me. Heaven. My first cup. Yum.

I tried to avoid having to look at my broken arm until after I had drunk my first cup of coffee, but I felt I needed to take a closer look at my latest fashion accessory.

There was a bright neon orange cast covering my hand and up to my elbow. Bright, neon-flashing, glaring, crayon-colored orange. That bitch, Karma, and her sister, Fate.

"Oh Ray, honey. I'm so sorry, but it was the only color that they had left. Winston said that he had an idea to fix it. Winston is so good at these types of things. I'm sure he'll come up with a brilliant idea." Karla patted my good hand gently, while Tom was smart enough to stand at least twenty feet away from me.

"WINSTON AGAIN! WHO THE HELL IS THIS GUY WINSTON? He was the one who was laughing at me, right? The only sober one at the party who— by the way, didn't you tell me that you were going to be gone this weekend? What the hell were you doing home? He fucking laughed at me and now Winston is going to fix the fucking neon orange cast for me?" Yeah, I knew that I was throwing a temper tantrum. Not one of my better moments. I'm blaming the lack of coffee and food in my system.

“Karla’s parents had to cancel, so our plans were changed to next weekend. Winston works with one of Karla’s friends, and they have been trying to get him away from his work for months. He’s a terrific guy but gets these panic attacks on occasion. Karla and Daisy thought a small get-together here would be fun and something he could handle.”

“Next thing you’ll be telling me is that Winston still lives with his parents. Never had a girlfriend, either. A great guy. A real catch.” A little voice inside my head pointed out to me that I had never had a girlfriend, either. Maybe Winston was gay. Maybe, if I could get over his jerk behavior of the previous night, he might be somebody worth asking out.

“You’re behaving like an asshole, Ray. He was upset about laughing and you getting hurt. He refused to leave until you were safe in your bed and comfortable. Real mother hen. Karla said that he even gave you a good night kiss.” Dropping my coffee cup, I glared at Tom. He sputtered and backed another ten feet away from me. I don’t blame him. My before-coffee face can be scary.

“Let me get this straight. Winston, the guy from the artsy store, was here last night. The one time that I look like Shrek on a bad day, I come home to find that the most gorgeous guy I’ve seen in a long time is here. He takes one look at me and laughs his ass off. I then happen to break my arm, and he stops laughing to read me bedtime stories?”

“Silly, he didn’t read you any bedtime stories. It was just a little kiss. Wait! Did you say that you liked him? Oh my God! This is perfect. The two of you would be so cute together.”

I groaned as Karla apparently forgot that she was a vice-president of a company and reverted to grade school. We’d be passing notes back and forth soon, with little hearts drawn around Winston’s and my name.

“I’m going back to bed. I have some nice drugs calling.”

\*\*\*\*

I’m not going to bore you with the details of my co-workers’ reaction to my neon orange cast on Monday morning. Even the HR person laughed, and

she hadn't cracked a smile since 1942. Tuesday wasn't much better, when my boss suggested that I might want to sit out the next customer meeting. Wednesday, I hid in my office until I managed to escape for lunch. It was sunny out, and I settled into my favorite lunch spot. Quiet. Peace. Oh, shit. Right across from Mr. Laughing Winston's place of employment, and he was coming in my direction.

I ignored him until he sat down next to me.

"Hi. I'm sorry." His voice was softer than I remembered.

"Apology accepted." My voice was harsher than I would have liked.

"Is your arm feeling better?" Damn. Was that actual concern I heard in his voice? My resolve to stay mad at him was fading fast.

"A bit. Thanks for asking." I was being polite. I was not starting a conversation with him. *I don't care how pretty his ass is, or how soft his voice is. I'm being polite. I'm not noticing how green his eyes are. That can't possibly be their real color.*

"That orange doesn't suit your coloring. I hope you don't mind, but I made something that might look better." He held out a piece of fabric that shimmered in the sunlight. It was a silver-gray cover with a geometric type of pattern woven into it. It was stunning. Gently taking a hold of my cast, he slid the tube-shaped fabric over my fingers and up the cast. I watched as his long, slender fingers smoothed it around my cast, covering the neon orange. A delicate cord, that I could tug on with one hand to tighten the fabric around me, completed the look. I was speechless. My opinion of him being a jerk was changing. He might actually be a likeable guy.

"If it gets too dirty, you can either give it a quick rinse in the sink or bring it over to my shop. If I'm not available, any one of my employees will be more than glad to wash it for you. I gave them specific instructions about this. Or if you have any issues or problems, please let me help."

He stood up and was half way back to the shop before my brain began to engage. Did he say that it was his shop? Was he the owner? He made this piece of art. For me? Who was the jerk now?

“Winston. WINSTON! Wait!”

He stopped but didn't turn around. His shoulders seemed to straighten up a little. Maybe he was bracing himself for a nasty comment from me.

“Winston. Thank you. This is beautiful. I will let you know if I need any help with it. On one condition.” I took a deep breath. He took a chance on coming out here. I could take a chance also. “Let me take you out for a coffee. After work?”

He turned around, and the smile on his face... wow. I thought his ass was pretty. Nothing compared to that smile.

“I'd like that.”

\*\*\*\*

I made sure that my suit jacket sleeve covered my new custom-made cast cover when I got back to my office. Having my shirt sleeve rolled up and the loose-fitting jacket design made for a tight fit, but it worked. For some reason, I wanted to keep this to myself. Unfortunately, my secret was discovered during the last part of the day. The thermostat had broken, and the temperature in the office had risen. Everybody had stripped down to their shirt-sleeves and was giving me strange looks. Finally, I took my jacket off, and that's when the comments started.

I smiled and asked if we could get back to work instead of discussing my wardrobe.

Karla didn't let me off the hook as easily, though, when I got home. She guessed right away that Winston had made it for me. Even Tom was excited when he heard that Winston had agreed to go out for a coffee with me. When were we going? Where were we going? More questions that I didn't want to try to answer. Especially one question. When were we going out? We didn't actually set a date. In fact, I didn't even have his contact information, but I did know where he worked. Maybe a little Internet research would be a good idea.

\*\*\*\*

Winston Arthur Sherman IV, owner and proprietor of Community Weavers, a local shop where one could purchase locally hand-woven items, supplies for weaving your own item, or learn to weave. The owner was an award-winning weaver/artist himself, with several celebrities and royals on his clientele list.

Shit again.

I was lucky if I could sew a button on a shirt, and here Winston was making fabric for famous people. The shimmer of the cloth covering my cast caught my eye and I remembered what he said. He said that he made this, as in he made the fabric. For me. The hell with coffee. I was taking him out to dinner.

Winston Arthur Sherman IV. With a name like that, I'd be having panic attacks, too. The poor guy. Isn't there a law against giving your kids horrible names? There should be.

\*\*\*\*

He was bouncing around the shop. I watched him for a good ten minutes while he bounced from one corner to the other. Maybe he was part Tigger. *Bouncy Bouncy Fun Fun Fun*. Okay, a bouncing Winston is an image that I didn't want to have in my head, at least not during work hours. My co-workers would notice something else that was hard besides my cast. Even now, I could feel myself growing harder, watching him move.

One of his employees saw me watching and waved at me to come in. Winston stopped bouncing. I wanted to cry. Tiggers are supposed to bounce. Not bouncing makes them unhappy, and I didn't want Winston to be sad. I needed to get this Winston-Tigger image out of my head, and stop talking to myself like I was a five-year-old child. I was starting to believe that Tom was right when he told me I needed to get laid soon.

“Hello there! You must be Ray. Winston has told us nothing about you! So please be warned that you will be questioned, prodded, and made totally uncomfortable while we determine if you will be allowed to take our Winston



out for coffee.” The tallest, meanest, *just released from prison where she made the prison warden her bitch*, woman greeted me at the door.

“I’ve changed my mind. I’m not taking him out for coffee. I’m taking him out to dinner. That is, if it’s okay with him.” *Speak fast, Ray. Keep a clear path to the door so you can make a run for it. Above all, do not show fear.*

“Ah! Not so fast, mister. We need contact information, your place of employment, and the names of three close friends, so we know where to send the police if Winston is not home by curfew. My name is Daisy. I manage the store here.”

“Daisy, as in I’ll be pushing up daisies if I don’t treat your Winston like the true gentleman he is.” I tried to give her my best boy-next-door smile, but I remembered that most of your serial killers were described as being “the sweet boy next door. We never knew there were fifty-four bodies buried in his backyard.” Running for the hills was fast becoming an option for me here.

“Here’s my card with my contact information on it. Place of employment is listed. Since I already know your boss’s name, my boss’s name is George. He’s the only George who works there. I live with my best friend, Tom, at a location that will not be disclosed until I am convinced that you haven’t lured me into this shop so that you can sell me on the open slave market.”

“Oh, I like him.” Another woman spoke up, and Daisy glared at her for almost five seconds before bursting into laughter.

“Definitely likeable. Okay, Stick. You’ve passed the first test. You can go now.” Daisy made shooing motions towards me. Winston had both hands covering his mouth, laughing like a hyena. The shithead. Fine. No dessert for him. Good thing that he had a pretty ass, and had shown symptoms of niceness before. Otherwise, it would have been home for me with a trashy movie for company.

*Someday, I’m going to ask him what he finds so funny.*

\*\*\*\*\*

“I was at an arts and crafts show. A woman was selling hand-woven place mats, and I was fascinated. They were so simple, yet very elegant. I purchased a set and did research on weaving. Got a part time job at a local yarn shop, and learned about fiber.” Winston was telling me how he got started in weaving. His green eyes sparkled as he talked about weaving, and I was swept up in his story. The terms he used were unfamiliar to me, but each hobby had its own language. Even my own hobby had its own language, and it took me a while to get used to the terms.

“You made this for me. Right? As in wove it?” I pointed towards my cast cover. I’d received several compliments on it, and I was keeping it after my cast came off. Maybe I could have it remade into a pillow for my bed.

“Busted. I felt so bad for you. With everything that had happened to you, and then being stuck with a neon orange cast, it was the least I could do.”

“I have several co-workers that think it’s wasted on my cast. It’s too beautiful.”

“It’s a piece of cloth. The beauty of it comes from the wearer and the purpose.”

“Okay, you just earned yourself a dessert of your choosing. It was a tough call there for a while, but the verdict is in. You get dessert.”

“On one condition. You tell me about yourself during it.”

We ate hot fudge sundaes while I thrilled him with stories about my life as a marketing analyst. I was sure that I had him hooked when I told him about the survey I once did about pink and blue pencils. He didn’t yawn once. A company wanted to know if their customers thought the colors were sexist, or if the company should go with a rainbow of colors instead. My colleagues and I had kept it strictly professional while dealing with our client, but downright lost it behind closed doors. Even my boss got into the fun when he made jokes about asking a gay man if he preferred the pink, blue, or rainbow colors. Winston wanted to know which colors won, and almost fell over laughing when I told him that the rainbows had won. My boss even gave the company their very own rainbow pencil flag to celebrate their decision. Two months

later, they showed up on our doorstep again to help them market more rainbow colors and gay-friendly products. It had taken them that long to figure out why their new product was drawing a new customer base of gays and lesbians. They were excited, and my company was excited to sign an exclusive contract with them.

Our waiter came over with our dinner bill. They were closing, and we were still tucked away in our corner. I didn't want the night to end. Forget about the way that we met. Winston was pretty. He was smart and funny. Talented and sexy. Slim body but with a hint of softness, not muscle-bound like some men I knew. Don't get me wrong. I like muscles, but I like a little padding too. I wanted to know what his hair felt like. I wanted to know what his skin smelled like. I wanted to know what he tasted like. Did he laugh during sex? Was he shy like Karla had told me he was? Nothing about this date tonight suggested that Winston was shy. He was bubbling over, but he did seem to shrink back into his chair when the waiter came by. Maybe he was okay in small groups but shy in large groups. Maybe I needed to ask him out for another date. Maybe I needed to take a deep breath, and not have my own panic attack in front of his shop. He had an apartment right above his shop. Said that it cut down on his commute time. Maybe I needed to sneak in a breath mint so that when I kissed him, I would have minty fresh breath.

Would he let me kiss him?

*Does he want me to kiss him?*

*Why am I acting like a teenage girl with her first crush? Just tell him that you had a good time. You would like to take him out again, and kiss him.*

My mind was racing around these questions as I paid the bill for our dinner. We wandered outside and headed towards his shop. The day had been hot, so we had walked to the restaurant. It was still warm out, but a slight breeze was in the air. Winston shivered a little, so I took the opportunity to wrap my arm around his waist. His arm went around mine, and we struggled a little with our footing. His body felt tense against mine at first, but he slowly relaxed. Karla had described him as being shy, but nothing in his actions tonight had suggested to me that he was. It felt more as if he was scared of

large groups. His demeanor was so different when it was just the two of us. I wanted to ask him what had happened in the past that made him so wary of other people. Instead, I halted our progress and turned towards him.

I wanted to kiss him so much.

Too late. He beat me to it. His right hand moved across my jaw, brushing my hair away from my face. He was the same height as me, so it was easy enough for him to lean in a little and press his lips against mine. A faint pressure, as if he was unsure of himself or of us. Or shy. Damn, he *was* shy. The bright chatter was nerves. His body language was telling me a different story, that of someone who was putting himself on the line for another person.

It was the sexiest thing that I could imagine.

I kissed him back, wrapping my arms slowly and loosely around him so that he could back away if needed. I opened my mouth and let my tongue flick at his moist lips. He groaned, and the Tigger in him came out. He bounced tightly against me, grabbing the back of my head to pull me closer. His tongue met mine and dived right into my mouth. I thought I was going to come right then and there.

Before I could embarrass myself, Winston jumped away from me, and began apologizing. Mumbling about being sorry and that he didn't mean to attack me. That it wouldn't happen again and how much he enjoyed tonight. How he hoped he hadn't ruined what he hoped to be a good friendship. Seriously? After a kiss like that, he thought I would want to be just friends? Oh hell no. I crossed my arms in front of my chest and waited for him to wind down.

“Winston. You need to stop.”

“What?”

“You're bouncing again. You know, like Tigger. Bouncy Bouncy Bouncy. I liked your kiss. Hell, I loved your kiss and would love to kiss you again. Preferably for the next few hours.”

“Did you just call me Tigger? As in Winnie-the-Pooh Tigger? I think I should be insulted.”

“Hey, your employee called me Stick, so I get to call you Tigger.”

“Stick? Oh yeah. Stick. Well, that actually came from me.”

“Should I be insulted?”

“Um, nope. Stick as in Sex-on-a-Stick stick.”

I moved closer to Winston, backing him against the nearest tree. I kissed him again. This time his arms wound around my shoulders, and my hands found a resting spot on that pretty ass of his. I'm not sure how long we stood there, tasting each other, breathing in each other's air, enjoying the pure pleasure of kissing. I could feel his hardness against mine and wasn't sure how far to push him. I knew that I wanted him, and had definite proof that he wanted me, but something warned me that I needed to take it slow. If I wanted the relationship to last more than one night with him, I needed to stop now.

He curled around me and began to make a rocking motion with his hips. I had to make a choice. Stop now or drag him to the nearest bed.

“Winston. Stop. We need to stop.” I pushed myself away, cursing myself, Karma, Fate, the tooth fairy, and the sandman for good measure.

“Sorry. I didn't mean to push.”

“No, and stop saying you're sorry. You don't need to. My God, Winston! I've been dreaming about you for the last couple of weeks, since I first saw you in your shop. One week of actually knowing you, and I don't know what to feel. I was so pissed when you laughed at me, then you show up with this work of art. Dinner tonight was the most fun I've had in months. Kissing you is heaven, and there is nothing that I want more than to drag you to the nearest bed. But I don't want just one night with you, and I have a feeling that if we did this, I'd never see you again.”

Winston's eyes went wide as he took in my speech and nodded his head. “I have classes tomorrow, but I'm free on Sunday. If you're interested.”

“Oh, I'm interested. Believe me, I'm interested.”

\*\*\*\*

Cold showers are your friends. Every time I thought about Winston, I got hard. After my second cold shower of the day, I decided to distract myself and clean the loft. I started sweeping floors and mopping them. Window washing was next since I had a plastic bag over my cast to protect it. Winston's cover was safely stored in my bedroom, far from the cleaning supplies. The kitchen needed cleaning, including the stove, the fridge, and the freezer. I finished by loading my laundry into the machines, and for good measure, added Tom's and Karla's. It was a lot harder with one hand than I thought it was going to be, but it was getting done. I was dusting the last bookcase when Tom came over to me and placed his hand on my forehead.

“No temperature. Pupils look fine, so it's not some kind of strange drug that you're on. Breath smells minty fresh, so I'm guessing that you haven't been smoking any weed. That leaves only one possibility. Your date with Winston went well last night, and you're going to see him again. Judging from your walk, you didn't get any last night, but the total number of showers you've taken today suggests you're going to get some soon.”

I smacked him over the head with my dusting rag. “It went very nicely. He's teaching some classes today, so we're getting together again tomorrow.” I sighed as I thought about Winston bending over his student's looms, showing them the correct way to hold the stick to weave with. I remembered what his co-worker had called me, Sex-on-a-Stick, and I felt myself responding again.

“Jeesh, you've got it bad. Can't believe it. You were so mad at him for laughing at you a few days ago, and now you're acting all moony over him.”

“He had his reasons for laughing. Did you know that he wove the fabric for my cast sleeve? Just for me. He's a master weaver. One of the best and has won awards for it.”

“You're talking fabric here. Fabric, man. Machines can do that. I'm not seeing you swoon over any machines.”

“That's different. It's an art. He's an artist. Combining textures and color to create masterpieces.”

The dust rag smacked me in the face. I was swooning. I was turning into a main character in a smutty romance novel. I needed to get out my gay superhero attitude and do something manly. Like challenging my worthless roommate to a game of Frisbee golf. I could throw with one hand.

\*\*\*\*

Both of us spend too much time inside. Me at my computer. Winston at his looms. Granted I have a laptop, and he has this thing called a “rigid heddle loom” he can pack up, but the truth is both of us spend too much time inside. Sunday afternoon was sunny, so we headed over to a local state park, wearing our hiking boots and carrying water bottles. He offered to carry my water bottle for me since I was the injured one. *Such a gentleman.* I told him that and batted my eyelashes at him. He made me carry my own water plus half the snacks he had packed in case we got hungry.

He pointed out various plants that could be used in dyeing fabrics. I pointed out that he had a button nose that was adorable. He pointed out that I had a mouth that was begging to be kissed. I pointed out that he blushed quite prettily when I complimented him. He reminded me that I was the one who had the nickname of Sex-on-a-Stick while his nickname was Tigger. We talked about things that didn't matter. *What is your favorite color?* The things you ask a person when you want to get to know them. The day was spending time together. I did reach out for his hand during a flat stretch of the path, and we walked for a while, holding hands. I'm not sure if I'd ever done that with anybody, except for my parents when I was a toddler. Holding tight to one of their hands was required. This was different. His hold was strong, but gentle. Each finger had its own callus, and one finger had a deep groove in it. It was from spinning his own yarn.

I shook my head over this piece of information.

We found a spot of sunshine for our lunch, and Winston turned those pretty green eyes towards me.

“Why a market analyst? What made you pick that career?”

“I’m a gossip at heart. I love hearing what people think about their neighbor’s new dress or the new flavors at the local ice cream stand. Don’t tell me the plot of the book you’re reading, but tell me what you thought about it. I want the full details. I got into a bit of trouble over it in high school. Told one of my teachers what the principal thought about her, and it wasn’t flattering.”

“Principal thought she was a lousy teacher? Why did that get you into trouble?”

“I may have overheard the principal telling somebody that the teacher was lousy in bed. I may have opened my mouth in a classroom full of students. Believe me; I’ve learned my lesson on when to keep my mouth shut after that. My boss says that I’m the best at keeping secrets. In fact, I know the results of a major survey right now, and there is nothing that you can do to me that will make me reveal that secret.”

Winston grinned at me. He leaned over, pushed me flat on the ground, and kissed me. Hard. His tongue demanded entry into my mouth, and I opened willingly. One hand slid underneath my T-shirt and went searching for my chest. I did not whimper. It was a manly expression of appreciation for his actions. This manly expression grew louder as he straddled my body and pressed close to me. Lips leaving mine, he nipped at my ear lobe and whispered, “Tell me the results of the survey.”

“Sixty-five percent of people can’t tell the difference between Pepsi and Coke and don’t care.”

He pulled away from me and laughed. I called him various nasty names and he laughed even louder. Strange how different this laugh sounded from his previous laughs. It sounded carefree, like music to my ears. The other times I’d heard his laughter, it sounded harsh and strained. My brain thought about it for a nanosecond before my body took over and pulled him back down on top of me. He stopped laughing when I kissed him.

We kept kissing until we heard a bunch of kids coming up the path. The dad and kids didn’t notice our slightly rumped state, but the mom did and she gave us a wink. We ended up talking with the kids about the different items



that they had picked up along the trail. Winston was able to name most of them, and one particular plant he told the kids that they should leave alone. I pulled their mom aside, and told her about a home remedy for poison ivy that my mother had used. It worked for me and should work for them. I accused Winston of making up half the names of the plants after they left. He shrugged his shoulders. *Maybe, maybe not*, he said.

\*\*\*\*

Monday morning came too early. I wanted to go back to the weekend. I wanted to finish what Winston and I had started.

I was thinking about that in the morning meeting and missed part of the conversation around me. My co-workers were talking about a company that had approached our PR department the week before and asked for help in dealing with a certain public relations situation they found themselves in. Our president heard their story, showed them the door, and told them where to shove their request. She wasn't polite about it, either. Their story? Some of their male employees had cornered a female temp in a copy room. They raped her. The temp went to the hospital, and to the police. According to the men, it was all in good fun, and the company claimed that the men were all outstanding executives with promising careers. The woman was a nobody, and the news was starting to report on how she was going to ruin these men's careers with her accusations. My co-workers were planning on a small celebration for our president, thanking her for her actions.

"We could cater lunch in. Give her a gift card to her favorite store."

"I think dinner out and skip the gift card."

"Or how about we take the money we would spend on the dinner and give it to the woman to help pay her medical bills?" My mouth opened by accident. For some reason, I was tired of the reports of criminals being rewarded and bullies being given a slap on their hands while their victims were left with nothing but a ruined life. The room fell silent for at least five minutes. That's a record in this office.

“We could get our PR office to help fight the negative stories about her. Remind folks of what the truth is about her.”

“Maybe we could find her a place here to work. I know that we could use the help, and she might feel safe here. She won’t at her old job.”

“HR has given me the approval to hire a part-time filing clerk. I know it’s not much, but it would be something, and the hours would be flexible.”

“Ray has a black belt, and we could tell anybody giving her a hard time that Ray would be paying them a visit.”

I left the meeting feeling a little pride about what my accidental comment had managed to achieve. I pulled up the news on my computer and read more about her case. Single, young, going to school, and working temp jobs to help her father raise her younger siblings. Her income was helping her family to keep a roof over their heads, while the bastards that raped her were high-powered wealthy men looking for a bit of fun. Sometimes, I actually hated my gender. Her lawyer’s name popped out at me. I knew the lawyer and the firm. A quick check on my vacation savings account showed a healthy amount. I called my friend and made arrangements to have money wired to the family for expenses. Or a vacation. They needed it more than I did.

What I needed was a small dose of Winston.

\*\*\*\*

Daisy waved me in and handed me a bunch of yarn. “He’s in the back and needing these skeins. You’re saving me a trip back there. Hurry now. Don’t keep the man waiting.” She dismissed me as easily as she commanded me to do her bidding. I wondered if she had a military background.

*Skeins? Is that what they are called?* I would need a cheat sheet if I was going to continue to come here. I walked towards the back where I knew the larger looms were housed and spotted Winston. I paused to enjoy the view. He was bent over at the waist, hands moving a mass of yarn around on the floor. Legs slightly apart with his ass high in the air. The pale gray sweater was falling forward, showing pale skin. Worn jeans sliding down showing off the

dark blue plaid of his boxers. Bare feet worked with bare hands in the mountain of colors displayed underneath him.

Every single brain cell that existed in my head disappeared at the sight.

“Daisy! About time, I need that magenta.” He reached his hand out, not even looking at me, but expecting the magenta to magically appear in his hand.

“Um, which one is the magenta? I have four reds and two purples here.”

His head popped up as he twisted around to see me. His stance was all wrong, well, wrong for him; I could have watched him for hours in that pose. He slipped on the yarn and tumbled to the floor. Dropping all the yarn, I rushed to help.

Laurel and Hardy could not have come up with a routine that was as funny as what happened next. I slipped on one of the red yarns that I had dropped, fell to my knees, and planted my face right into his groin. He yelped. Daisy and another employee rushed in. Daisy slipped on the purple yarn and fell on her ass. We struggled to right ourselves or at least get my face off his crotch, and managed to get tangled in the yarn spread out on the floor.

Screaming for us to stop struggling, the other woman ordered us to lie still. She was going to try to untangle the warp. I knew that the warp had something to do with the weaving, but couldn't remember. Not with my face so close to Winston's groin. I couldn't even remember the woman's name. I was going to ask Winston, but he was whispering something while trying not to move. His voice grew a little louder. “...to your left.” I'd know that line anywhere. It was the words to a cult classic, “The Time Warp”.

Forget about the first time that I met him. Forget about his strange laughter. Forget about my initial anger at him. Forget everything I knew before. I joined in on his song, singing off-key with him. I was in love with him. My crush on his pretty ass had turned into love.

\*\*\*\*

“Warp, up and down. Weft, right to left.”

“Do you think I’m going to remember that? Please check off one the following: Yes. No. No opinion.”

“Smart ass.”

“Probably. Seriously, I’m sorry that I screwed up your warp. Is there any way that I can help to save it? Untangle it maybe? Replace it?”

“See! I knew it. I knew that you knew the difference between warp and weft. I knew it. I knew it. I knew it.”

Winston jumped up from his seat and did what looked like a victory dance around the table. I considered tripping him as he made his second pass around me, but one broken arm in this relationship was enough. Strange how I was thinking about this as a relationship.

“Ray. You’re incredible. After the shitty way that I laughed at you, you gave me a chance to get to know you. For us. I know it hasn’t been that long, but I feel as if I’ve known you longer. I used to watch you eat your lunch by the shop each day. So perfect in your suit. So precise. Never a flaw. When I saw you on Friday, covered with mud and dripping, it was as if you were one of us. Messy and so fucking gorgeous. I wanted to introduce myself before, but I couldn’t force myself to walk the ten feet outside my door to your bench. Daisy was getting so frustrated with me that she threatened to cut my warp. Then Karla invited me, well told me, that I had to come to her party. A simple evening with her boyfriend and some friends. No pressure on me. Nothing. I had no idea you lived there, otherwise I would have cut the warp myself before going. Oh God, I’m rambling.”

I was stunned. The man was scared of me. He thought I was gorgeous. He was watching me when I was watching him. My God, this man created artwork for rock stars and celebrities. He spoke with them, but he was too scared to speak to me? I was nothing. For crying out loud, I was a market analyst who created surveys asking strangers if they liked Product A better than Product B. I was boring, and he wanted me.

“Sit down, Winston. You’re making me dizzy.”

He sat down. On my lap. He straddled my chair and planted himself right on top of my lap. Where he could see and feel the large bulge in the front of my jeans.

“Um, that’s not helping.”

“I think it is.”

“You’re going to end up on the floor again.”

“Can we get naked first?”

“Definitely not helping.”

“I think it’s about time.”

“Time for what?”

“Time for bed.”

“Not helping.”

“Ray?”

“Hmm.” I was busy nuzzling his neck, and I didn’t want to stop to answer his question. Either he had forgotten to shave this morning or he was going for the scruffy look. I liked it.

“Ray?”

“What?”

“Let’s go find a bed.”

\*\*\*\*

Winston’s bed was closer, and it was a king-size bed. The man had a serious bed for playing in. It was one of those pillow top mattresses, soft yet firm enough to hold the weight of two grown men. I pushed him across its width and settled myself between his legs, relishing the small groans that he made. I tried to lower myself on top of him, but my cast got in the way. With strength that surprised me, Winston rolled me onto my back and solved the problem.

“You’re beautiful. My God, you’re so beautiful.” Winston whispered against my ear. His lips moved down my neck and across my collarbone. I responded with whimpers. So suave of me. His fingers tickled down my side with his lips following close behind. I grasped at his forearm and tugged him upwards.

“Liar. I’ve seen beautiful, and it’s not me. Beauty is you. Your smile, your strength, your spirit.” I was begging. Begging for this wonder of a man to kiss me, to touch me, to do anything he wanted to me. I didn’t care. I knew what it was like to kiss Winston. His lips against mine, tongues meeting, and sharing our breath. I’d tasted the slight coconut-chocolate flavor from his favorite treat. Felt the heat of his mouth. Now, I wanted to know what it was like to wrap my arms around him, and stay with him for the night. I wanted him. All of him.

Running my one good hand around his waist, I pulled him tight to me. He laughed lightly, and again I was stunned at the difference in his laughter from the first time I heard it.

“Blah, blah, blah. Enough talking.” He brought his mouth back towards mine and kissed me. Gentle, caressing, and hot. God that man could kiss. I spread my thighs wide, hoping that he would take the hint. He took the hint. I felt him grow harder against my hip.

Taking off my jeans with one hand in normal circumstances was difficult. Taking off my jeans with one hand, one hard-on, and one seriously impatient Winston was impossible. We were giggling with our attempts to get undressed quickly. I forgot the basics of taking off my shoes before taking off my jeans. He had forgotten that unbuckling belts makes it easier to unzip zippers. Frustrated, I shoved him off of me and kicked off my shoes. With those obstacles removed, I was able to get rid of my jeans and the rest of my clothes. The only thing I did not remove was his covering for my cast. There was no way I was going to ruin this moment by showing off that ugly neon orange monster.

Pausing in his actions, Winston watched me strip. His green eyes darkened with lust while the tip of his tongue slipped out of his mouth. He dropped to

his knees, running his hands up my calves. Concentrating on the feel of his hands on my legs, I groaned loudly. I hoped that there was nobody in his shop underneath; otherwise, they would have known exactly what was taking place at that moment. I decided to worry about that later, especially since a certain pair of lips was moving closer to a certain part of my body. Briefly, I thought I needed to do something, show him that I wasn't a selfish lover. That I took an interest in my partner's enjoyment. But from the sounds he was making, he was enjoying himself as much as I was.

"May I?" His voice had gotten husky. I wasn't sure what he was asking for but decided that I didn't care. Whatever he wanted, I was willing to go along.

"Anything. Anything you want."

"I want to fuck you. Is that okay?"

My brain went on permanent vacation. Spreading my thighs wider, showing him my answer, my brain had one cell left with a little responsibility. "I'm clean. Tested recently but condom required." I was surprised that came out in full sentences.

The sound of a drawer opening reached my ears, and my body responded like Pavlov's dogs. My legs went wide, my hips went up, and my cock went hard. I'd make a pun about giving that dog a bone right now, but I won't.

"I tested clean also. Haven't been with anybody since, but I'll get tested again. Make sure you're safe. Until then, condoms."

"Me too." With that bit of business taken care of, I felt a finger nudging at my entrance. Not sure if my pleas to hurry up and fuck me were silent ones or if I actually said them out loud, but I didn't care. He pressed inward, and I sighed happily. A second finger joined in, and I groaned. I was babbling when he finally entered me. If I remember correctly, so was he. We were loud, encouraging each other for harder, faster, and more. Suddenly, Winston went still and sobbed out my name, and I watched as he came. Watching his beautiful face as he came sent me over the edge.

\*\*\*\*

Our new employee, Sally, showed up for her first day of work the next day. We didn't hold a formal meeting, but all the men were quietly told that they were not allowed to be in the same room with her unless another woman was present. It was not that the company didn't trust the men working in the office; it was because of the circumstances of her attack. Our president wanted Sally to feel safe, and when she did, the rule would be relaxed. Sally was assigned to my department since it had been discovered that while gay men may have fashion sense, they do not have filing-paperwork-correctly sense. They thought that by being gay, I was also a way for her to become comfortable around men again. I was nonthreatening. I tried to act offended but was secretly relieved that I had somebody who was willing to clean up my filing act.

HR came around with Sally, and I made sure that I was in an open area, in view of several women. Sally was extremely professional when told that she would be working for me on my filing, but I could see the fear in her eyes.

"Sally. It's nice to meet you. Please sit down. Can I get you a glass of water or coffee?" I tried to be as professional as she was, but I wanted to hug her and tell her that everything was going to be okay. *You see, you're working for a gay superhero now.*

"No, thank you. I'm fine." Good solid voice.

"Good call. The coffee is terrible here, but I have a nice selection of teas in my office. Please feel free to help yourself. Just ask any of the women where I hide my stash. They've found all of my hiding spots." I smiled, thinking that she would be more receptive to approaching a woman. "I was reading your resume, and I must admit that you're overqualified for the job. But if you're willing, then I would be an idiot to turn down the opportunity."

"A good filing system can either make or break an office. Even if a company has the most creative minds working for them, they won't be successful if they can't find their clients' contracts or invoices." Oh, I was going to like her. We talked a little more about her job duties and her hours. I did notice a strange habit of hers that matched one of Winston's. When a large group of people came close to her, she flinched. Winston's habit was more



subtle, but it was the same. I wondered if she was shy as he was. Thinking of him, I noticed the scarf she was wearing.

“That’s a lovely scarf. My boyfriend is a weaver, and he’d be jumping all over your scarf, examining the structure of it.” Yes, I threw the “gay card” out there. Maybe, if she knew, she would be less nervous around me. The gay card helped. She visibly relaxed.

“Thank you. It’s a Winston original. Your boyfriend might have heard of him,” she said. I smiled at her as I made the connection between her scarf and my Winston.

“Yeah, I’ve heard about Winston.” I brushed my fingers gently across my Winston original, marveling on how lucky I was to have the man himself, and not just a piece of his talent.

\*\*\*\*

Survey question number four: did the product meet your expectations?

Yes, No, No opinion.

Survey question number five: did Winston meet your expectations?

*Oh, hell, yes. All three times. My ass is still feeling it, and he was also walking a little funny this morning. I wonder if he’s available tonight? I could take him out to a movie or something. Dinner and a movie. Cliché type of date. Are we dating? Does he think we’re dating? He didn’t think it was a one-night stand, did he? He’s interested in more. I know I’m interested in more than a single night. Oh God. What if he was disappointed in me last night?*

*Maybe I’d better stop acting like a kid with their first crush and get back to work.*

Survey question number six: did he like action flicks or drama flicks?

Personally, I liked horror flicks the best, but there weren’t any decent horror flicks playing right then. Just a bunch of lifeless paranormal ones that pretended to be real. Boring. Boring would be good. We could make out in the back of the theater and ignore the movie. Rent a movie and stay at home. Make out on the couch.

The ring of my cell startled me out of my daydreams. Chuckling, I recognized the number that popped up. It was Winston's.

"Hey. How're you doing?"

"Distracted as all hell but doing great. I was wondering what your plans were for tonight?"

"I was hoping on doing you tonight. That or taking you to a movie."

"How about I make you dinner and you can do me afterward?"

"I can leave work early."

"Can you leave now? No, don't do that. I can't ask you to skip work because I'm, well, I've been distracted all morning. Thinking of you. About last night."

"Leaving work right now."

I hung up on Winston and sent a quick email to my boss. Minor emergency at home and I was taking the afternoon off. She emailed me back and told me to say hi to Winston.

Busted.

\*\*\*\*

The sunlight was dancing over our bare skin. I could get used to this, skipping out on work early to give my boyfriend a blowjob. Judging from the noises that he was making earlier, I was sure that he wouldn't mind it either.

His body was similar to mine, but it had its subtle differences. He was equal in height to me. His hair was shorter, dark, and curly compared to my longer dirty blonde. Shoulders broader than my own, from all that weaving, I suppose. Slender with just a bit of softness around the edges. I know that gay men are supposed to be all about the hard abs and chiseled features, but I liked a little softness. Hard abs will fade with time. Softness will comfort the stresses of daily life and serve as a living pillow. Personality will last longer, and his green eyes and smile will stay with me.

I ran my hand across his chest, enjoying the slight fuzziness of it. My chest was smooth and his chest hairs rubbing against my skin were like a hundred tiny caresses. I noticed something new on his hip. They were faded, but I could feel the slight pucker of several small scars. Tracing a finger gently against the scars on his right hip, I spotted a written tattoo, “the wise forgive but do not forget.” It was in simple script done with light ink. Unless you happened to be studying his skin closely, it was not noticeable. Briefly, I thought about asking him about it, but it felt like an invasion of his privacy. Tattoos can be a very personal item, and I wanted Winston to tell me about it when he was ready. Liar, I’d be on the Internet searching for the quote five minutes after leaving his side.

“Hey.”

Damn, he was awake and caught me staring. It was his own fault. I wouldn’t be staring at him, if he weren’t so pretty. My hand ran over his hip and settled on his ass.

“Hey back.” I removed my hand from his ass and settled it around his waist. The damn cast got in the way of a good snuggle and I was looking forward to getting it removed. Winston didn’t seem to mind it as he curled up against me. The man was a cuddler. Secretly, I was thrilled and intended to take full advantage of this discovery.

“I was wondering if you wanted to go to a party this weekend. A casual affair. I know it’s a bit late to be asking, but it’s an annual event that my family throws. I’d understand if you said no. My family can be a handful at times.”

“Oh, inviting me to meet the parents already. You must like me. Yes. No. No opinion.”

“I’m taking the invite back. I’ll tell them that you were a figment of my imagination and don’t really exist.”

“Too late, you extended the invite already. I’m getting the party hats out. Wait! You told your parents about me already?” I pulled back from him and

tried to give him my best evil villain glare. He laughed. Maybe I'd better stick to being a superhero, if my villain face was going to get laughed at.

“And my two brothers and sister. Oh, their spouses and various offspring. I was having dinner with them, and Andrew asked if I was inviting anybody this year. I think I shocked them when I mentioned that I might.”

“Shit. How big is your family and who is Andrew?” I was nervous now. Meeting the parents of one's partner for the first time was bad enough, but this sounded like I was going to be meeting the entire Sherman clan. Least it sounded as though a homophobic family was not going to be an issue.

“I have three siblings, their spouses, and six nieces and nephews. They're dying to meet you. Andrew is my older brother. I'm the youngest.”

“You're making me nervous, Winston.” Forget about meeting the family making me nervous, the idea of Winston wanting me to meet his family was scaring me to death. It sounded as though he was serious about this relationship of ours. I was still on the first chapter, amazed that he was in my bed. Well, technically it was his bed. I hadn't even thought about us becoming serious, that we might become serious. My history with relationships was disastrous. I'd meet somebody. We'd jump into bed and have a great time. Go out for drinks. After a few months, the sex would become okay, and both of us would move on to the next hot man.

With Winston, it felt different. The sex was fantastic. He was gorgeous, but there was something about him that made me want to hold him close. I wasn't sure if it was his shyness in large groups, if you could call it that. He was fine in a small group of people, witty, engaging, and normal. Get a handful of folks in the same room with him, and the change was remarkable. He acted as if he was scared of people. Like Sally at my office; she was recovering, but her actions spoke volumes. Running my hand over Winston's hip, I brushed over his tattoo. A thought popped into my head, but I dismissed it immediately.

“Ray? You don't have to go. It's okay.” He kissed me lightly, barely a kiss at all. I flipped him on his back and straddled him.

“Oh, I’m going, but you are going to owe me big time for this. You’re going to be invited over to my parents’ house, and meet my family. I don’t have as many siblings as you do, but my mom is a total terror. Word of warning. Don’t eat any of her baked items. They are lethal.”

He nodded his head and pulled me down on top of him. As I entered him, we forgot about both sides of the family and concentrated on each other.

\*\*\*\*

“Holy shit, Ray. You’re going to the barbecue. As in the Sherman Annual Barbecue?”

My roommate was staring at me, his jaw dropping to the floor. I think I saw drool.

“Winston invited me to his family’s place this weekend for a party. It’s a casual event, and I’m going to meet his family.”

“Holy shit again. I can’t believe that you’re taking this so lightly. You’re going to the Sherman Annual Barbecue. Man, this year’s guest list is supposed to be insane. Rumor says Jules Austin, the singer, is coming. The president had to decline, but other presidents have been known to come.” Tom was ranting. My Winston shared the same last name as the Sherman family, but he wasn’t one of them. The Shermans were a high-class super-rich family, billionaires, or multi-billionaire type of family. Winston cut coupons and shopped at the “Gently Loved” store for his wardrobe. He did not belong to a family that had world famous singers coming over for dinner. Or presidents.

“Winston is not that Sherman. He’s an owner of a weaving shop, and my boyfriend. He lives over his shop, not in a mansion with servants. For God’s sake, he does his own cleaning.”

“Ray. The Winston that we had over for the party is Winston Arthur Sherman the fourth, youngest son of Winston Arthur Sherman the third. Of the fucking Sherman Annual Barbecue family. Did you not know who you were fucking?” Tom was yelling now. He started pacing the floor, shaking his head. “Idiot. You idiot. You didn’t know.”

“He’s not that Sherman. He can’t be. He’s normal, not a rich kid. And don’t be so crude about him.” I shook my head in disbelief. It was a strange coincidence that there were two men with the same name in the same town. He couldn’t be.

“Ray. Google him. There are a few pictures of last year’s barbecue on the net. Take a look and get your head out of your ass. Your boyfriend is one of the super-rich.” Tom flipped open his laptop and started the search for me. I watched as he found and selected a few pictures. I slumped down in the chair next to him as a familiar face appeared in the photos. He was in the background, hiding behind two men and one woman who bore a close resemblance to him. His brothers and sister. He said he had two brothers and one sister. The next picture showed an older man and woman with her arm around Winston’s waist. His parents?

Shit. I was an idiot.

How could I have fooled myself?

What was he doing? He could have anybody, and he was dating me? Was this some sort of game to him? Was it a joke?

My chest hurt. He couldn’t be interested in me. I was nothing but a nice looking body in a decent suit. My job was something that most people yawned over. I was nothing compared to him. The pain in my chest was spreading. It had to be some kind of a joke. What did he want from me?

“See, Ray. That is your Winston in these pictures.” Tom pointed at Winston, and I read the small blurb underneath it. The Annual Barbecue was an event to raise funds for various charities. Each guest was encouraged to raise support for their favorite charity, with some outrageous results. Contests and a silent auction were held during the event, with one local group receiving a huge portion of the receipts. It was a support group for the victims of violent/hate crimes and their families. The fund-raising would help pay the legal fees, the medical bills, or in some cases, funeral costs for the victim. The volunteers helped the victims with whatever was needed. The charity was formed almost a decade ago, when a brutal attack against a local teen made

national news. Nicknamed the Closet Boy, his attackers had beaten him badly and then locked him in a closet. The police had ignored the parents' pleas for help in finding their missing teenager. The media jumped on the story when the kid showed up the next day, half dead from his attack and from kicking down the cheap closet door. It was the same group where my lawyer friend worked and was currently helping Sally.

I ran my finger across Winston's picture. I couldn't imagine what he was doing with me, and it didn't feel right. We came from two different worlds. I couldn't let this relationship go any further. I'd have to stop it. I'd go to the party. I wouldn't embarrass him. He and his family could have their laugh at my expense. I'd get to see him one more time. At least it would be a good story to tell in my old age. About the time I had a fling with a rich man's son.

Why did my chest hurt so much?

\*\*\*\*

I was in over my head. Think of every cliché and I was it. I did my research and kicked myself into next week for being a blind idiot. He was of the Sherman family. I thought he was a normal guy like me. I thought that maybe I would have a chance with him. Make a life with him. I realized that I had fallen in love, but he was slumming. After he'd had his fun, he'd go on to the next gullible guy and turn on the charm.

I snagged a cold beer from one of the passing servers and gulped it down. I was getting drunk. There were gardens in the back, and I could get lost in there. Let Winston party with his friends and let the loser hide in the gardens.

A tap on my shoulder startled me, and I turned quickly. Winston was holding out a plate of food for me.

"Ray, I think you should eat something. It's really good."

"Why did you invite me? Was it all some kind of a joke for you?" I wanted another beer. I wanted to go home. I wanted to curl up in my bed and cry. I didn't want to be here. I didn't want to hear Winston tell me that he never wanted me.

“I invited you here because I wanted you to meet my family. I guess my timing was off a bit.” I saw a server and flagged him down for another beer. Winston intercepted the beer and handed the server the plate of food meant for me.

“What the hell, Winston. What the hell were you thinking? Forget that. I don’t want to know what you were thinking. It was fun while it lasted, and I’ll go home now. That singer guy seemed pretty interested in you. He was flirting pretty heavily with you.” My chest was hurting again, and I was finding it hard to breathe. I needed to get out of there.

“You mean Jules? He forgot his mother-in-law’s birthday again. He was begging me to find something in my shop for her as a present. Each year, the women change their birthday dates on his schedule. He comes to me in a panic and I find something in my shop that suits that person perfectly. Thing is, I have all their birthdays on my schedule and have something for Jules when he comes begging.” Winston took a gulp of my beer, and I looked for another server. I needed that beer.

“He was offering to blow you.”

“Last year, he offered his ass to me. Ray. Listen to me. He’d never go through with it, even if I accepted his offer. Jules is in love with his husband. Besides, I’m not interested in him. I’m interested in you.”

“Why? You’re rich. I’m not. You’re talented. I’m not. You get hit on by superstars. I don’t even get an upgrade to my coffee from the local coffee shop.”

“Because you see me, not my family’s pocketbook. Because after my asshole behavior, you still looked at me and gave me a chance. Because I love you.”

I stared at him, not believing his words. He couldn’t love me.

“There you are, Winston. Can I tear you away from Ray for a second and talk?” Winston’s dad was waving at us. With all the Winstons in the family, how did they keep them straight? “It won’t take long. Hey, Ray. Enjoying yourself? There’s a ton of food up front. Make sure that you stuff yourself. Get



some of the honey mead that John brought. God, I love that stuff. Your mother won't let me have it any other time. Says that all that honey is not good for me."

Oh my God. Tigger's dad was Winnie the Pooh. I was going mad.

"Dad. Later. Please, can it wait?" My Winston turned away from his dad and towards me.

"Won't take a second. Your mother wanted to make sure that you were comfortable with your announcement later this evening. After all these years, she worries about you. She knows that the boys are still in jail and can't hurt you, but she worries." Dad Winston continued on talking, but I didn't hear a word he said. All I could see was my Winston's face go pale. The words "jail" and "attackers" reached my ears, but I couldn't make sense out of any of it.

"Dad! Shut up now. I haven't had a chance to talk to Ray yet. Please be quiet."

"Oh shit. I'm sorry. I thought Ray knew already. Your mother is going to kill me if I messed up anything between the two of you. She fell in love with Ray at first sight, and your sister thinks he's adorable."

"Excuse me, but I'm standing right here." I would need another beer if I was going to keep listening to these men. No server was in sight, and I debated about leaving both Winstons to search for one.

"Ray. I wanted to talk to you before, but I was scared. Scared of what you would think."

"Of what I would think? Why would it matter what I thought? You're the rich one. I'm the poor schmuck that fell for your lines." The hell with it. I grabbed Dad Winston's mead and took a healthy swig. Sweet honey slipped down my throat, and I groaned at the flavor. It was good. Maybe I could find a case or two of this to drown out the pain in my chest.

"Fuck the goddamn money! Ray, I already told you that I thought you knew. Dad is talking about something else, and I've changed my mind. I'm not making any announcement tonight." He tried to knock the mead out of my

hand, forcing me to take a step back. Even his Dad took a step back. I will admit that an angry Winston was hot, and I wanted to push him a little to see how far it would go. The other part of me wanted him to shove me and nail me to the ground.

“Son. Calm down. Ray, I apologize, but sometimes my son forgets that he needs to verbalize his words. Let me guess, you didn’t know who our family was. Don’t be too harsh on him for that. All the kids have had trouble with dates wanting them for the money, and not for themselves. As for the other part, well, we have never had to deal with it before, but he must think you’re worth it. He’s ready to talk about it now.”

The second sip of the honey mead was even better than the first. “Fuck you, Winston, and all of your secrets. I didn’t know about your money. You live in a small apartment over your shop and cut coupons. You laugh at the strangest things. You hint at this big announcement that you’re making tonight. What the hell am I supposed to think?”

Both Winston’s faces went pale at my outburst. I was shocked at it myself. I considered myself to be an easygoing guy, but this man riled me up in more ways than I could count. The silence around us grew as I continued to sip on the mead. Quietly, my Winston cleared his throat. “Remember a few years back when an attack on a gay teenager made the headlines?”

“You need to be more specific. I can name a half dozen cases right now.” It was horrifying the number of gay bashings that made the headlines on a normal basis. More people were becoming outraged about the attacks, so progress was being made.

“A local one. His classmates stabbed him and locked him in a closet. I was going to talk about that,” he whispered.

“Yeah, the Closet Boy. A friend of mine is one of the lawyers who worked on that case. She never mentioned the details, but the newspapers said the kid was stabbed and raped repeatedly. She still works for that organization, and I donate to the cause on occasion.” Suddenly, I remembered a tattoo on Winston’s skin. It was above some old scars. Stab wounds. They were scars

from stab wounds. I dropped the mead, rushed over to the nearest bush, and emptied out my stomach.

It was too much for me to handle. I couldn't deal with this, so I ran.

\*\*\*\*

The place was huge. You needed a map, a GPS unit, and a Sherpa to help guide you around the gardens. It was perfect for me to get lost in.

My head was spinning. Winston Arthur Sherman IV was a member of one of the country's richest families. How did I miss that connection? The number after his name should have given me a clue. He was also the infamous Closet Boy from a few years ago. Thing was, I wasn't thinking about money and family. I was thinking about his ass, his strange laugh, his shyness, his kiss. I was thinking about him.

They were so ordinary. His family was like mine. Siblings teasing each other about events that happened years ago. Mom fussing over how tired he looked, and if he was eating enough. Dad drinking home-brewed beer. They were so fucking normal for the amount of money they had. Other wealthy families had TV shows filmed around them, and here's this family who barely makes its way into the local newspaper. Except for once a year when they throw this major party, a fundraiser for several charities including legal aid for victims of abuse.

I discovered several benches and picked one to sit on while I settled my thoughts. My memory gave me little information on what I knew about the family from the news. The only thing I could remember was the "boy in the closet" headlines. The newspapers never gave the name of the victim because of his age, but the local gossip had filled in the name of the school where the attack took place. The Closet Boy case, as it became known, sparked a controversy over the school's hostile attitude towards their gay youth.

His classmates, a bunch of thugs, grabbed him because he was talking to their girlfriends. They dragged him to an empty classroom, beat him up, raped him, and locked him in a closet. When he didn't show up at home that night, their friends started searching after the police refused to help. He was found

the next morning when a teacher discovered him half dead from the attack. He had kicked the cheap door apart to escape. The monsters claimed that he begged them for it. The school said that the monsters were promising students, and shouldn't have their academic careers ruined because of one gay boy crying wolf. The media and the activists went crazy for a couple months. Marches protesting the slap on the hands his attackers got because they were juveniles. The school and the families of his attackers were sued when the criminal courts failed to provide any justice. The Closet Boy disappeared into the background, never to be heard from again after his testimony in court.

No wonder he was shy around people. I'd be terrified. Yet, he was brave enough to let me into his life, and what did I do? I stranded him after figuring out who his family was, and hearing his story. Face it. I was pure scum. No, that would be an insult to the scum. I needed to get my act together and go beg him to forgive me. Groveling would be a good start.

I went back to where I left both Winstons. Neither one of them was there. I searched the nearby gardens. I debated about calling him on my cell, but I was chicken. Besides, I had left my cell phone inside. Finally, I saw the older Winston talking to a server. Jogging towards them, I thought that if I started the groveling with his dad, that maybe Winston would be more receptive in talking to me.

“Mr. Sherman! Wait up. Please.”

“Ray. I'm busy. Go inside.” He made a shooing motion with his hand, and my heart sank. I had screwed up badly if he was treating me like this.

“Please. I need to apologize.”

“No. You need to go inside.” The server tugged at Mr. Sherman's sleeve, moving both of them away from me.

“I behaved like an asshole. I want to apologize to you and Winston. If he's still speaking to me.”

“He's inside with his mother. Now, please go.” I was close enough now that I could see the fear on Mr. Sherman's face. There was something wrong, and he was trying to warn me off.

“I would take Mr. Sherman’s advice and walk away.” The server moved his hand and showed me his gun. Oh, shit. This was bad. Really bad. I took a few steps back and held both my hands up.

“Okay. Walking away.” Several options ran through my head. Option one, run and get help; but they would be gone by then. Option two, try to talk the server into letting Mr. Sherman go; but my talking skills were failing me at the moment. I had a third option, but it was risky; and since when do I listen to what other people say? Looking for an opening, I spotted one. I could do this. I had to do this. For crying out loud, I have a black belt, I should be able to take down one armed idiot who was threatening Winston’s dad.

The gun dropped away from Mr. Sherman’s side. I moved my body. My one hand smashed over his arm with the gun while my other hand slammed into his nose. I heard bone breaking and hoped it was his and not mine. I saw Mr. Sherman scrambling free, and I took another swing. My cast connected with the server’s head and I heard popping sounds. The server dropped. It was almost too easy.

I fell to my knees, adrenaline rushing through me, and then I tipped over. Mr. Sherman was taking off his jacket and pressing it against my chest. He was shouting something, but I couldn’t hear him.

Everything went dark.

\*\*\*\*\*

My hand hurt. I had hit it on something. No, somebody, not something. Somebody. A server was going to hurt Pooh Bear. I had to stop him.

Pain. My stomach hurt.

I could hear somebody screaming. I struggled to wake up.

I could hear Winston calling my name. I needed to wake up.

Then the pain went away, and the dark claimed me again.

\*\*\*\*\*

I heard whispering this time. There was no pain.

“You need to eat something. You’re not going to be any good for him if you’re exhausted yourself.”

“I can’t leave him, Mom. I can’t.”

I managed to open my eyes this time and saw Winston’s tear-streaked face. He was so beautiful. I didn’t want to see him crying. I needed to see him happy and bouncing.

“Listen to your mother, Tigger.” My voice cracked. My throat hurt. I wanted some water.

The smiles on their faces. On my Tigger’s face. Fresh tears rolled down his cheeks as he leaned over to kiss me. It was a gentle kiss, almost fearful. I wanted more and grabbed him to pull him closer.

“Ouch. Damn it. What the hell happened? Is Pooh Bear, no, your dad, is he safe? Is he okay?” God, I needed to stop calling these people by these crazy nicknames. Maybe I could blame the drugs. A sharp pain stabbed me in my side, and I tried to grab at it.

“Stop! You’re injured. Pooh Bear is fine. Mom, get the doctor, please.”

I heard a male voice calling for the doctor; Andrew, I think. It got confusing. A couple of doctors came rushing in and shoved Winston away from me. I wanted him back and reached for him. One of the nurses took pity on me. She made room for Winston, and he held tightly onto my fingers. The brief contact calmed me as the doctors poked at me. I barely understood what they were telling me, but apparently I had stopped Dad Winston from being kidnapped. Except for some bruises and minor cuts, he was fine. His kidnapper had a broken nose and arm thanks to me. I had broken my cast, but my arm was unharmed. The bad news was he had a gun. Fortunately, he missed my vital organs, and the bullets had gone straight through me.

I had been shot.

By a gun.

Shot.

Bang.

I squeezed Winston's hand tightly. I wanted the doctors to leave. I wanted Winston to curl up next to me and tell me that we were going to be okay. I wanted to apologize to him for being an idiot earlier. I wanted him to forgive me for being an asshole. I looked down at our joined hands and saw a fresh white cast around my arm. No neon orange cast. No Winston original enclosing it.

"Where is it?" I got a blank look from Winston, and then he smiled at me again.

"You broke the cast on the guy's head. They replaced your cast with a new one. "

"My Winston original. The fabric you made for me. Where is it?" I was starting to panic.

"It was ruined. They tossed it. I'll make you a new one. I'll make you several new ones."

"I want my old one back. It's the only thing that I have left of you. I want it back. To remember you by."

"Ray. Sweetie. I'll make you a new one. I'll make you anything you want. And you have me. I'm not leaving you." Winston shoved a doctor aside to get closer to me. I loved that about him. He'd sit in the background, happy to be there, but get in the way of something that he wanted and watch out. "Ray, I love you. Why would I leave you?"

He loved me. He said that he loved me. He wasn't going to leave me. The pain in my chest went away. I lifted my free hand to his face and wiped a tear from his cheek.

"Forget that I said that. I love you too, Winston Arthur Sherman the fourth."

I got a proper kiss from him this time, deep and delicious. He pulled back and grinned wickedly. "That's Tigger, if you don't mind."

My Tigger was bouncing again.

The doctors demanded that Winston step back and let them do their jobs. As he moved away from me, I noticed the wall next to me for the first time. I stared at it in shock, not quite believing what I was seeing. T-shirts covered the entire wall, each one with a different superhero logo on it. There was Superman, Batman, Captain Marvel, even a Mighty Mouse one.

Winston's mom saw me staring at the wall in confusion and answered my unspoken question. "We weren't sure who your favorite superhero was, so we got them all." She reached around Winston and brushed the hair from my forehead. "I know who mine is."

\*\*\*\*

My arm looked strange. After being in a cast for so long, it was pale white and stood out against my tan. I carefully folded the several cast covers that Winston had woven for me. I didn't need them anymore, but I refused to give them up.

"Hey handsome. You ready to go?" Winston walked into our bedroom with my car keys in one hand.

"I think so. Are you sure about this?" I grabbed him and pulled him into a tight hug. It felt good. I could hold him with both arms now.

"I'm positive." He kissed me gently.

We had talked for days while I recuperated from my gunshot wounds. He told me about his attack. I talked about my insecurities about our relationship. We held hands while both our families sat in the courtroom and watched as the kidnappers were sentenced to prison.

We made love. A lot. Lots and lots of great sex.

His laugh changed from a nervous one to a glorious one. I found myself loosening up and dressing in a casual manner. I could see myself losing the suits forever. Even my job was changing. In one hour, my job title was going to change from Market Analyst to Partner and Co-Owner of a weaving shop. My boss was pretty upset about me leaving until Winston promised her that she could have her pick of any shawl in the shop. Winston's employees were



excited since the new shop was three times larger than the old one. My former roommate, Tom, was not as excited as the rest of us. His new roommate, Karla, was a bit more high-maintenance than I was.

A slight tap on my shoulder brought me back to the present.

“Hey. It’s time to go. You got everything?” He waved the car keys in front of my face, and I snatched them away.

“I have to grab one more thing. Meet you by the car?” He nodded and left the room. I palmed the keys and put two matching rings inside my front pocket. “I have everything now.”

\*\*\*\*

“On the count of three. One. Two. Three!” Winston shouted and dropped his stick in the water. I dropped mine at the same time and raced him to the other side of the bridge. “Wait. Wait. Wait. There! That’s mine! I won again!”

He raised his arms in the air and did a victory dance. I grabbed him by his T-shirt and pulled him close. “Okay, Tigger. I know you’re cheating. I’m not sure how but you are cheating.”

“How about one more game of Pooh Sticks, then I’ll take you to dinner. Where you can pay since the loser is buying dinner tonight!”

Laughing, I grabbed another stick from the pile we had gathered and stepped to the side of the bridge again. Two kids from a family joined us, and the four of us dropped our sticks into the water and watched as they floated past. I pretended to pout as my stick came in last again.

“Dinner it is. I guess I’m buying dinner for my husband.” I couldn’t help but grin as I called Winston my husband. We’d been married for two weeks now, and the novelty of married life hadn’t worn off yet. Of course, we were still on our honeymoon, but I had a feeling the warm fuzzy feeling that I got from that title was never going to wear off. Especially if he was going to continue to wear the Tigger T-shirt that I got him as part of his wedding present. It fitted with the trip to Christopher Robin’s Woods we had planned for our honeymoon.

He reached for my hand and held on to it tight. “On one condition. You let me choose the dessert. Hint, it’s covered in honey and is married to a superhero.”

He winked at me.

I winked back.

As we raced back towards our suite, I sent a silent thank you to Ms. Karma and to all of her sisters for that crappy day when I first met Winston.

**THE END**

## **Author Bio**

*Jinjur Louis lives surrounded by her own collection of yarn and weaving tools. When not spinning her own yarn to weave with, she makes up stories to amuse her friends. Currently she is trying to write a novel but is easily distracted by the voices in her head, telling her their stories.*

## **Contact Info**

[Goodreads](#)