

LOVE HAS NO BOUNDARIES

# LOST *in the* ECHO



JACK L. PYKE

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# Love Has No Boundaries

*An M/M Romance series*

## LOST IN THE ECHO

**By Jack L. Pyke**

### 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.

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By Jack L. Pyke

## Photo Description

Black and white photo of a young man bound to the bed. His white shirt is torn open, revealing toned abs; arms are bound wide, hands gripping at the rope and raised off the bed. A blindfold covers his eyes, and his head is turned slightly to the right. Mouth is open slightly, showing a need to speak, be heard, yet it looks like an internal conflict is keeping the man bound, hidden, and silent.

## Story Letter

*Dear Author,*

*The bed was soft, the sheets cool. That was all William could sense. Until fingers touched his face. A stranger's touch and he shuddered, listening for a voice, an explanation, some reason for this. Why was he here? Why were they doing this? And what did they want with him?*

*Sex is an option, not a must. If sex, please no twee or raunchy sex. HFN is enough, no HEA needed. Please try for something like abduction rather than BDSM. Set somewhere in Europe and please avoid the usual kind of crime plots, like the mafia.*

*Thank you,*

*Joan*

## Story Info

**Genre:** contemporary

**Tags:** professors, abducted/kidnapping, grief, enemies to lovers, captivity, HFN

**Content warnings:** mild violence, psych torment, mild torture, description of death of a loved one

**Word Count:** 20,965

*Dedication*

To the lady who gave me William. And to the LHNB editorial and production volunteers: huge, huge, thanks.



# LOST IN THE ECHO

**By Jack L. Pyke**

## CHAPTER ONE

William took a left off the A6 and pulled his Rover onto a long stretch of road, the suspension making it a smooth ride, just barely massaging the tension in his arms. A suit jacket slept on his front passenger seat, threatening to slip onto the floor, and the occasional glare didn't keep it in check. In fact, the jacket seemed to sit there chuckling with loose change as it inched closer to the floor, goading every look Will could give it, as he flicked off his stereo. White sleeves were rolled up to his elbows, the sun tanning Will's arms through the tinted windows, and the cool breeze from the air conditioning shifted hair into his eyes. It made the late summer heat of a Friday afternoon almost bearable. Almost. He was running late. Although you wouldn't have guessed it with how the heat seemed to melt his tyres to the concrete, making the Rover slow, and the road ahead shimmer as it stretched and thinned, almost like some twisted backdrop in a Hitchcock-like nightmare.

Among the wings of the forest taking flight on either side of the road, ancient oak trees arched over the drive up to the old Lancaster University, offering the perfect group-huddle respite from the sights and sounds of the rush-hour traffic. Eventually the tree lines eased, and like quick flashes of life on fast forward through forest, here and there groups of youth lay sprawled out on the freshly cut grass. All smiles, chuckles, and small, secret kisses passed onto blushing cheeks that would have the Chancellor and all of his Vices raising a brow. Will snorted. Life and light—all there beyond the restraint of his windows.

Will's grip on the wheel tightened as he kept his gaze fixed on the run up to the County South Language Department.

His usual car parking space was taken, setting his mood a little darker, and he pulled into the next one, maybe fighting the need to pull in close enough to



the offending car, block the driver's side door off—state his claim of *don't do it again*. But he left being a jerk for the up-and-coming who thought acting like one would get them wherever they needed to go a little faster. Will was too tired for ego wars.

“You been at the pub for a pint, teach?” a voice called over, amongst the chatter and chuckles going on back there. Caught locking his car, William glanced back. “Ryan. You’ve got five minutes to finish your meet and greet and get into the lecture hall,” he said, realising he’d left his jacket on the passenger side. Ignoring the group of undergraduates, he reached back in and pulled it free. “And do you think the Chancellor would allow us a break time for anything longer than half a pint?”

“Well,” said Ryan, all roughed up hair and cheek to boot, “considering I’m shorter than you, a half’s good enough for me, if you feel your wealth spreads far enough to buy me one, Mr. Chambers.”

William looked at him and Ryan’s smile failed a touch. All of the defiance that was usually there in those younger eyes slipped into a distance that almost had William easing off; the cheeky offer of a drink had only ever been used as a tactic to get close to someone who should have been walking right there beside Ryan, they both knew that, and Ryan seemed to recognise it now. Seeing him lose all of his usual spark, Will’s instinct was there to ask if he was okay, to make sure he was, except he fell back on his silence, not yet willing, or able to cross any distance. Ryan mumbled a sorry, looked away, and moved off toward the main reception doors. William followed a few moments later, rubbing at the light sweat dampening the nape of his neck, yet shivering despite the heat. A few mumbled “hellos” and “afternoons” from people he knew went with him as he made it up into his study on the second floor; he greeted each colleague with the politeness of a small smile, politeness he could manage, conversation was the hard part.

The two lectures scheduled for this afternoon were mostly for his fulltime students, but twenty or so part-timers who studied the distance PhD in Applied Linguistics needed their theses marked, too, and it was something he should have done by now. Slipping his USB from his pocket, William gave a sigh.

Long gone were the days of carrying ream after ream of paper, now E-theses were subbed through the university online language forum, and it eased the load. Less time carrying, more time marking. *Or so the theory went*, mused Will.

Just as he brought the computer online, a tap came at his door. “Will.” Kate inched the door open and offered a smile. “Your lecture was due to start five minutes ago.”

“Yeah. I know,” he said, multitasking by inserting the USB and pulling his jacket on.

Kate came over and gave a wince. “And you know you should have done that well before your holiday next week.”

“Yeah,” he said again, a little tired even for his liking. “I know.”

Giving a sigh, Kate offered a smile and rubbed at his arm. “How about I download all your E’s and I’ll bring them to you during break? That way you can get off on time.”

Will slipped into a relieved thank-you smile. “You don’t mind?”

“No,” said Kate, “I don’t mind.”

Some of the pressure twisting his insides uncurled a touch. “You know my passwords, right?”

She nodded. Of course she did. Kate had been secretary to six language tutors for over ten years now and could ferret her way into any situation and disappear; leaving no linguistic fingerprint to say her devious side had been at play. Elliot had taught her well.

“You know he’s leaving next week?”

Will fought a knot that tightened in his stomach. “Who?”

Kate sighed. “Elliot.”

“He got his Oxford post?”

“Yeah. I’ll miss him. He’s been really good as Head of Department.” She was quiet for a moment. “What about you? Will you miss him?”

“I’ll miss Ryan.” Will looked at the door. He didn’t want to be here. “Although I would have appreciated being notified I was losing a student.”

Kate set to work on the computer. “Ryan’s not going.” Will looked back and Kate caught his eyes. “I wish the dad wasn’t either,” she added, now avoiding his gaze.

“His choice,” said Will, and he left Kate to it, making it down into his lecture hall. The groan of the door barely disturbed the chatter going on inside, and Will breathed a sigh.

“I hope all that row you’re all making surrounds the heated debate on how even objective analysis of Corpora data will rely on some form of subjective interpretation. Otherwise you can all leave.”

A chair was pushed back.

“Sit down, Ryan. Some of you need the extra study time.”

Chuckles hit the lecture hall as Will took off his jacket and placed it over the back of his chair, his gaze for a moment on his desk. A fresh coffee sat steaming in tune to the afternoon. There was a temptation to look at Ryan, say thank you for the peace offering, or at least acknowledge the fact that the son sitting over there was nothing like the hard-nosed bastard father, but that would mean looking up, that would mean looking at Ryan and facing the empty seat next to the young man.

“Right,” said Will, facing the board. “Just for a change, let’s go wild and throw something else into the linguistic mix. Let’s run with a little stylistics.”

“Oh, man,” called out Ryan from behind, “I only went to the barbers yesterday. You saying I’m going all” —there was a deliberate tousle of long locks and, Will guessed, a slow smile off Ryan too—“shaggy dog, Mr. Chambers?”

Despite not being able to look back, William managed a smile. But then came the sound of pages being turned, minds settling into concentration, and it forced Will to stare for a little longer at his whiteboard. He needed out now too.

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After a lousy night's sleep, Will fought off tiredness and pulled open the door to his Rover. Bags now packed neatly into his boot, his USB in his pocket, and laptop sleeping safely in the back somewhere, Will refused to look back at his detached cottage as he got in and gave a tired sigh. Every home was a cottage, barn, or old farm in Burrow Heights. The house and location not really being Will's ideal choice. But it was close to the university, and, at least for a while, it had also given him the opportunity to look beyond just a career. And just for that reason, it still had its lure as Will did exactly what he'd tried not to do; he looked in his rear-view mirror.

The motorbike still sat outside the garage, a late-teen's parallel twin engine, must-have Kawasaki Ninja 300, and all night-black with flecks of red. Now the machine was less "mean", more just old and crumbling under its own weight as it tilted to the side. After everything else that had gone, Will hadn't found the heart to sell that. The Kawasaki sat in the same defiant *I'll wait right here, he'll be back for me soon* pose, and it nearly tore out Will's heart under the pressure.

"I could take her off your hands."

Sat in his car, William just about caught the soft voice as he turned the Rover's engine over. Jake from a few doors down was out for his mid-morning run, and he offered Will a shy smile as he glanced at the motorbike on Will's drive. He stood just a few feet away from the car, moving slightly from foot to foot as if ready to bolt at the slightest word from Will. "She'd get a good home," said Jake, nodding at the motorbike as Will let the window fall all the way down.

"*Humph*, well, I'll..." Jake always offered; Will always promised to get back to him. Will never did, and something in Jake's kind eyes said he didn't mind. He understood. Will hated how everyone understood, especially when he couldn't figure a thing out of this whole mess for himself. "Can... would you just keep an eye on her for me whilst I'm away, please?" he asked instead, burying the need to move the gears, as the instinct to get away ate at his insides.

“Always,” said Jake. He looked like he’d say something else; he’d looked like he’d been on the verge of saying something else for the past year, but Will fell back into the security of a safe distance, giving just a quiet thanks, this time adding a promise to pick Jake something up for all of his troubles. “You know where I am if there’s any, y’know, problems. I slipped a note in at yours with the details.”

“Yeah,” said Jake, avoiding any eye contact now. “How’s Ryan?”

“Ryan’s okay.”

“And Elliot?”

Will’s brow darkened. “Elliot’s... Elliot: a twisted, homophobic psychopath who just happened to be head of my department for a while.”

Giving a frown, Jake glanced back towards Will’s house. “Listen, you take care, okay, Will?”

Will nodded. Dorset offered a whole week of running; no motorbikes, no houses that should have been homes, and no sweet men from a few doors down wanting a little more than just friendship, when all Will needed now was to disappear into the background, maybe be forgotten, become lost in the echo of a wild heath and harbour.

Already feeling the promise of another summer’s day, Will made a point of pulling up outside the local corner shop for some essentials: energy drinks, bread, milk, ham, mustard—a pack of Turkish Delight bars. Some vices he couldn’t—wouldn’t leave behind. But in between the carrier bags, he didn’t realise he’d picked up two deep-red, cinnamon-scented candles until it came to packing them in the boot of his Rover.

A gentle touch ran over the thin film covering to one of the candles, and Will rested his head against the boot lid. He’d almost forgotten.... How the hell could he have almost forgotten? Will glanced around, knowing there was one last stop to make.

The caretaker of the crematorium insisted on taking him up to a plot Will now knew how to find in the dark. Will waited for the man to move off,

watching him duck and dive from headstone to headstone, coming up with the odd handful of weed or dead flower. A gentle breeze carried a flurry of blossom petals and a rich rose scent, and Will sighed deeply. The view from up here was stunning: one of the highest hills looking out over fresh fields to the left. But it was the view to the right that always caught Will's attention. The dirt track was already busy with kids on their bikes, the sound of tyre on dirt lost to the distance. Not the most tactful of venues to see from a crematorium, but it was why Will had chosen this particular place. An echo of laughter always seemed to play around him up here, one that said a Kawasaki wouldn't fit on the playground below *and* would most probably terrorise the hell out of the younger kids playing there now.

He managed a smile, knowing his offer of one would have been returned. Eventually.

“Good-looking young man.”

A little startled, Will glanced off to his left to the caretaker still picking up weeds from a few graves down. A photo slept on the headstone at Will's feet, a picture of youth at its seventeen-year wildest; all black hair, black eyes, a slight smile that always left you guessing whether a joke or the need to run was coming. Will was always left chasing after either one.

“Looks as troubled as his dad,” said the man.

Unwrapping the candles, Will crouched. The petals that had blown over mimicked how a bedroom had never been kept clean for more than an hour, and Will never thought he'd regret missing the arguments that carried every touch of normality. He let the candles rest by the grave. Matches were in his pocket, and his hand hovered there for a moment, prepared to cause a flare that would let cinnamon and the undercurrent of rose calm everything that the day was throwing at him. But instead his hand slipped across his knee, the candles now, as well as always, remaining unlit.

“He wasn't mine,” said Will, quietly.

“Hmmm?” said the caretaker.

“The boy.” Will forced an angry sigh through his nose. He’d have given anything for this lad to carry his surname on something other than a piece of Government foster-carer paper. Will glanced down in time to catch the blossom dance across the grave, and his jaw was set tensing over thoughts on how funny it was how the people responsible were always the ones that got to walk away unharmed. “Happy eighteenth, kid.”

He stood, offering a polite thank you to the caretaker, then headed back down the hill to his Rover.

\*\*\*\*



## CHAPTER TWO

On the eastern side of Poole Harbour, a run of soft sea and sand held hands with a mass of forest and heath. They offered everything William loved about seclusion: a harbour only most locals knew about, a forest wrapped like a comic vampire cloak around it, all waggling eyebrows and scary music and creaking noises to boot, and all to ensure it stayed masked in mystery. He had Dorset shores running through his veins and had grown up living next to the Arne Nature Reserve. It's where he'd picked up his love of running, later his love of language.

Give a boy a backyard that led from harbour to forest, Will would have thought that most kids would no doubt either grow up following a family heritage of fishing or at least venture out into the wilds of botany. But with spending many a time with dirt on his hands and knees as he picked up bugs, feeling them wiggle under his touch, Will had always carried a fascination with how animals signalled stress, love, and life, all through colours, codes, and wriggling bodies. Arne had given him his first steps into linguistics at a young age; most of his projects earning him a frown off his father as he'd watched Will from his fishing boat on the harbour. That distance seemed to grow with Will. His studies had given him all of the conversational turn-taking tricks he'd ever need, yet when it came to actual conversation between two living and breathing bodies, between him and his father, between the loves and losses in his life, *safety in silence* always seemed the easiest option. He had a lot to thank Elliot for on that score.

Will frowned.

Strange how the one time he'd found his voice, he'd helped cause so much damage.

The drive had been long: four hours, making it close to two in the afternoon before he pulled his Rover alongside his log cabin. No boats were in the small harbour, no doubt most out already to catch their daily hold of cod. The cabin was set far enough away from the little home-from-home collection of holiday homes, from his father and the critical sneer of some of his old

neighbours, and that suited him just fine. He was close enough to keep his Wi-Fi connection, but not close enough for anyone to pop over and borrow a cup of sugar, or ask why he hadn't called in a while.

Grabbing his bags and his laptop from the boot, Will pushed on through to the coolness of the cabin, the musty smell of disuse not matching the white-sculpted interior design of the open-plan layout. His laptop was plugged in and turned on first, then food stored in hidden cupboards; pans and potatoes put on the hob for later, before Will made his way up to his en suite. After a quick shower to wash away the heat, Will padded his nakedness through to the bedroom. An array of casual clothing was already lined up inside his wardrobes, and he opted for just jogging bottoms. After a light sandwich and drink downstairs, Will settled into his assignments, determined to get as much out of the way so he had little to think about over the next week.

Will woke a few hours later, cuddled around his laptop, and he focused sleepy eyes on the darkness outside his patio windows. Giving a chuckle, he checked his watch, stretched long legs under the table, and yawned. It was touching two in the morning and he'd only read one thesis. After shutting things down for the night, he cleared away his plate and coffee cup, then headed on up to bed. It seemed the better option. The covers were cool against his skin after he'd stripped down, the feel of almost silk-like material shaping his body like cling film, and Will stretched, for the first time allowing himself to relax into the soft comfort.

"Hmmm." Will's hand brushed the flat of his stomach, just by accident at first as he shifted the sheet to get comfortable, but then, as his body reacted, a run of happy goose bumps chased a second, more deliberate touch.

One arm covering his eyes, almost hiding him from loving the touch he played on his body, Will dug the flat of his feet a little harder into the mattress. The shy covering of sheet only added to the slow tease of the back of his hand brushing the length and thickness between his thighs. So easy... so easy just to slip between material and skin, maybe just to feather-play those fingers between navel and the vulnerability of everything that hid beneath the thin safety of the covers, to stroke, to please.

Will arched his back slightly, letting a soft murmur escape his lips. How long had it been? Maybe—maybe he needed to be feather-played, to be stroked, to—

Giving a cry, he twisted to his side; head now buried in his pillow, legs curled up in almost a defensive position as he gripped at the sheet, trying to stop the heat he could feel between his thighs.

Wrong. Today of all days, it was *wrong*.

For a long time, he lay there with his eyes screwed shut, denying everything natural by touching his body, but like so many nights before, he buried the need to let go, each time becoming easier than the last. Scarily so.

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The morning offered a lovely coolness, all low mist lying over harbour and heath. Will stood on his porch, slipping on his running shoes. Despite the brisk bite to the early hours, the promise was there of another heat-fuelled day. Usually he'd run with no T-shirt around here, but the heat demanded otherwise, the last thing he needed now was burning beyond repair. Clean jogging bottoms and a loose, white short-sleeved T-shirt were the safer option. Doors now all locked, and with enough water to last well into the day, Will let the branch and bracken crunch under foot as he sort out the freedom of familiar tracks past the heath.

A run of stepping stones took him over a little stream. He knew once he passed the moss-covered boards lining the forest floor, he'd be well into the tall trees and occasional offer of waterfall that even most locals rarely found. Out there, the roots of the trees pulled free from the ground, making it feel like the forest itself was caught trying to uproot and run right along with him. Will could race under some, had hidden under most, and as soon as the first one came into view, all life melted away into the old feeling of running shoes breaking dry bracken and twig.

A few hours into Will's run, the halfway point came up close to lunch, and Will let himself rest against a huge stone as he took another sip of water. Off to the left, the old, disused mill with its rustic wheel had been given an island

all to itself, or at least a decent river that ran almost like a moat around it. A small waterfall nudged at the millwheel, trying to give it some life, but the wheel only whimpered a protest that barely carried on the breeze. Air and water would only move it so far before the wheel gave up, creaking back into its slow drowning. Will and the mill had stared at each other a few times over the years, sometimes leaving Will with a slight chill, that feeling of not being as far away from life as he'd like. The blackness of the windows glistened like a widow refusing to let her grief fall, mouth quivering against the loss of life, of love, of history. He'd hated this place as a kid, mostly because of Elliot, now it just reflected how tired he felt, how, like the millwheel, life seemed to want to push him around despite his will to just fade into the background.

Flicking the lid back on his water bottle and then clipping it to his jogging bottoms, Will pushed away from the stone, then from the mill. A few blackbirds flew from the trees, crying disgust at his interruption, and Will nodded an apology. "Sorry, lads. Your turf, right? Not mine so—*humph*."

Will hit the forest floor, tasting nothing but dirt and grunting away the leaves from his face. A curved root jutted from the ground, and it sat there grinning a little too proudly with Will's running shoe jammed there in its mouth. Will sat up and grabbed at his shoe. Wincing at the ache in his ankle, he rubbed at his foot first, not liking how the deep throb called *cut* to his running day. "Just like you to fall and have no one around to fall for, Will," he mumbled. Managing to wiggle his running shoe back on, Will sighed and pushed up off the forest floor.

Barely even managing to straighten to his feet, Will grunted as an arm slipped around his waist, forcing him to hit the floor again, this time his shoulder and hip taking the brunt of the ground as he landed on his side. Legs came around his, holding him still, just as arms crushed a bear hug around his ribcage. Will cried out, and a crunch of twig was heard above his head just before a blindfold was roughly pulled into place, turning Will's world black. The man crushing his ribs, he came with a friend, and one who was content enough to kick at Will's shoulder and force him face-first into the roughage. Will's arms were wrestled behind his back, tied, then as dirt-filled fingers dug

into the side of his mouth, Will's lips and jaw were forced open and a gag pinched into the corners of his mouth. Will grunted, and a hard breath roughed his ear as something sharp, cool, and very dangerous pressed against his cheek.

"Keep real still, beauty, and real quiet." The knife twisted slightly, now scratching a path down Will's jaw, to trace the curve of his throat. "Or struggle," whispered a voice. "But I guarantee you won't like me by morning if you do."

Will stilled, his hard breathing the only stress-release point he allowed himself.

"Oh, I like you like that." Will was dragged to his feet and pulled back into someone as an arm went around his throat. The knife was kept by his cheek, but as Will was pushed forwards, he dug in with his heels, grunting out his fear with not being able to see where he was going.

"The hard way, then."

A push up of his sleeve, Will felt something sharp dig into his skin, then cool liquid entered his blood stream, sending his arm cold right down to the fingertips. Life started to spin, then numb at the edges, even the warm summer breeze brushing against his cheek disappeared, taking with it his will to stand.

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## CHAPTER THREE

That constant *creak, creak-creak* came again. Will lay there on his back, licking across dry lips as he tried to shuffle through images that explained the noise. Again, just that constant *creak, creak-creak*, like an unhinged door pushed gently by a breeze. A draft shifted his hair against his face, then swept down his chest, over his abs, his legs—his feet, all to sweep back up. It eased the sweat he could feel lining his body and brow, and helped focus how muggy his mind felt. A gentle lapping added a soft beat to the breeze, and a shift of sheet came at Will's side. Somewhere deep down it made perfect sense to him that the cool sheet covering him would ruffle if a fan was placed close to the bed, but the images didn't quite connect yet, nothing connected yet but the heavy tiredness still trying to pull him down. The comfortable feel of the bed beneath his body offered a place to ground reality, but his arms were held wide, slightly raised, almost as if he was caught mid-fall into some strange, screwed-up dream, the likes of which he hadn't tasted since his college days and the rare few lines of coke.

Dark. This dream was dark. Eyelashes brushed against a silk that was pulled tight against his eyes, making his head hurt from the crushing pressure of the knot caught between pillows and skull. The need was there to rub fingers against the ache, but his hands refused, seeming to want to keep his arms held wide open, welcoming whatever sacrifice he was being offered for. The shift of sheet would brush against his nakedness, and part of him wanted to laugh, maybe cry out at why he'd be naked mid-run, but his throat was too dry, and a run of choking was all he could manage.

That soft *creak, creak-creak* came to a stop, forcing Will to control his coughing and tilt his ear towards the sound, trying to gauge, to understand why the noise would react to his. But then the *creak, creak-creak* started again, just at the foot of the bed, off to the left, and it added to the gentle sweep of the fan, the soft lap of the sheet.

A groan, Will relaxed his body completely, giving in to the sounds, how it sang a tripped-out lullaby that pushed him back into the land of dark dreams and naked bodies.

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Images shifted in the darkness: black eyes hidden in a curtain of black hair that made life worth living, if only for four short years. But upset... those eyes had always held that shimmer of water, never quite managing to let go of emotion, yet somehow needing to. It had come once, and no foster-parent manual could have warned Will about the fallout. The fight of a thirteen-year-old boy, twisting beneath the covers, calling out the terrors of being left on his own as a toddler. Nothing had broken those tears. Nothing had let Will get close and just hold, just catch him before he fell—

Will cried out, digging his heels into the bed, stretching his head back as he arched his body. Fading dreams nearly had him calling out a name he rarely spoke, and he stopped it before it escaped. As much as the hurt needed a name, he couldn't risk crying it out for fear of losing the memories of all the good that came with the call of it.

The *creak, creak-creak* came to a stop, and life slipped into sharp focus for Will. Rope bit into his wrists, bringing with it the deep ache of constantly having his arms held wide and raised slightly off the pillows. That same burn was around his ankles as he lay there spread wide. Life was kept in nothing but shadow as a blindfold sent his world into nothing but one huge deprivation tank of sense and sensation.

*Move.* Will's first tug and kick against the rope was to test the tension, his second and third to test whatever strength it would take to get free, his fourth—cried desperation when he found it didn't matter how hard he struggled, he couldn't move. "Let me fucking *move*."

"Move?" said a voice. "Curious."

"*Humph?*" Will went still hearing the male voice.

"You didn't ask to be let go and—"

"*Let me fucking go.*" Will slammed his head into the mattress. "Let me fucking g—" A heavy creak of bedsprings, Will choked as someone grabbed him by the throat, straining the muscles in his neck. A body and breath pressed in close, coating Will with a threat to never let go if he carried on.



“Watch your mouth, Mr. Chambers. My friend here isn’t keen on foul language.” Finding it hard to breathe, Will frowned. The male voice had come from the bottom left of the bed, but someone else, some *friend*, held him down. Friend’s breath brushed his face, and Will blinked almost instinctively even though the blindfold blackened out the view. He caught a slight hint of coffee, a stronger scent that echoed the freshness of the forest, or Friend had just been outside and carried it back in with him. It wasn’t the type to be bought as a cologne, just a natural scent of life lived in the outdoors. The grip around his throat was hard, vice-like, and more than enough to still Will’s mouth. “Good boy.” The same male voice from the bottom of the bed, and that creaking started again. The fan had stopped, everything carrying its own fresh chill, but that creak. That damn *creak, creak-creak*, it came again and Will forced air through his nostrils, making them flare in frustration as Friend’s hand patted his cheek. Then the bed took a natural shape as he was left alone.

Will thought about his wallet, his car, but if these two men were local, and they had to be to have gone so far into the forest, they would have taken his things by now and left him alone. A glance through his log cabin patio windows would have given away everything he owned: Will knew he’d forgotten to draw the blinds last night. He bit back a groan. The windows. Were these two opportunists or had they been watching since he’d arrived? When he’d wandered around naked, when he’d...

“Get an eyeful?” he snarled, and the creaking came to a stop again. “You like what you see, you sick—”

A touch brushed Will’s outer thigh, causing him to hiss and try to move to the side, away from the onslaught. But the sheet was gathered and Will felt heat touch his cheeks when it was pulled down over his hips, exposing everything he had to the cool air.

“Oh right,” said Will. “All about sex, is it?” He snorted coldly, although he was shaking like hell and trying not to show it. “What a disappointment. Trust me to get the fucks who can’t think beyond their dicks an—”

“*You wanna see a dick?*” Friend’s voice was nothing but heat and hiss against Will’s face as his hand crushed between Will’s legs, encasing his balls

and squeezing until colours exploded behind Will's blindfold. "I'll show you a—" Friend cut his words, but didn't loosen his grip. Will squirmed there, trying to close his legs to ease the intense grip-release-grip agony hitting his body.

"Ease off." That came from the Voice, now sounding a little tense and close by the bed. Will felt a jolt, almost like a shove, and the grip tore free. Will whimpered release, although the loss of hand and new grip of cold air only seemed to make his balls swell and throb that little worse.

"Right." That was Mr. Voice again. "If you learn to be a good lad" —The sound came from the bottom of the bed—"you earn the right to do this next trick away from the bed, until then..."

*Earn what?* "What the hell do you want from me?"

A bottle was pressed against his groin and Will jerked from the cold assault.

"I don't *want* to have to clean those sheets just yet, Mr. Chambers. I want you to do what's natural when you awaken in a morning."

Will tried to shift away, hide from the coldness between his thighs that demanded he react. "It fuh—" He stopped himself swearing, knowing it was Friend who held the bottle against his groin. Will pulled hard on his stomach muscles and heard the rope creak as he did the same to his binds. Half in fear, half in just the need to lie still and disappear buried everything else. He was exposed to the room, to a Friend who was anything but.

"We don't have all day, Mr. Chambers."

"Why... what the hell are you doing? *Why* are you doing this?" The need was there to try and grab the sheet, or just curl up and hide what the bottle touched. "Just fuh-tell me."

"The bottle?" said Voice. "So you don't make a mess of yourself. Aren't we good to you?" The creak of a rocking chair started again as Will just groaned his reply. The ache was easing between his thighs, but the insistent

need to relieve himself pressed into his groin, followed by a further press of a cold bottle against his tip.

“C’mon, I know you like to mess around with both sides,” said Voice, “so having a guy touch you there should be nothing new for a bi, right? You should enjoy it, really.”

Will reddened. “Elliot,” he spat. “You stink of Elliot and—”

“Now, Mr. Chambers. *I* don’t actually like this, nor does my friend, so can you hurry up, please?”

*Bastard.* A rough touch forced his tip into the bottle and Will blushed as he started to do what came naturally. The sound grated, hearing his body react and trickle into a container. It was nothing new walking into a restroom and doing what he needed to do; he’d thought nothing of it in the past. Being naked and bound to a bed? Knowing men watched without trying to ignore what was going on? Will finished and twisted his head into the pillow, to try and hide.

“Not so difficult, now was it?”

The blindfold helped. They could see him, but at least he couldn’t see them.

The sound of a cloth being rinsed out came from Will’s right, then the bed depressed at his side. The touch of cool water played havoc with his abs, forcing him to draw on a sharp breath, more from the cold shock over the rough wipes at his stomach, his chest, up, then down his arms. The damp cloth touched his face, forcing Will to twist away for fear of suffocation. But the cloth roughly cleaned despite his protests, leaving fringe, cheeks, and lips slightly damp. His neck now arched slightly, head tilted back, Will chased a bead of water from one corner of his lips to the other as dehydration nibbled at the back of his mind, and as he did, the cloth shifted down his throat, drew dampness over his chest, following the dips and curves to his abs, all to inch towards his thighs.

“Don’t.” He screwed his eyes shut despite being caught in the blackness of the blindfold. “Please.”

“*Beg me again,*” snarled a voice in his ear. Will didn’t, and a rough touch cleaned between his thighs. He received the same coolness with a towel before having the sheet pulled up. Just to his hips, no higher.

The bed took a natural shape as Friend stood, and Will forced relaxation through his body at the thought of being left alone, of not being touched. He hadn’t let anyone touch for such a long time.

A hand slipped under his head, encouraging him to lift up as a bottle went to his lips. Will instantly tried to turn away, in no way trusting the holder, in no way trusting the contents. An angered sigh was given, then the bottle touched his lips again. A little wetness spilt over his lips, and Will caught the scent and taste of orange juice, not to mention the stickiness as it spilt down his throat. His run had been topped with the basic fluids, nothing more, and the need to drink was there. But trust... there was no trust.

“Drink, Mr. Chambers. My friend here doesn’t seem to have much patience where you’re concerned.”

“Why me?” Will twisted away from the drink as the grip tightened in his hair. “Answer me and I’ll take your sodding drink.”

“Take a drink, and I’ll answer your question,” said Voice, still rocking his way through life on the chair.

A snarl, Will took one swig, and a hand pressed over his mouth and nose to make sure he swallowed. Will choked, struggled, then snarled, “I’d have done it without you doing that,” as the hand moved. He got another pat to his cheek for his effort. “Leave me the hell alone.”

Footsteps moved towards the door, two sets on a hard wood floor. “Wait,” he said, a little puzzled, now forced to raise his head off the bed. “I drank. You said you’d answer my question.”

“Yes, I did.”

“And?”

A sigh. “I didn’t say when, Mr. Chambers.” A door opened. “Get some rest and learn from the lesson. From here on in, if I ask you a question, you answer it.”

“Why... What the hell am I supposed to know?” Will snarled in frustration. “I’m just a bloody linguistics tutor, not even head of my department.”

Quiet, then, “You have time to think about that, Mr. Chambers. You think real hard whilst we’re away.”

The sound of the door closing only added to Will’s frustrated confusion as he pulled at his bonds. Feeling nothing but a sting from the burn of rope around his wrists and the heavy ache in his arms and balls, he let his head drop back onto the pillows.

“*What the hell am I supposed to know?*” he shouted out. Throughout his life, Will hadn’t so much as picked up a speeding ticket. Coke. He’d done a little coke in college, messed around with a few lads, but they’d parted on good terms despite Elliot’s vicious games. Then he’d met Erin, settled, got married as Will’s career had taken off, and he’d moved from Dorset to Lancaster. Even after the split from his wife, there’d only been—

Will cried out. “*Let me fucking go.*” Then groaned. “Just let me fucking move.”

Left with nothing more but to lie there, Will closed his eyes, willing sleep on, anything to blackout the tumbling questions fogging up his head.

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## CHAPTER FOUR

“Come on, you know you love me.” A hand patted the Kawasaki and Will was transfixed on the bright colours, fixed in a moment where he saw every event unfold in those flecks of red cutting across a black sky, but he was still compelled to answer with the same words: “Enough not to let you kill yourself.”

Standing there with a thousand and one motorbikes, jet skis, and all the other possible mechanical wet dreams a company could throw at a seventeen-year-old (and his foster dad’s seemingly bottomless wallet), Will again questioned why he’d been talked into the Kawasaki Event here at Silverstone. He ran a touch over the leather seat, squeezing gently to hear the creak under his grip. Bikes had never been his “thing”. There’d been a friend back at college who’d lost his leg on one of these beauties, some bad luck over black ice, a brick wall, and a car behind that had also decided to crash the party. Giving a look back at the big goof of a kid that had moved aside to let him get close, Will couldn’t stomach the thought of seeing *him* limp for the rest of his life on a prosthetic leg either. Although, and Will fought a grin here, it would slow the quick little sod down.

“So?” Eyebrows were waggled at him, and a shoulder gently shoved at Will’s. Hands went in pockets, and the coyness was all followed up with a cheeky grin. “Whatd’ya say?” Puppy-dog eyes came next and Will buried a grin seeing all the tricks coming out to play. “Don’t make me pull the *‘kid-who-never-got-anything-because-he-was-left-on-his-own-whilest-his-parents-went-for-a-drink,’*” he took a deep breath, “*‘because-they-were-alcoholics’* card.”

“You finished? Maybe need an oxygen mask after that little speech?” said Will, managing a chuckle as someone buffeted past. Will glanced to his left to try and apologise, but whoever it was had already passed him. A look back, he was a little surprised to see Ryan. Ryan said nothing, never even acknowledged Will, his look solely on—for—black eyes. And those black eyes returned Ryan’s glance, one that lasted no longer than a second, yet also seemed to last a lifetime between the two young men it concerned.

Then it was gone; Ryan walking off into the crowd, a black gaze and a slight blush finding Will. Will's world had just crashed around him, and the catalyst was right there in that young lover's look. Anybody else *but* Elliot's kid.

"Actually, no. Not finished." Another shove made Will stumble a touch. "There was that time last year when you gave me food poisoning."

Will groaned, knowing exactly what was coming out now.

"Oh yeah." Black eyes were so alive. "In bed for days, I was. Couldn't even lift my head off the pillow. All thin, weak, and left whimpering just for some loving an—"

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"Hey." Four slaps hit Will's face, stopping a cry he didn't even know he was making. "Up."

No choice was given as a cold, wet cloth rubbed into his face, making him splutter. At the foot of his bed, that rocking started up again, also a gentle tapping, like fingers keeping a gentle beat on wood.

"You've been gone for a few hours, Mr. Chambers. Lunch time. You're going to eat now. And if you do it without giving my friend here any hassle, next time you will be allowed to sit up."

A hand crushed into Will's scrotum, just threatening with the crushing weight.

"Are we clear?" said the Voice.

Will stilled, thinking things over quickly. Being allowed to sit up and eat might mean losing the rope around his wrists so... *Yeah, I can play good.* He nodded, just once, and his scrotum was released.

A touch went to the back of his head, lifting him up a touch, but Will still found he jerked away when something warm and wet touched his lips. The grip tightened in his hair. "I..." said Will, hearing how croaky his voice was. "I... What is it? Please?"



There was quiet, then, “Soup,” said Voice. “Tomato.” The creaking started again and he was back to rocking in his chair. “I know you don’t like any other kind.”

Will tried a frown, but it had little effect in the confines of the blindfold. Then the warm spoon demanded access to his mouth again, and Will parted his lips politely even though the need was there to head butt this so-called Friend. The soup was hot, but not enough to burn his mouth. He swallowed fast, wanting to get this out of the way, get Friend’s touch off him. The same went for the second and third demand into his mouth, but by the fourth, Will was swallowing fast to ease the hunger pains that cramped stomach muscles.

“Good,” said Voice. He sounded older than Friend, and yet both men had patience. The heavy creak gave an impression of weight and it was contrasted with Friend’s ability to ghost around and barely stain the room. There was a heavy sting of sweat too. Not from Friend, but from someone who carried extra pounds and cooked a little faster in the midday heat. “Drink, Mr. Chambers.”

A sound of spoon going into an empty bowl, Will found his lips were wiped, then a bottle touched his lips. He drank, this time even lifting his head to drink hard and fast. He was thirsty enough to feel as though his throat had glued itself together.

“Good, good,” said Voice. Everything went quiet for a moment, and then the bed was given its natural shape as Friend got to his feet.

“Right, Mr. Chambers. Let’s make this easy.”

*“Humph?”*

“Three days. Three questions. Three answers.”

Will tried to lift his head. “What?”

“Over the next three days, you will be asked three questions. You are to supply an answer for each one.”

Will gave a hard sigh and dropped his head back down. “What the hell do you think I know?” He wasn’t rich; he had no wealthy family members. The

closest to any money was Erin's father, but he'd died and Erin had long-since created a distance of her own between her and Will.

A light tap of finger came on wood, not hurried, showing no impatience. "First day, first question..."

Will waited.

"Tell me the name of the boy you cry out for in your sleep."

"*Humph.*" It was all that Will had.

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Will had never been so nervous, not even since he'd sat looking at the Vice-Chancellor, back at Will's job interview, and feeling more like he was facing expulsion for being caught smoking pot again. If he'd known Elliot was taking the same interview that day, but for a higher job, he'd have deliberately smoked some pot to get thrown out. But today he was dressed for another interview, probably the *only* interview that really mattered, only this time a woman sat opposite, thick black diary weighing her knees down, her handbag resting against her feet as if it sighed relief from not carrying the diary. Maybe he was overdressed, it certainly seemed odd to Will to be suited up in his own living room. But today...

Will gave a deep breath and tried not to mess with his tie.

"Nervous?" Jill smiled over at him, taking a break from filling in her notes.

"Some," he said, rubbing at his eyes. "First times and all that."

Jill chuckled, jerking him up from his mumble and forcing him to fight a blush. "I-I didn't mean, *humph.*"

"Take it easy," laughed Jill, now content to close her diary, then reach down and slip it into her bag. Will swore he heard the thing groan in protest from where he sat. "We could have delayed this until your wife was back, y'know."

Will shook his head. He'd married Erin just after leaving uni, some seven years ago. Although he'd messed around with both sides, Erin had just felt

right, when they'd met in that summer before final exams. They'd settled pretty well, today just seeming a natural progression in their relationship. Erin had taken it hard with not being able to have kids. It was a little unfair now that after all the hard work and jumping through hoops had been done, she'd be half a country away looking after her dad.

Will had worked with social workers through Lancaster University, having been through a number of Child Protection courses more to do with work. Will usually felt at ease around anyone. Only this social worker, and the panel she came from, had him nearly ready to drop to his knees and beg mercy for whatever sins she wanted to say he'd committed.

"Okay," said Jill, craning her neck to look out of the window, then getting to her feet. "Remember this is just for a few days to start off with, to see how you get along."

Palms a little damp now that he'd eased to his feet too, Will found he was constantly wiping them on the material covering his ass as the doorbell rang. He never shifted, even though this was his house, Jill still seemed to command that air of control. Giving an easy smile, she disappeared into the hall, and the sound of a hatch being flicked, then the front door opening, had Will craning his neck to get a better look.

Jill came back in first, followed by the whole grunge scene: ripped jeans, black hair shaped around an oval face, all the kid was missing was a few piercings.

"Will," said Jill, standing aside, "you already know—"

Will held out his hand and breathed a smile. "James."

A sniff, James looked at Will's outstretched hand, more down at it, then quirked an eyebrow up at Will. "First time nerves, huh?"

Will choked a chuckle. "Something like that."

James took his hand. "Yeah, well, get over yourself, 'cause I'm bloody starving here and in need of a decent *not social care home* meal."

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“See, wasn’t so hard, was it?” The creaking of a rocking chair had started up again, and with the sound grating on his every nerve, Will found he was already pulling against the ropes, all drenched in sweat, body aching, throat hurting. He’d called it out without realising, and his whole world turned blood red.

“My life—my fucking kid is nothing to do with—” Will struggled to swallow as that same Friendly grip found his throat, slicing his anger in two.

“*Your* kid, Mr. Chambers?” said Voice. Will felt every muscle stretch and protest as his jaw was forced up, his breathing now coming in short, sharp intakes through his nose. “From what I hear, he wasn’t *your* anything,” said Voice.

Will flared his nostrils, wanting so much to get his hands free and punch someone. He didn’t really care who, just so long as his fist connected with something. But he controlled his breathing, as best he could with the choking hold on his throat. “He was mine,” he said flatly. “If you want a father that personifies dick, go look at Ryan’s dad.”

The grip released his neck, and Will swallowed, the ache from the roughness telling him he’d have bruises there.

“Hmmm. Mr. Mathews. You have issues with Ryan’s father?”

Will laughed, and then it turned into a serious sobering up. “Oh-no. One question, three days,” he managed to choke out. “Can’t change the rules.”

“But you’re forgetting one thing,” said Voice, “and I thought the ball twisting you had already would have been enough to convince you to follow the simple: I say, you do, game.”

“Like fuh—” A leg was suddenly between his, pressing into the mattress just a few inches from his scrotum, then Will winced as a fistful of blindfold was grabbed, forcing his head off the pillow with how it caught his hair too.

“There’s safety in not seeing,” said Voice, although he spoke from the bottom of the bed. Friend’s touch teased the blindfold, threatening to pull it off and show Will just what he was missing out on. “Do you want to see, *William*?”

I mean, really see and risk knowing who we are? Because if you carry on using your mouth...”

The shift in Will was instant, and he quickly tried to turn his head, twist away from the threat of exposure. No. He liked the safety in not seeing. He wasn't a fighter, never had been, and Friend's pat at his face again after his hair was released seemed to acknowledge that.

“Good man, Mr. Chambers.” The rocking chair stopped, then gave a last sigh as Voice got to his feet along with Friend. Will was beginning to recognise the length of the creaks, what each one meant. Then he was listening as Friend's footfalls fell away from the bed. That left Voice standing and watching at the bottom there.

“You answered the first question,” he said. “Thank you. Now, do you remember what we said this morning? That if you eat you would be allowed to sit up?”

Will let his head rest back down. “Yeah.”

“Let's take it one step further.”

A door creaked open, Will knew the sound by how long it lasted, and again polished shoes on wood came back over to the bed. Friend. Something slid onto a surface close by: a unit, then the bed at his side depressed.

“If you eat and drink, my friend here will take you to the bathroom this time.”

That meant this had to be a house of some sort. Will went still. And it also meant having his legs untied, his hands. He couldn't fight, but he could run. He'd been running most of his life. That sounded really damn good to him. A *shuuush* hit the silence, sounding like it came from the unscrewing of a lid, and true to form, liquid being poured into a glass came next. Friend's hand came under Will's head, offering Will up for what was to come, and this time a straw tempted his lips. Sparkling water fizzed Will's senses, making him choke a little as he drank, but he stored away the knowledge that they seemed to be learning from past mistakes over not using a straw.

“Very good,” said Voice. The man was pacing at the bottom of the bed, his steps not hurried, just stretching stiff muscles. “Can we go for two in a row?”

Softness pressed against Will’s lips and a few crumbs fell onto his neck. A strong scent of mustard cleared his nose, and again Will frowned. Like the soup had been, mustard was one of his favourites. With another nudge to encourage him to eat, Will took the bread, tempted to bite down on the thumb that briefly touched his lips. But ham? Mixed with mustard on soft bread? He nearly groaned his hunger, his need to eat, and after a few moments, Will knew there was nothing left but the brush of hand that wiped away the crumbs.

A sniff, Friend’s weight was gone from Will’s side. Will tried to relax, then failed miserably when a light touch of material brushed his face. At first he panicked, thinking Friend was going completely for him in his attempt to suffocate the hell out of him. But tugs came at Will’s left wrist and Will caught on that it was the tail of Friend’s shirt brushing over his face as he leaned over to untie him.

“Trust is low,” said Voice, and a strong hand, bigger than Friend’s, pinned Will’s free hand back to the bed as Friend untied his other. The need was there to rub at his wrists, just get some feeling back into them, but that relief was denied as a shove at Will’s shoulder pushed him awkwardly onto his side, now facing Voice. It was awkward. His legs were still tied, the tendons and muscles in his right one now stretched to hurting, the rope acting like the perfect rack as the pressure of a knee was pushed into Will’s back.

A grip under Will’s shoulder lifted Will up slightly, then a slight push forward from Friend tipped him forward so Friend could tie Will’s arms behind his back. More rope circled Will’s wrists, wrapping around the left one once, twice, four times, then the right wrist taking the same treatment before they were knotted together. Will’s heart sank a little. Use of his hands was out of the question. Feeling the release of his feet, Will pulled his body up into a tight ball, the sheet slipping free and leaving Will blushing.

“C’mon,” said Voice, and a grip under Will had him sitting up, his legs still near enough pulled under him on the bed. “Up.” A tap at his legs encouraged him to uncoil and let his feet find the floor. Will toed it first and felt a mix of

dust and wood grind against his pads. Then he just sat there for a minute, feeling the ache that spread from his feet, up his legs. Moving made things worse, disturbing muscles that almost seemed happy to sleep the days away. Will screwed his face, wondering how long he'd been here. Two nights? Three?

"Not got the time for this," mumbled a voice, but it wasn't *the* Voice. Seemed Friend could string together more than two words, albeit only all one syllable. An arm slipped underneath Will's, using his bound arms as leverage and forcing him up. Will stumbled forward into a body the size and shape of his, maybe one size up, but not much.

"Off."

Will was pushed to arm's length before an arm slipped under his again, his bound hands making it easy for Friend to take Will's weight and encourage him forward. Will half limped, half walked, dragging his right foot slightly with the stretching the muscles had taken. The movement was awkward, and frustrated Will hated how he relied on someone else for such basics steps. Brought to a stop, Will was forced to wait as a door was pushed open. This one had a different sound to it, a little lighter as its creak spread out into an echo. Pulled forward again, he found wood floor gave way to cool tile. It could have been an en suite; Will couldn't really tell. For all he knew, Friend could have led him into a corner of a disused building to take care of business. He couldn't remember anything after being knocked out: if they'd driven, walked. Maybe he was back at the Mill. Will nodded privately to himself. That would make sense. It wouldn't take much to get this place set up, add a generator, bring a bed in. He felt a little sick. That meant a hell of a lot of pre-planning here, and personal information... they knew what flavour of soup he liked, how he loved the sting of a little heavier spread of mustard on his sandwich—that he wasn't James's dad.

He groaned, or at least recognised that the groan hitting the silence was his as Friend stopped him and twisted him around. Will grunted as a foot kicked at his ankle, forcing his legs apart, then a body shaped his from behind. Will



looked away. Despite being blind, he still looked away as his dick was taken in hand.

“Andy Morgan,” he mumbled.

A snarl hit the silence as Will was pushed forward by a strong grip in his hair, the hand on his dick now playing hell with his scalp. “Who the fuck’s Andy Morgan?” Friend couldn’t have sounded any rougher, and Will winced as the grip in his hair forced his head up.

“James’s dad,” said Will, hoping it sounded calm, even though he wanted to blurt it out on a startled cry. “That’s you.” It made sense. Although the bastard had never been there for James, it would make perfect sense for him to want revenge. James *had* been in Will’s care.

Friend gave a snort, and Will found he could move again as he was pulled back to mould the man behind. “Try again,” came the whispered snarl against his ear. An arm had slipped around Will’s waist, fingers now holding onto his hip. Will could feel Friend’s body digging into his, lower back to flat stomach, soft curve of ass to the press of a groin that had Will fighting the need to shake him off.

A breath kept brushing his left shoulder blade, but it seemed very deep, very carefully controlled. Maybe too controlled. Friend’s hand drifted down Will’s abs, tracing almost absently through the wiry offering of pubic hair, all to drift down his shaft. Nose and lip replaced the brush of breath, just easing over the curve of Will’s neck, taking, tasting his scent. Lip turned to nip, but the strong brush of fingers down his dick still had that distracted feel as Friend played him root to tip.

“Please.” said Will. The beginnings of a long and heavy hard-on pressed into his hip. “Stop.”

“*Humph.*” The contact was gone and Will was pushed forward slightly, the grip on his hips keeping him steady. Nature’s call came next, more through fear of being on such unsteady ground and chasing that teetering over a cliff feeling. The sound was unmistakable, though, the filling up of a toilet, and then the tug on a lever added the final confirmation that a toilet was flushed.

“Anything else?”

Will swallowed—hard. “No.” His voice sounded a little high.

“Sure?”

“Absolutely fuh—”

The swear word was cut short as Will was pushed to the side. Friend really didn’t like swearing. Will wondered how he’d get on with Ryan’s dad. Elliot—

Will stumbled, nearly fell, but the security of a wall saved him, and he quickly huddled into it, needing its comfort as he clawed his nakedness into it.

“Shower.”

Will groaned. “What?” he said in a ghost of a voice.

“You need one.”

Buffeted slightly, cold metal slipped over Will’s head, and he panicked as a choker chain settled at the base of his throat. A tug tightened it, then a light clink was heard in time with a chain’s rattle just a few inches above his head. Will instinctively tried to shift back, down—anything to pull away, but he came to a choking stop as the tether to the chain kept him still, almost forcing him onto the front pads of his feet

Will’s world became a whole lot smaller as water blasted his head. He cried out, not that the water was hot or scalding, but he’d been chained up like a wild animal in desperate need of a wash, and he was better than that—better than this.

“Why me? I’ve done nothing to you.”

Nothing came, and Will tried to twist away from the water, curl up in the corner somewhere and be allowed to find some dignity with covering himself up. The ropes bit into his arms, the chain choked his throat, and part of him welcomed the hurt, welcomed the anger. If he had the will to fight, then he wasn’t an animal to be trained.

A body came in quick behind his, shaping him again, all naked, all toned, touching his, and he cried out again, mostly in fear, the rest in anguish with how his own body cried a sudden *hell yes* to the contact.

Hair gripped, Will was forced to press his forehead against the wall, and he was held there until he got the hint not to move, not to struggle. “I’ve never fucked anyone against their will.”

Will forced his breathing to calm. The heat off Friend’s hard-on was there, but it was contrasted coolly with the calmness of his control. “Stay that way. Please.”

Giving a grunt, Friend shoved him forward, and Will turned his face at the last moment to stop himself smacking into the tile. Friend seemed to take a step back, then a rough sponge with rougher handling had Will trying to cower into the wall, just to slot himself in somewhere and not have part of his body on display. Strokes came at his shoulder blades, rough at first, then gentler as Will forced calmness. The touch moved down to his lower back, then spent time stroking the curves of his ass. Attention was paid to his legs, but there was no lingering, nor when it came to Will’s groin. He was left alone for a moment and water was allowed to wash the assault away. But then shampoo rubbed into his scalp, sending foaming bubbles over his chest and back, and it soon made him feel dirty again. The most humiliating part came when the water was turned off and a toothbrush demanded access to his mouth. Will complied, to get this hell over with—he complied.

Grateful for small mercies, Will was left alone to drip-dry in the corner. Shuffling came from close by, like Friend was towelling himself dry.

“Good boy.” That was bitten out sarcastically as the chain to Will’s throat was unfastened and allowed to clank back against the wall. A towel finished what the air-drying hadn’t, but it was brief, clinical—just to get the job done.

The draft from the open door caused a shiver from Will, and he gave a groan as he was pulled towards the draught. “Clothes,” he managed to choke out against his own nakedness. Only a snort was his reply, and panic took full control for the first time, enough to cause Will’s breathing to rattle and gasp,

now knowing he was nothing more than a hamster on a wheel forced to constantly run for a vicious crowd. Will was suddenly struggling away from the grip on his arm, shoulder shoving Friend once, twice, then giving a cry as Will managed to make a break for the door.

He hit the frame first, feeling his nose and top lip split under the run and hit; then Will landed on the floor, the wind forced out of his lungs as he went down hard. The blind stumble into the door frame had only half caused his screw-up, the weight from Friend, all shouts and cries joining the riot, did the rest as Will was slammed into from behind.

“Bloody idiot,” shouted someone. Voice. And then Will found he was somehow back on the bed, being dumped down, not really understanding how or why he got there.

“Breathe.” A body straddled Will’s, and Will caught Friend’s woodland cologne as a hand under Will’s jaw forced him to keep still. “Slow your *fucking* breathing.”

That wasn’t really a problem for Will. His head, and the taste of blood in the back of his mouth, they all came on a cloud of almost drug-induced sleep. Will didn’t mind that so much. He wanted to sleep now.

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## CHAPTER FIVE

Twice he was woken throughout the afternoon, leaving Will feeling like a teen fighting his father's strong grip as he tried to stir him into life. A rougher tone to "wake up" came this time around, but Will's answer was the same, just a grunt, a wish to cover his eyes and curl to his side. He never quite managed either, his hands and feet stuck in some kind of cement that only allowed knee and elbow joints to move. It didn't seem to matter that much, he needed his sleep. Eventually no one had come to shake him away from the night, not even the raised voices that sometimes filtered through from behind closed doors.

If Will could have stayed like this, mind numb and hidden in blackness, he would have done, but now the insistent chirp of a bird and the warm breeze blowing the sheet over his body eased him back into reality. That *creak, creak-creak* was there, and Will let a sigh escape, for the first time actually finding comfort in the rhythm. The sound continued, never breaking pace, almost seeming to understand it was calming life down for Will.

A dull *thud, thud-thud*, started to creep in with the gentle *creak, creak-creak*, and Will tried to frown at the pain in his head. The side of his lip felt thick, and a swipe of his tongue caught a coppery taste, then a fine line of a cut. He winced, but mostly from the hint of disinfectant that left a bitter aftertaste on his tongue and in his throat.

"How's your head, Mr. Chambers?"

Will tried to lift the offending body part off the bed, but gave up as life spun a touch. The blindfold still blocked out the world and the rope was back, holding him out for sacrifice, keeping feet and arms out wide. Will groaned and gave another lick of his lips. "Hurts."

As the gentle *creak, creak-creak* kept pace to the chorus of birds outside, Will found a hand slip under his head and lift him from the pillow. Something pressed against his lips, but Will was too tired to question anything any more. He opened his mouth slightly and a tablet slipped onto his tongue. The coolness of a glass came next, and Will took a swallow of water to wash the tablet down before another was put on his tongue.

“And here was me thinking we were making progress,” said Voice as Will drank some more water, for a brief moment choking on the bitter and gritty aftertaste of paracetamol as he was allowed to rest back down. “Looks like we’re back to square one.”

Will felt the sheet slip off his body and he made a half-hearted attempt to pull his leg up and into his body, cover himself up. He felt cold despite a heat running through him, and a hand dusted his outside thigh, stroking there, as he shivered without the covers.

“Temperature is up. You’ve not been taking care of yourself too well lately,” said Voice, his tone hard. “The paracetamol will help with that. I need you focused and compos mentis for today. Please concentrate and all of this will be over with soon.”

Will didn’t bother with an answer. A damp cloth started to brush between his thighs, over his hips, the flat of his stomach—the coldness of the water now more room tempered. Either that, or the heat off his body warmed it, and the feel of cloth skating his skin now offered a more calming feeling than sense could explain. Left there, his body all damp in an almost morning chorus heat, Will tilted his ear as something was placed to the floor, then came water being poured. The weight on the bed changed slightly as Friend came in close. The tail of a shirt tickled at Will’s abs, then a leg drew between his as a hand went next to Will’s head, taking the weight of the man above him. A breath brushed Will’s face, then that same woodland scent drifted over his senses. A moment later, a softer, more tentative brush of cloth came at Will’s face. It cooled the heat on his cheeks and dampened the hair to his fringe as it claimed his forehead. Then, in the wake of the damp cloth, a thumb swept his lips, tracing the contours of his mouth as if chasing the echo of a past smile.

Everything about Will whispered into life, throwing him headlong into one hell of a mixed-up mess. His moan was soft, the slight arch of his back welcoming the ride of a different heat. And the touch stroking gently at the corner of his mouth followed it, everything coming full circle. Whatever crazed infection Will had, it seemed to seep naturally into Friend, the swell

against Will's own hip matching his, as if souls had already long since mated and now simply sighed into coming back together.

"Please," said Will, confused, and knowing his need was on full display. "Let me go."

The thumb stilled on Will's lips. Friend's breath was held close; then giving a snort, he was tugging the sheet back up over Will, pushing away—off. He even took two steps from the bed, putting a distance between them with a hard escape of air that measured the safety.

The creaking started again, or maybe it had never stopped, Will didn't know; even the birds seemed to still for a moment back there. But this time that patient tap of fingers came on the wood of an armrest, and it counted the seconds.

"Second day, Mr. Chambers."

Will groaned out loud. "Please. No."

The soft slide of a drawer opening came from Will's left, the creaking of the chair continuing at the bottom of the bed, and then there was a rummaging around for something. Wrapping was removed, then a dull thud came as Friend placed the item on the bedside unit. The strike of a match registered somewhere—then was lost as the scent of a candle drifted under Will's senses.

He cried out, hating the winter warm cinnamon flavour that seemed to rush like a thick wave of blood over him. "Don't." It was all he could manage. Tears dampened his blindfold, but even they were held captive, not given permission to fall properly as he arched his back, crying out again. "Fucking don't."

"Second question. And it's the simplest one." The creaking of the rocking chair stopped. "What went wrong?"

"Fuck you—fuck you, fuh—"

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Under cover of darkness, Will pulled his Rover onto his drive, wincing as the tyres skidded under the fresh cover of snow. His teaching skills must have

been slipping, forcing him to spend a few hours with an undergraduate until well after sundown. The lady, a more mature student, had been bright, but she'd googled Chomsky and had stood there trying to debate how prescriptivism should be banned for stifling creativity. Will had resigned himself to the inevitable, knowing that even the best minds in linguistics get bloody when it came to prescriptive versus descriptive approaches. The sanest option was Halliday's functional approach: use both when the need arises, but the lady hadn't googled Halliday yet. And as it was only the fourth day of the course, she hadn't exactly been introduced properly to the functional approach yet either.

It had been a long few hours, ended by how he'd seen no wedding ring on her fingers although there was a tan line there. Wiping at his eyes, Will sat there in the car and groaned. He was getting slow, and certainly well past being available. Erin had left nearly two years ago, the pressure over losing her father wearing her memories down. Things had ended... frighteningly well, with James still visiting her every other weekend. Although that had eased off over the past few weeks.

Giving a sigh, Will pushed out of the Rover and locked up. The black scarf tucked neatly into his long overcoat didn't exactly do much to protect him against the chill of the thick, falling snow, and he quickly turned his collar up to the cold as he made a careful track over to the house. At least James's motorbike was tucked up on the driveway, no tracks visible anywhere to say he'd risked breaking the law by riding it. He wasn't old enough, not yet. James had been off from university with flu, missing the first few days back, which had only added to Will's concerns over James riding the motorbike. At seventeen, he'd picked up a natural flair for language, taking his A-levels at 15 when most weren't even settling down for their GCSEs. Excelling skills had gotten him into university early, right next to Ryan in Elliot's class, and Will wanted to keep him safe enough in order to get through it.

After managing to work cold fingers and get his key into the lock, Will scowled at the door before pushing it open. Will had said nothing to James about Ryan after the bike show a few days back, mostly hoping that James had



worked Ryan out of his system. James certainly hadn't mentioned anything, and Will, his selfish side, really needed Ryan to stay away from James's radar. It had been a shock, discovering James was gay, but Will didn't have a problem with that, he understood. But... Ryan. Anybody else *but* Ryan and his head case of a father.

Letting the door close behind him, Will unwrapped his scarf and threw it over the coat stand keeping watch by the door. The heat was on, already warming his cheeks, but it was the scent wafting through from the living room that had Will frowning a smile. After shaking himself free of his coat and giving that a home, Will gave a good stretch, then followed the mix of hot jacket potato and cinnamon as he headed on through to the living room. "Aw, kid, all this effort just for—"

Candles. Will should have noticed the candles first: about half a dozen set at various heights around his living room. Maybe a small part of him did: the scent certainly gave everything away, but nothing mattered, only James. Bare-chested, hands diving beneath jeans as tongues fought a battle of heat and need that bested any starving man, James lay beneath Ryan.

Breathing became hard, everything that mattered in life became hard, all blurred at the edges but for the two young men tentatively testing each other out on the settee.

"Stop." At first it was a whisper, just a rush of air that passed his lips, maybe followed by a groan, then, loud enough to cause both Ryan and James to jerk their glances over in Will's direction, he shouted, "For godssake stop."

Ryan was the first to react. A scramble to his feet saw him grab his T-shirt off the floor and quickly tug it down his body. "Will—"

"*Chambers*," shouted Will, taking a step back, "My name's Mr. Chambers to you."

Where Ryan had stilled at the cry, James was busy coming over, grabbing Will's arms and trying to push him back, out of the living room. Will wouldn't take his gaze off Ryan, who was now fumbling around for his phone.

“Please, for godssake, Will,” hushed James, and the look in his eyes pleaded just that, for some calm, some order, maybe understanding. “I’m sorry. I’ve been trying to find a way to tell you. I’ve—”

Will’s cold laugh stopped everything, even James took a step back as Will ran his hands through his hair. “Oh you... You stupid boy.” Will tried to bury the sickness churning his stomach. “You’ve got no idea what you’re doing.”

James looked at Ryan. Will thought it was for support from the older boy, but when James looked back, that old head of his seemed to take control. Maybe it was due to being forced to hunt through black bags and find his own food, sit there eating in a corner on his own, but the look in black eyes took control of the situation so very easily.

“I like Ryan,” he said quietly, “more than a lot. I love everything that you’ve done for me, but this,” he pointed back at Ryan, who had finished whispering in to the phone, “us. We’re good, so bloody good together. You—”

“Ryan,” said Will, trying his best to sound calm. “You need to go.”

“Will,” said James. “Just listen, please.”

“Now.” Will never even looked at James. “I need, I need some time alone to talk to James, and you...” Will closed his eyes briefly. “You need to go home.”

“Mr. Chambers—”

*“Fucking go.”*

James grabbed hold of Will’s arms, but all Will wanted, all he needed was for Ryan to leave them alone for five minutes. This needed to be sorted now. Part of Will knew he shouldn’t have left it this long, but he’d hoped.... Yet James was there, pushing him back like Will wanted to tear Ryan apart, when that wasn’t it, not at all. He just needed Ryan to go.

*“Get out, Ryan, or I swear I’ll—”*

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“What?” The Voice brought Will’s thoughts to a cold halt. Will hadn’t spoken, not said a word, and yet the Voice knew—he bloody well knew. “What would you have done, Mr. Chambers?”

*“Not what his fucking father thought.”* Neck stretched back, Will gave a cry and then fought heart and soul against the bindings. *“I wouldn’t have ever hurt him.”*

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Someone buffeted Will, then another pair of hands grabbed him by the collar and sent him back against the wall. “What the fuck is your problem with my kid?”

Elliot. Will stifled a groan as dark brown eyes called out every ounce of fight in Will, yet at the same time the hands roughing up his jacket threatened to strangle every ounce of fight out of him. “*Dad.*” Ryan was there, grabbing at Elliot’s arm, or trying to at least, but Elliot pushed him away.

“I asked a question.”

Will laughed again, let his hands find his hair, then gave a violent shove at Elliot’s shoulders. “Get him out.” Will was there in Elliot’s face now. “Get him the fuck out of here.”

“Got a problem, have we, Will?” Elliot’s lip curled in a sneer, one Will wanted to knock off his face. “A little worried what people are gonna say about the fag of a foster dad who turned his foster son into a fag too?”

“Fuck you.” Will pushed Elliot again. *“Fuck you, Matthews.”*

“All right—all right. Stop,” said James, pushing between them, “just stop. Please—please.”

Will should have listened, just took a step back and saw what was going on with James, how grief had started to fall so easily. After so many years of keeping it back, it fell so easily now. But Elliot still had that same goddamn sneer to his face.

“Gay?” James’s voice had been nothing but a whisper, but Elliot was all that Will saw. Elliot. They’d grown up together, mostly on the opposite side of

the road with Elliot throwing stones in Will's direction. They'd gone to the same primary school, then secondary, followed by college, and Elliot had played the same vicious game every time, chasing every kiss Will gave to a girl with whispers in the girl's ear over how Will played around with men. Then he'd chase each of Will's kisses to a guy with a call of fag—always followed by that goddamn sneer. For someone who had the intelligence to get to the head of the linguistic department in the same university as Will, Elliot came with every stain of foul going.

“Out.” Will calmed everything about him. “Take your kid and keep him the fuck away from mine.”

“Reputation?” said James quietly, and Will looked at him. “You?” James seemed to search for something. “Your fucking reputation? That's what all this is about?” His eyes widened a touch. “Oh, what? It isn't bad enough you've already got a wreck of a kid with alcoholics for parents who used to beat the shit out of him? You...” Another tear fell, “adding gay to your closet shit-list is just a little too much, is it? Did you even tell Social Services that you're bi, or did you miss that minor detail off just so you could try and play happy family?”

“No.” *Christ.* Will took one step towards him; James took two steps back. “For godssake, James,” he said quietly, arms falling in defeat to his sides, “this I... you don't understand. Elliot—”

“Yeah? All the shit over him playing big-guy bully with you? I do. And you know what?” James's arms had taken a slight shift from his sides, the normal pose of a bird just getting ready to take flight. “Fuck you, Will.” And he was pushing past, with Will crying hurt and trying to catch hold of James's wing to stop him from leaving. As Will tried to follow, Elliot pushed Will against the wall, holding him still. “You let them sort this,” snarled Elliot as Ryan took off after James. “You back off an—”

A dull thud followed by the sound of kicked over milk bottles forced Will's gaze towards the door, followed automatically by Elliot's. There was such a quiet to the night then, that knowing that something's happened in the distance and you can't see it. All you can do is turn your ear towards the noise.

And then it came. Ryan cried his dad's name and Elliot was suddenly shifting for the front door. Will stayed there, breathing hard, heavy, just listening, watching the flicker of cinnamon candles in the winter breeze.

“Will.”

It should have jerked him into gear. There was a lot of anguish and urgency to Elliot's call of his name, but Will refused to move. “Will.”

The second cry had the desired effect, and Will was out of the living room, pushing past Ryan as he stood trying miserably to thumb the buttons on his mobile, then Will was crumpling down next to James.

“Slipped.” Ryan was sobbing, trying to wipe away his tears so he could see the phone. “He ran and I couldn't stop him. Slipped.” Ryan nodded as Elliot was there, pulling the phone from his son's hand, grabbing him hard into a hold yet still managing to use the phone. “Dad, he just slipped and...”

Will had removed his jacket, and now lifted James's head off the corner of the concrete step that had taken on a deep shade of cinnamon crimson. One of the empty milk bottles put out earlier had skidded a little way down the pathway. That wasn't the problem. Another, looking like it had bounced off the first and stayed where James had fallen, was broken in pieces around James's head, leaving this strange swirl of milk mixing with blood, snow, and a mosaic of shattered glass. “S'okay, kid.” Will kissed at James's forehead. “S'okay.”

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Will lay there, not moving, breathing now so completely controlled. “You need to let me go.”

That *creak, creak-creak* started again, the pace a little quicker. “Why, Mr. Chambers? Your boy lasted what? One week in intensive care with a shattered skull? Do you think he had the option to get up and walk away?”

“Let me go.”

“I didn't catch that, Mr. Chambers.”

“*Let me fucking go an—*”

A body pressed down on Will's as a hand gripped his throat. "*Mouth.*" The grip shifted slightly, so did the weight on top of Will, almost doubly making sure that he got the hint to keep oh so still. "*Third question, fuck the days.*"

Will couldn't breathe, and it wasn't because of the grip choking his throat—he knew what was coming now.

"What," was spat against Will's face, "what didn't you tell James?"

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## CHAPTER SIX

“Have I convinced you yet?” Ignoring all other bikes on display at the bike show, yet maybe keeping an extra eye out for Ryan, James started to pace the motorbike as Will forced himself to focus on the leather that creaked under his own touch. “Come on.” James was almost dancing. Will knew if he left the kid hanging on any longer, James would swing into full mosh-pit mode: all energy and a will to get noticed and not lost in the crowd kicking in.

“You never even cleaned your room this morning.”

“Uh-huh, like that is it?” James gave a sniff to his nose, then giving a cry—he fell to his knees and gripped at Will’s leg, his head hugging close to Will’s hip. “Don’t leave me, please, Dad,” he cried at the top of his voice, and Will instantly tried to shove him off as he grimaced a smile at the people who turned heads in their direction. “Dad, I love you. And, my room—I’ll promise to pick up that one lone sock up off my cold—*damp*—”

“Get up—”

“—carpetless, cell of a windowless room—”

“Get *up*,” Will forced through his teeth, not knowing whether to laugh or run and hide underneath several thousand rocks with how people were staring.

But James wasn’t finished. “Even though I share that small room with five, like—eight, eight other of your shirtless, shoeless off-springs. We all love you, Dad, s—”

“For godssake, Jay, *pleeeeeease*.”

Giving a grin up at Will, James pushed to his feet and started to dust down Will’s jacket, then he looked at the onlookers. “Okay, move on. Nothing to see here.” He waved the bewildered bunch away, and they carried on with a few shoulder shrugs and wide-eyed glances back at them. “Mmmm,” said James, now patting his own jeans down. “Don’t do the whole ‘look at me, I’m gorgeous’ thing too much, do you, Will?”

“You’ve got enough showmanship for both of us,” said Will, fighting off the burns on his cheeks as the sales rep finally came over, now the man had stopped wetting himself with laughter over in the distance.

“So.” The salesman grinned at Will. “I take it that this young chap’s got his eye on this bike?”

Will rolled his eyes. “The whole pleading thing a usual around here, is it?”

The salesman nodded. “You’d be surprised.”

“At what?”

Will stilled hearing the voice and turned to see Elliot Matthews just about manage to stop someone bumping into him. “Mr. Matthews.” James dug his hands in his pockets and literally beamed at Elliot. “I’ve just seen Ryan.” He thumbed behind him. “That way.”

Elliot glanced past James. He was messing with his mobile and didn’t look happy about something. “I told him to keep his ass close,” he mumbled distractedly.

James’s blush turned a few shades deeper, X-rating his thoughts, no doubt with thoughts on what could happen if Ryan brought his ass back close. “You like the bike?” said James to Elliot, and as Elliot looked it over, his eyes lit up a touch. “Bloody gorgeous, lad.”

Will was pushed aside as Elliot came between them, his back now to Will.

“Ryan said, hmm. I heard you used to own a Kawasaki,” said James, crouching down next to Elliot as Elliot inspected some biker thing Will had no clue about. “Yeah,” said Elliot, and he cocked James a smile. “You chose this one, huh?”

James nodded, then his smile slipped. “Is it okay?”

Elliot gave a hElliot gave a Hmmmmmm. “A bit much for a first ride. Have you had lessons?”

“Yeah, Will’s made sure of it. He thinks I should go safer with smaller.”



Elliot snorted but Will ignored it. "It might be the safer option, yes." Elliot looked James over. "But you look like you've got the body type to handle her."

"Yeah?"

Will nearly groaned out loud at the pitch of excitement from James.

"Yeah," said Elliot, getting to his feet, then stepping aside to let James climb on. "You take after Will more than you think with riding the wild."

Elliot was gone then, off into the crowd, leaving James testing the motorbike out, and Will frowning down at his feet. "James, I'm just going for a," Will shifted his head towards the toilets, "y'know."

James was peering down at the opposite side of the bike. "Hmm. Sure. Whatever. Just don't run off." James wagged his eyebrows. "Dude, I know where you live."

One last warning look for James to grow up, Will made his way through the crowds of people and headed on over to the restrooms. There was a throng of men inside, vying for space, and Will got a sympathetic tap on the elbow off a guy in a wheelchair. The man had just come out of the disabled toilets and he thumbed behind him. "If you're quick, you can catch the door before it closes and go in there."

Will looked back into the men's room, then at the closing door. Hating himself for it, Will slipped over by the disabled toilets and winked his thanks to the guy in the wheelchair. He took care of business and washed up, resigning himself to the fact that he was going to have to dip into his savings as soon as he walked out the door. But James wasn't spoilt, as a matter of fact, this was the first time he'd set his heart on something and asked. Most of it stemming back to his days with his parents and getting more than the odd bruise for his troubles. Will couldn't stop the sadness in his smile. It was good that he was asking, or trusted enough to ask. Will would have given him anything he called for just to get him to ask.

After giving his hands a good wipe, Will grabbed his wallet and pulled open the door.

The wallet was pinched from his hands, and Will was forced to back up a few paces as Elliot came into the disabled toilet and closed the door behind him. He wore black jeans, boots, a shirt that was always pulled out in a throwback to his school bully days.

Elliot started looking through Will's wallet, and he offered a smile. "See your dinner money's improved over the years, Chambers."

Will held his hand out, and Elliot, cocking a brow, flipped the wallet shut and slipped it in his back pocket.

Will eased into a smile. "Think you're funny?"

Elliot stepped closer, slipped his arms around Will's waist, and then gave a hard sigh as he rested his head against Will's. "I'm pissed off, and that makes me cranky." He pulled back, and Will found he was looking up into a gaze that said "pissed" didn't even come close. Elliot shifted and pulled his mobile from his pocket before holding it up for Will to look at. "Switched yours off, hmm?" he said, and Will held the steady gaze. His phone wasn't exactly off, but it was in the glove box to his Rover. "I thought you told me you had private tutoring booked for today?" said Elliot quietly, throwing his mobile on the side, then letting his hands find Will's ass. With a gentle tug, Will's hips dug into Elliot's, causing friction. Giving an uneasy sigh, Will slid his hands up Elliot's arms, feeling all the stress and tension as Will rested his head against Elliot's.

"Will, just be straight with me when you want time out with just you and James, yeah?" Elliot breathed quietly, then a kiss brushed Will's cheek. "I'm a dad too, y'know. I understand."

"A pissed off and cranky one, and one that used to pinch my dinner money, lock me inside the stationary cupboard, then throw stones at me when you let me out." Will offered a frown topped off with a smile. "I've grown up with your twisted version of understanding, Matthews."

Elliot chuckled softly, and Will found it naturally spread to him as he smiled. "Yeah, well. You dodged most and spent the rest of your time running away from me."

“You can be scary when you’re pissed off.” Will slipped his arms around Elliot’s neck and Elliot stole a kiss. This guy wasn’t so tough. They played for a moment, bodies that had been on slow burn since they’d untangled from each other last night now didn’t take long to run into the danger of throwing any sense of control right out of the restroom window. Thoughts of bare skin on bare skin, hardness on hardness—it took Will every ounce of his soul to not strip Elliot bare and take him up against the wall.

“You stole my dinner money,” breathed Will in between his kiss, and Elliot choked a chuckle that seemed to rattle down into Will’s bones.

“You stole my soul first,” whispered Elliot, then pulling back, an edge came to his eyes, and he slipped his hands into Will’s jeans to feel his ass. “Beg me nicely, I might—might let you have your money back. I get to keep your soul, though.”

“Hmmm?” Will kissed at the nape of a soft neck, nipping, marking, but he’d started to shake and Will found he was pushed away to allow Elliot’s gaze to search his.

“What the hell’s this, Will?” Elliot brushed at Will’s cheek, taking away a runaway tear.

“This needs to stop.”

“Huh? What—us?” Elliot frowned. “Where the hell has this come from?” He took his hands off Will’s ass, but traced down to one of Will’s hands and held it.

“Christ, Elliot.” Will went in close again, his forehead resting hard against Elliot’s, their lips almost touching. “I can’t lose him.”

“Who?”

“James. Him and Ryan,” said Will quietly, “they’re seeing each other.”

Elliot pushed him away a touch. “They’re what?”

Will wiped a hand over his face. “Elliot, you should see how they look at each other.”

“*Humph*, okay.” Elliot gave a deep, hard sigh. “We can work this. It’s not *unworkable*.”

Will let out a laugh, but it was cold and a little horrified. “Make it work?”

“Will—”

“Do you... ah.” Will turned away and ran a hand through his hair, wanting so bad to cry out what he was feeling. “Social Services.”

“Wait, what?” Elliot screwed his face. “James is seventeen. Social services—”

“*He’s in full time education, Elliot.*” Will tried to force control, but he was close to losing it. “They’re involved until he turns eighteen. *I could lose him if they find out about this, this—*”

“This what?” said Elliot, his voice now flat.

“This whole fucked up mess.”

“So little Will Chambers does what he always does, huh?” Elliot was over by him, in Will’s face. “He runs, so far lost in his own world he doesn’t give a fuck about anyone else.”

“I care about James.”

“I fucking *love* you.”

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“Stop.” Will knew the natural fit of the body against his now. “Elliot, for godssake, what the hell are you doing to me?” he cried, fighting his grief and failing miserably. “I lost him. I still lost him—”

The blindfold was pulled roughly off, forcing Will to blink against the onslaught of light, then hands gripped either side of his face as Elliot cried out and rested his head against Will’s. There was a year’s full of grief in those brown eyes, but also so many more years of not loving, of not allowing himself to love. “Christ, Will, you never even recognised my voice; you’re that fucking lost in his echo.”

Elliot forced Will's head back, stretching his throat, kissing along it and digging his hips into Will's. His touch was so familiar and honest, Will's body reacted with natural ease, back arching and a sudden relaxing, an opening up of his throat to give Elliot access.

"So tonight," snarled Elliot against the bites, "this one night, I'm taking what belongs to me and making sure the father walks away having felt something other than hurt."

Will groaned out loud as Elliot traced a rough path down between Will's thighs and stroked along the heat and hardness he found.

"Christ, when was the last time you came, Will?"

"Elliot." That was less of a cry, more a murmur as Will tested the rope at his feet and dug his heels into the bed, lifting his hips with a need to feel every inch of Elliot's touch. Elliot shifted quickly, swamping Will's body with his own, hands slipping underneath Will's bound arms to pull him into a hard hold. Fingers dug into Will's shoulders, claiming, digging; lip and nip chased Elliot's jaw, stirring shivers down the length of Will's body, and Elliot's own clothed bump and grind of his hips into Will's naked body had Will high on everything that was Elliot.

"Would it be so bad?" breathed Elliot into his ear, and he followed it with a bite to the tender lobe. "If I took you now, like this," Elliot's hands traced along the ropes, then found Will's bound hands, "would it really be so bad if I took you bound down like this, Will?"

Almost hiding in the curve of Elliot's neck, Will ignored the dampness from his eyes, and gave a gentle shake of head. There had never been anything wrong with having Elliot take anything from him.

Will threw his head back as Elliot kissed his way down over Will's chest, nipping at a bud, then teasing a slower kiss down Will's abs all to kiss just below Will's navel. Feeling Elliot kiss lower, then take him in his mouth, Will cried to have his hands and feet free. He wanted to run this time too, but with Elliot, not against him, just cry yes to every scar Elliot kissed open, make contact himself, and let him know he wasn't alone. Elliot seemed so alone.

Will cried frustration. Elliot had always seemed so alone.

But he was right there now, shifting up and kissing Will roughly, taking a breather at times to whisper how everything was okay. It wasn't, but it didn't seem wrong to pretend just for a few moments. Will returned the heat, drawing on Elliot like a lifeline to the living, and he moaned at how good Elliot felt.

"Christ, Will." Elliot settled into the curve of Will's throat. "The things you do to me." There was a slight lift of Elliot's hips, then Elliot freed himself and Will caught his breath feeling the trace of wetness Elliot's tip made as he crushed their hips together.

"Missed this so much." Elliot bit at Will's throat. "So bloody much, baby."

There was no pain as Elliot pushed inside, but Will bit into Elliot's shoulder to bury everything else that slammed into his body. Elliot's arms were back around him, holding him tight, and despite how his fingers were marking, threatening to tear Will apart with the need to take, maybe hurt for being hurt, Elliot's pace inside of him was so first-time tentative.

"Love you, Will Chambers," breathed Elliot, and Will dug his heels in, using whatever freedom he had to arch up into each thrust into his body. Elliot became wilder, jerking Will beneath him as Elliot cried out his need to come. Will beat him to it, stretching his head back and gripping onto the ropes as he came. His pace still hard, Elliot cried release a few seconds later, then hearts were left to pound against each other in the come-down as Elliot relaxed everything he had into Will.

Arms aching from the ropes, and his head thumping its own beat with the release his body had been allowed, Will frowned feeling dampness against his throat. Elliot was still cuddled in, but now it was more in defeat.

"Elliot?"

Giving a sniff, Elliot lifted his head only to press their foreheads together. "You kill me, Will. Every fucking time." Will went to speak but a hand pressed against his mouth. "My transfer over to Oxford starts next week, and..." He shrugged and a tear fell. "And I need to leave all this—" The hand was replaced with a brief kiss. "—all this behind." He gave an angered sigh.

“I’m sorry, for everything: for the past few days, for not stopping Jay walking out that door.” His frown hurt. “The stones.” He nodded. “I’m sorry for the stones too. But for twelve months, although we hid from the two people we most cared about and tore them apart through it, for twelve months, I got to taste you.” His eyes hardened. “And I won’t ever fucking apologise for that.”

Elliot shifted and pulled something from the drawer. “But you haven’t answered my question, and you need to think long and hard, Will,” he said, and Will’s hold body stiffened seeing a syringe, “what didn’t you tell James?”

Will frowned.

“The university will have my details for the police if you go down that path.” He looked so angry. “I’m hoping you won’t, but then after this—” Will whimpered as the needle was pushed into his arm. “I wouldn’t blame you, baby.”

Life went very heavy, his arms now more like a dead weight, and Will fought the drag down into the murky depths. “Elli....”

A kiss feathered his cheek. “Get some decent sleep, Will. You look like you haven’t slept properly in months and...”

Whatever was said, Will didn’t catch it; he’d never even noticed when the chair had stopped creaking and the Voice had left them alone, only how cold everywhere felt without having Elliot there.

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## CHAPTER SEVEN

Everywhere was shadowed in darkness, and for a moment, Will lay there, feeling the dread of shifting his body and testing out his muscles. He wasn't quite sure why he needed to test his muscles out and see if he could move without wincing from any stiffness, his head sat in the middle of a fog that refused to shift with the breeze playing on his body, but a deep part of him knew he should be trying to move. Elliot—

Will stilled.

Elliot.

He tugged at the rope, and it took him a few seconds to register that the feel of it around his wrists and feet were purely locked in his head, like the feel of a wedding ring he'd had on for years yet still felt the presence of it even when it was removed. The contents on the bedside unit spilled on the floor as Will struggled to twist up and out of bed, then blindly fumble for a light source. He needed to know where he was, to ground himself in a visible place. His fingers brushed a switch just close to the unit, and he flicked it on, blinking against the soft onslaught of light that came from the wall mounted lights. *His* wall mounted lights.

Hand running through his hair, Will did a slow intake of his bedroom. The ropes were still tied to the silver frame of the headboard, the foot restraints there at the bottom. The black rocking chair was new and—

Will groaned, nearly doubling with how sick he felt. Two things. It had only taken two new additions into his home for Elliot to displace and disrupt his perception of his own home: a blindfold and a rocking chair: a constant moving, creaking chair. Will stared long and hard at that chair, hating everything it represented. All his shame, his gullibility, his fears.

It took him all of a few seconds to cross the distance and hurl it at his balcony doors. At first all it did was thud against the glass, but two more gave the glass a single crack, then fourth—fifth? Breathing heavy, Will stood watching glass settle as the chair lay trying to crawl out onto the decking, away from him.



Clothes came first: jeans, shirt—shoes, then Will was limping downstairs. In the grunted hunt for his keys, Will went quiet when his laptop caught his attention. The screen had gone to standby, leaving an eerie wave of aurora light sweeping the darkness of his kitchen. Seeing his car keys on the tabletop, Will made his way over, his grab at them distracted by the laptop. His touch to the mouse shifted things into life, but it wasn't his usual desktop background that he saw. The simple words "You're welcome," blinked back at him, followed by an arrow that pointed to the left hand corner of the screen. Will followed it down to see that his USB still slept in the port. Clicking on the folder, Will set the muscles tensing in his jaw.

"You fuck, Elliot."

All of his paperwork was marked; he'd been bound and blindfolded upstairs, and Elliot had sat here, marking papers.

*"You fucking fuck, Elliot."*

Will gave a violent shove at the table, scraping it over tile, and nearly sending the laptop over the edge. He didn't even waste time waiting to see if it hit the floor. Car keys digging into his palm, Will pushed outside, taking the small steps two at a time and getting into his Rover. The ignition was easy enough to find, even in the dark, but the note attached to the steering wheel? Will almost missed it, his hand sweeping over and nearly knocking the yellow sticky off. Peeling it off his fingers, Will then switched on the interior light and narrowed his eyes.

*Clear your head before you drive back home. Stay safe. Please.*

*Love, Elliot. Always.*

A snarl, Will screwed the paper up, set down his window, and tossed it. After shifting his gears into reverse, Will backed out, then home became the furthest destination on his mind.

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For the hours it took Will to find Elliot's home, life became surreal beyond the blackness of his windows. He shouldn't have been driving, he knew that

much. The street lights blended into single lines, making them more like death orbs running alongside of him, all life and malicious intent in the innocence of colour. Cat's eyes and the occasional *thud, thud-thud* as he ran over them put him back in his bed, but the lack of life tied him back to it, and every now and again it would take his slam of fist into the steering wheel to drag him into reality again.

It was well into dawn by the time Will pulled up outside Elliot's home, and just a few doors down from his. The heat warmed tarmac, already promising another gorgeous day, and a moving van sat there sunbathing, not showing any impatience with being made to wait on the drive way. A few boxes were already piled high inside, but nobody was on Elliot's drive. The offer of movement came from inside the house, or more the lounge as Elliot's front door stood open.

After parking the Rover so the van couldn't pull off the drive, Will let the engine die, then grabbed at his keys before pushing out. He followed the sound of voices moving from the living room to the kitchen, and he made a mental note that two people were opening cupboard doors and shuffling things about.

Elliot caught sight of him before Will saw Elliot. Having just unplumbed the washer, Elliot pushed to his feet. There was a moment he went to say something, then Will was going for him with every intent of making sure he never said another word.

"No you don't."

Will had no idea where he came from, but the biggest mother of all men grabbed his arms, pulling him back and stopping him going for Elliot.

"Will—"

"*You don't*," shouted Will at Elliot. "You." He cried out, mostly in anger as he tried to get free. "What gave you the fucking right to—"

"Oh-kay," said the man behind, and Will found he was pulled away, out of the kitchen and into the living room. Pushed inside, Will skidded to a halt. It took only a moment for him to be back by whatever freak of nature was there trying to stop him getting at Elliot.

“How about you calm it down, Mr, Chambers. You just—”

Will stopped and closed his eyes, now tilting his ear. At first heat filled his cheeks, the knowledge that this man had seen him naked, that he had been there when Elliot—

Will groaned out loud just as Elliot eased passed the Voice and rested back against the doorframe.

“Will—”

“*Don’t.*” Will held a finger up to silence Elliot. “Your friend there is going to give me his name,” he said, now so cold in his calmness. “His going to give me his name, and then he’s going to tell me what gave him the goddamn right to help tie me down to a fucking bed.”

The Voice held out his hand. “Colm Ryans.” Will just stared at the offering. “And the fact you’ve hurt a very good friend of mine gives me every right.”

Will couldn’t get his head around that reply. “Shall we see how far that friendship goes when you’ve been sharing a cell with him for a few years?”

Colm shrugged and dug big hands in his pockets. “Yet you’re here on your own, Will.” He leant back against the wall. “Where are the police?”

“Fuck you.” Will looked from Elliot, back to Colm. “Fuck you both.”

Colm sighed, then looked at Elliot. “See what you mean about the language. It doesn’t suit him.”

“You don’t know me. You know *nothing* about me and—”

There was more noise behind the door, someone coming downstairs, maybe juggling a box. “Elliot, where do you want this one—”

“Oh fuh—” Will laughed, then his hands went to his head. “Jake?” Sweet Jake, always looking as though he’d been on the verge of saying something, standing there at the bottom of Will’s drive with an eye for James’s motorbike. Sweet *sweet* Jake. Will threw his hands out, things clicking together a little now. “You—you too?”

Jake stopped there in the doorway, his eyes a little startled at first, then almost instantly softening. “You okay? You look rough.”

“Rough?” Will spat it out, not believing any of this shit. “You...?” He frowned, some in anger, mostly just hurt now. “What the hell did I do to you?” Will had given Jake the address of the log cabin, where he’d been going, how long he’d be there, when he’d get back. And with Elliot’s local knowledge of Dorset. “You?”

“I watched Elliot come and go from yours whilst James was with Ryan away from your house,” said Jake. “I also watched what happened to you when you stopped letting Elliot in.” He offered a sad smile. “So yeah. Me too.”

“Leave us alone, yeah?” said Elliot to Colm and Jake as he took a few steps towards Will. Will growled, then spun away. “Your problem is with me, Will.”

Choking a laugh, Will glared back at Elliot. “My problem?” Will pushed him back, then pushed him again until Elliot was up against the wall. “You tied *me* up, not the other way around.”

“What didn’t you tell James, Will?”

“Huh?” That cut him short.

“*What didn’t you tell James?*”

Will jerked at the shout. “*About us,*” he shouted back. “*I didn’t tell him about us.*”

Elliot snorted coldly. “Ryan hasn’t spoken to me since that night. Do you know why?” Elliot’s eyes flared. “He hated me for my anger that night, saying it was nothing unusual for me to lose it and cause all the shit. But you...?” Elliot smiled, but he wasn’t happy. “Ryan said he understood your reaction. He said everything was a shock, you finding him there. And little Will Chambers: he never loses his temper or resorts to foul language, now does he?” Elliot folded his arms and sneered. “Only little Will knew about them

already. He stood there at the bike show that day and swore that we were over, that he was going to tell James about us.”

Elliot pushed Will back. “*Why didn’t you tell James about us, Will?*”

“*Because I loved you too much,*” he shouted at him. “Because I went home that night and kept my mouth shut thinking James would get it out of his system—*because for the first time, the very first fucking time, the father lost out to the lover in me, and I wanted both of you.*”

Elliot came in hard, fast, cupping Will’s face, but forcing him back with the violence of it, the grip nearly threatening to break bone. “You needed to say it—I needed to *hear* you say it,” he snarled, “because for the past twelve months, you’ve been stuck in the same place, repeating the same moments over and over again like a needle jumping on a record, and you’ve kept me right there with you. Everyone—I’ve had everyone look at me like the bully you put me back into. I lost my son, and you—” Will was forced back a step. “You had a grave to grieve beside; me—I’m caught in some screwed-up limbo land where I see my son—you—but you both don’t hear me no matter how loud I cry. Not as a father—not as a lover.”

Will felt a tear slip free. “Why didn’t you tell Ryan that you were reacting as a lover that night, not the box he slotted you into?”

Will’s grief ignited Elliot’s and this time the tear that fell was his. “Because it was bad enough that he hated me, Will,” he said quietly, “I couldn’t let him hate you too. He needed someone, and so did you. If you had each other, at least you had something to hold onto.”

Knocking Elliot’s hands away, Will grabbed Elliot to him. “For godssake, Elliot. I didn’t know. I didn’t know he’d blamed yo—” Will cried out and held on tight. Then he pushed him back. “But James. He was mine to let go of when I chose, you bastard—not you.” Will fought so hard not to let his grief spill, and failed miserably. “For godssake. Here.” He tapped his head. “It’s all I’ve got left of him. You—”

“What?” said Elliot, just standing there and taking it. “I what?”

Will went back into Elliot and wrapped his arms around his neck, his head now resting against Elliot's. "You arranged to have me kidnapped; you risked your career, your friends, our neighbour; and me..." Will screwed his eyes shut and shifted slightly, pressing his head harder against Elliot's to stop the hurt. "I couldn't even reach out and catch a scared boy when he fell."

"Hey, it was—"

"Worst kind of hurt I've known, Elliot." Will kissed at his neck, trying to bury the grief that tore at his body then. "Losing James—you... Christ. I never meant to lose you in the echo of everything, lose what we had."

He pushed away a touch and ran a thumb along the stubble on Elliot's jaw. "For Ryan's sake, but mostly for me," Will screwed his eyes shut, "stay with me, please."

Elliot tried to pull away. "We'll tear each other apart, Will."

Will nodded. "Yeah." He felt a tear fall. "Fucking tear me apart, Elliot." He kissed gently at his lips. "Then when you've taken everything you need, lie still with me. Because I swear, I'll test your heart, take your soul, then lie still with you in the aftermath, just loving watching your mind and body recover from the heat that's always been us."

Elliot's kiss was hard, so lost for a moment; then he sighed angrily. "Can I bring the rope for when you really piss me off?"

Will choked a chuckle. "Only if you drop the scary guy in the rocking chair."

Giving a grunt, Elliot crushed a hold around Will. "Didn't hear much protest against the use of a blindfold in there, baby."

Will returned the roughness of the cuddle. "We'll talk to Ryan," he said quietly. "He needs to know his dad didn't cause this, that he's a lover, one who sacrificed his own soul to try and protect the people he loved."

Elliot started to shake. Grief, worry, release—they changed with each shiver like the changing of colours in a constantly rotating kaleidoscope, now

all exposed at their fullest. “Just leave the kidnapping and everything out, though, yeah? I don’t think mentioning that would help my case much.”

Will chuckled; then it slipped into nothing feeling Elliot’s grief rack his body. “Got you, baby. I fucking hear you now. I hear you now.”

**THE END**

## Author Bio

*Jack L. Pyke blames her dark writing influences on living close to one of England's finest forests. Having grown up hearing a history of kidnappings, murders, strange sightings, and sexual exploits her neck of the woods is renowned for, Jack takes that into her writing, having also learned that human coping strategies for intense situations can sometimes make the best of people have disastrously bad moments. Redeeming those flaws is Jack's drive, and if that drive just happens to lead to sexual tension between two or more guys, Jack's the first to let nature take its course*

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