

LOVE Has NO Boundaries



Don't Read in the Closet Event 2013

THE CANDIDATES

Bette Browne

Contents

Love Has No Boundaries	3
The Candidates	6
CHAPTER ONE.....	7
CHAPTER TWO.....	10
CHAPTER THREE.....	16
CHAPTER FOUR.....	20
CHAPTER FIVE.....	24
CHAPTER SIX	32
CHAPTER SEVEN.....	38
CHAPTER EIGHT.....	43
CHAPTER NINE	52
Author Bio.....	60

Love Has No Boundaries

An M/M Romance series

THE CANDIDATES

By Bette Browne

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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Photo Description

Black and white, two sexy twenty-somethings in suits. The slightly shorter man is reaching up to kiss other, and his left hand, just hovering over the taller man's collar, is tentative. There is an uncertainty there, but an obvious desire. You can almost tell he is wondering whether he is doing the right thing.

Story Letter

Dear Author,

After hating each other as college rivals, now they meet again at a job interview and it is not hate sparks that are flying now.

Or whatever you can come up with... enemies to lovers... please HEA!

Sincerely,

Kimberly

Story Info

Genre: contemporary

Tags: rivals to lovers, businessmen, two alpha males, reunited

Word count: 17,702

THE CANDIDATES

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CHAPTER ONE

“Thank you, Mr. Howard, we’ll be in contact,” Mr. Price’s deep voice commanded, finalizing the interview with the brief comment.

“I look forward to it,” Reece said and smiled, outwardly projecting all of the confidence he possessed in spades. As long as he hadn’t come across as too cocky, he had this job in the bag. He was sure of it. He pushed up from the chair and stood, reaching out his hand to Geoffrey Price, the managing director of Price & Associates. He shook it, then each of the other board member’s in turn, saying each man’s name as he did. “Thank you, gentlemen,” he finished and turned for the door, making sure to walk calmly, assuredly; even though, with everything in him, he felt like screaming out “Hell yeah!”

The murmurs and soft discussion had started before he even closed the door behind him, but he didn’t turn back around; instead, he kept his composure, pulling the heavy door of the boardroom closed gently behind him. As soon as it was shut, he fist-bumped the air and shouted a silent *woot*, not caring who was there to witness his display. His confidence would surely work to unnerve his competitors, and that was a good thing, but he darted his eyes around anyway to check if there was anyone still in the small waiting room.

A set of pale blue eyes met his, and Reece faltered for the split-second it took him to process who those eyes belonged to. It couldn’t be. But it was. He pulled himself together and continued walking, passing the owner of that glacial glare, not sparing him a second glance as he passed. Instead, he slung his satchel over his shoulder and strode from the room.

Jesus Christ!

Cameron Fielding, the goddamned fucking bastard.

Reece hurried from the building, and once he was out of sight, stormed to his car, pulling open the door and throwing his satchel onto the passenger seat. He climbed in, slamming the door closed behind him and just... sat there, his heartbeat and breathing more erratic than they had a right to be. He was rattled, there was no denying it. What the hell was going on? Cameron Fielding? Really?

He could count on one hand the times since they'd left school almost six years ago that he'd thought of the guy. He'd come up in conversation, of course, but only when he ran into other alumni they'd both gone to school with. Other alumni who loved to play the bragging game so typical of young urban professionals—lots of crap where they rubbed each other's noses in anything they could, spouting person-specific taunts like: "Did you hear about Fielding?" or "I heard Fielding got a choice job in Baltimore," or "Fielding's dick's bigger than your dick..."

Okay, he was being ridiculous now.

The simple fact was that Cameron Fielding had always rattled him.

Reece closed his eyes, an image of ice blue ones, totally unlike his own, immediately coming to mind. He slammed his hand on the dash. "Fuck!" He didn't want to be thinking of Fielding's eyes—never again.

Fielding was hot, about the most handsome guy he'd ever seen, in fact, and Reece had never had a problem admitting that—even if those admissions had been made very quietly in the dark of night in his dorm, in his own bed, alone. But that hadn't stopped Reece from knowing straight away that the guy was a Grade-A prick. From their very first class together as freshmen, they'd gotten off on the wrong foot, and things had never improved. "Rivalry" was too polite a term, and "friendly" just never came into the equation. A constant four-year back-and-forth of "one and two" or "two and one"—that was what had defined them.

Reece sat up straighter: That was what *had* defined them—then. Yes, then.

He smiled, finally getting a handle on his emotions. He was being ridiculous. Six years had passed since school, and that was a lot of water under

the bridge. He was older now, and hopefully wiser, and that hard-fought maturity had taught him that the so-called “rivalry” between them had been good for him; it had pushed him to succeed back then. He’d always been a focused kid for sure, but he’d never had such a worthy competitor before Fielding. And if he was honest, Fielding had been the “competitor” who’d helped shape him into the man he was now.

Reece let out a huff. Maybe he should thank Fielding for providing that competition. Instead of sitting there like a dickhead, he could go back and shake the guy’s hand, finally say thank you. And then tell Fielding not to bother with the interview—the job was already his anyway. He chuckled out loud at that. He wasn’t being conceited, just realistic. He’d been headhunted for the position, and the interview had gone well; he was certain the job was his.

He rolled his eyes at himself. It didn’t seem like he’d grown up too much after all.

Good luck, Cam, he thought as he started his car. *You’re gonna need it.*

Determined not to spend another moment wasting thought-space on the guy, he exited the parking garage and headed home.

CHAPTER TWO

Friday arrived quickly. Two days had passed since the interview on Wednesday, and Reece hadn't heard a thing. Rationally he knew two days wasn't very long, not in the grand scheme of things, but he'd expected the call on Wednesday afternoon—or Thursday morning at the very least. He was so sure the job was his, so why was it taking so long? Numerous things could be causing the delay, he knew that, but it didn't make not hearing any easier. He knew he tended to be... impatient. It wasn't one of his better traits.

“Reece.” His personal assistant's voice came through the intercom. “The conference call is set up for five minutes.”

“Thanks, Bec,” he replied. “I'll be ready in two.”

He stared at his computer monitor, the calendar open for the day. He had far too much to do to spend time worrying about a phone call that would come if it was going to come, so he decided to let it go. He'd hear soon enough.

When Simon had called late in the afternoon, it hadn't taken much for his best friend to convince Reece to join him and a few of their friends for beers at the bar. The long August days seemed to make everyone testy, his clients included, and he'd been eager to tear off his tie and share a few cold ones with his friends.

Two beers and a shared plate of hot wings had turned into a cocktail marathon. Reece hadn't eaten near enough for the amount of alcohol he'd consumed, and it was showing. He'd have thought he was old enough to know better: It seemed not!

When had the music gotten so loud, he thought as he finished some overly-sweet concoction—his fifth drink. “Don't want any more of these,” he mumbled, not sure who'd heard. “Too fucking sweet.”

Conner was talking to Toby on the other side of their table—they hadn't heard him. He peered at them, noticing how close his two friends were... really close. He chuckled and turned to seek out Simon, who'd know what was going on. Simon wasn't in his seat, and Reece wondered how the hell he'd missed him getting up and leaving. He'd been there a moment ago, so where

was he now? He looked around, his eyes settling on their other friend, Tim, and focused, and he sighed. Now that was a nice sight! Tim was talking to a young guy, his hand resting gently on his shoulder, their faces close. The guy was probably only about twenty-one or so, dressed casually. He looked intelligent but relaxed, probably a student on summer vacation. Reece missed those carefree undergraduate days. Not having to worry about anything more important than if your mom would be pissed that you came home so late the night before.

That's how it had been for him. He'd been lucky; he knew that. He'd lived at home over summer breaks, not having to worry about working to pay off student loans. His parents weren't what you'd consider wealthy, but they were comfortable and had been able to support him through school. Paid for his student fees and accommodations. During term, he'd worked a few hours a week to earn spending money, but that was all. It had been easy. Sometimes he craved those days again.

Thinking of school made him think of Cameron Fielding, and it was just as he did that Simon returned, next round of cocktails in hand. Reece picked up a glass, studied the deep red drink with what looked to be pomegranate seeds, and then swallowed it in one gulp.

"Settle down, sweetheart," Simon chided, pushing the remaining glasses toward their other friends. "What's got you upset?"

The invitation to divulge was all he needed. "Did I tell you who I saw on Wednesday—at the interview?" Noting that Tim hadn't returned for his drink, Reece reached for it, taking a sip to claim it as his.

Simon quirked a brow, shook his head, and then leaned in, intrigued. "No, you didn't. Who?"

"Well..." Reece started, gesticulating with his hands—a sure sign he'd had a few drinks. "I'd just finished the interview. It was fucking awesome, man... went down like a dream, you know." He could hear that he was rambling but didn't care. "I was stoked, so sure the job was mine... in the bag, you know. Anyway, I walked out of the boardroom..." Reece picked up what had been Tim's glass and took another mouthful, "What the hell is this?" he protested.

“It’s Tim’s drink, not yours. If you didn’t like the first one, I don’t know why you—” Simon stopped talking when Reece rolled his eyes, and took a deep breath. “You were saying.”

“You won’t believe who was there as well.” Reece pressed, his slurred words insistent.

“Not unless you tell me, no. Now spit it out.”

“Fielding.” Reece almost hissed out the word. Simon narrowed his eyes, and Reece guessed he was trying to recall who that was. “You know. Cameron *fucking* Fielding.”

A light seemed to go off. “From college, that Cameron Fielding?” Simon asked.

“You’d better believe it,” Reece sneered.

“Well fancy that,” Simon added, a hint of humor in his tone. “It’s been a while since you’ve mentioned him. He used to rile you up.”

“I couldn’t believe it, seeing him in that room.”

Simon’s eyes sparkled. “Did you say hi?”

Reece eyeballed his friend. “Hell no!”

That caused Simon to chuckle. “Why the *hell* not?”

“Because... because...”

Simon was shaking his head now. “Reece, it’s been what... seven or eight years? Don’t you think it’s time to get over it?”

“Hell no!” he repeated. Fielding had made his life miserable; he’d never forget that.

“You’re a big boy now, Reecy. Time to put on your big boy tighty-whities and... Get. Over. It.”

Reece could hear that his friend was laughing at him, but he didn’t care. “Never!” he protested. There was enough alcohol in his system that every stubborn bone in his body was holding defiant. “Never!”

Simon guffawed loudly. “I think Reecy doth protest too much.”

“Fuck you,” Reece sneered, picking up the cocktail and downing the rest. “Fuck you.”

Simon was still laughing as Reece stormed from the bar. At least he found a cab easily.

Reece opened a bleary eye to the bright sunlight of a ridiculously clear August morning. Grumbling about the injustice of it all, he pulled the light sheet that was barely covering his torso over his face to block out the headache-inducing rays. It was already hot and he didn’t want to be covered up, but the sun was hurting his eyes. Why hadn’t he shut the fucking curtain the night before? Oh, he knew why—because he’d been too drunk to care.

He pulled himself out of bed a half hour later, the stifling air under the sheet finally getting to be too much for him, and he dragged his hung-over body to the shower. Vowing to never again drink cocktails, and then laughing at the hypocrisy of a pledge every hung-over bastard in the world made only to renege on it at the next opportunity, he luxuriated in the tepid water of his shower—not too hot this morning because he needed to cool down.

When he emerged from his bedroom, clean and refreshed, wearing only a pair of soft, worn cargo shorts to provide a bit of modesty for his neighbors, he felt okay. Some aspirin and two large cups of strong coffee and he felt even better. He got on with his Saturday morning, his chores at least keeping his mind occupied and away from Simon’s taunts. He was just putting a final load of washing into the dryer when his cell rang, and he hurried to his stereo to pull it off the dock and answer it, not bothering to read the caller ID.

“Yo,” he called out, over-compensating for the music, even though it had stopped as soon as he removed the phone from the dock.

“And a good morning to you, too, sweetheart.” The voice was almost too joyous.

“Simon,” he growled, for a split-second considering hanging up on him.

“Don’t be like that, Reecy. Surely you’re not *still* angry with me.”

He wasn’t really angry with Simon at all. His friend’s taunts had been playful, if a little close to home. He was angry with himself.

“No,” he answered, “even if you are a jackass.”

Simon burst into laughter. “That I am, sweetheart, that I am.”

Reece rolled his eyes at Simon’s endearment, deciding not to comment. It was better that way. Commenting generally only added fuel to the fire, resulting in more use of the name Simon had gifted him, in a very tongue-in-cheek way, when they were juniors in high school and just realizing they both liked guys... just not each other.

“And to what do I owe the pleasure of a phone call so soon after being in your illustrious company?” Not that multiple phone calls over the course of a weekend were unusual between the best friends.

“I thought I’d tempt you to dinner, my treat, and you can tell me all about the interview, seeing as we kind of got off track. And I’ll listen without judgment, I promise.”

Last night was the first time he’d seen Simon since the interview on Wednesday, and even though Simon was usually the first person he’d have bragged to about the success of the interview, he wasn’t feeling so confident now. He felt like he was on a roller coaster: up one minute and down the next. “Thanks for the offer, man, but I’ll take a rain check. I’m gonna head over to Mom and Dad’s and have lunch with them, maybe a swim, and then have a quiet night at home. I need to wind down.”

There was a moment’s pause before Simon spoke. “Okay, but before I go, you said that the interview went well.”

“It did. I felt over the moon when it was finished.” Saying those words pumped him up a bit, and he stood a little straighter.

“Well, if that’s the case—and forget about any of the other candidates—then the job might be yours. If ‘someone else’ gets it, then it wasn’t meant to be.”

Reece smiled at his friend's words. "When did you get so wise?"

Simon chuckled, and Reece could almost visualize him preening like a peacock. "I have my moments."

"You do, my friend."

"Does that mean you'll come out to dinner?" Reece could hear the slight imploring tone to Simon's voice.

"Thanks, but no thanks. I need the down time."

"Okay. Say hi to the folks for me." Simon had known Reece since grade school and had spent as much time at the Howard house as at his own.

"I'll give Mom a big kiss for you."

"And your dad too... please." The "please" was drawn out and sultry.

Reece rolled his eyes but played along. "Eeeeeeeew. That is just all kinds of wrong."

"But he's soooo handsome." Simon kept ribbing.

"I'm hanging up now."

"Love you," Simon added.

"Love you too."

Reece ended the call and chuckled. Simon had indeed lifted his mood. His friend was right. If the job was his, then he'd get a call, probably on Monday; if it wasn't, then he'd keep working where he was. He really liked his job; he'd only been interested in the other because they'd come after him. And he wasn't too proud to say it had stroked his ego. It would be a new challenge, with a very attractive pay increase, but he'd live without it. And if he got it, then he'd celebrate. And whether it was his or not, either way he'd never have to bother about Cameron Fielding again.

CHAPTER THREE

Reece picked up his keys and sunglasses off the hall table then opened the front door, pulling it closed behind him as he walked out into the fourth-floor hallway of his apartment building. The space was quiet, no noise at all coming from behind any of his neighbors' heavy doors, and it reminded him how much he liked the privacy this complex afforded him. His apartment wasn't huge, but the two bedrooms and combined living and dining rooms were more than enough for him. The modern kitchen and well-appointed bathroom, even if they weren't large—it was less to keep clean as his mother often reminded him—and having his own car space in the underground parking garage were what he loved most. He could see himself living there for years, as long as the owners didn't decide to sell. Choosing to use the stairs instead of the lift, he pushed open the door at the end of the hall and began to jog down. He was halfway down the stairwell when his cell rang again. Thinking it was probably Simon begging him to reconsider dinner, he pressed the answer key without looking at the display.

“Yo.” He breathed loudly as he kept moving.

“Ah, Mr. Howard...?” The voice and an uncomfortable pause made Reece stop in his tracks. *Shit!*

“Yes, this is Reece Howard.” *Fuck, fuck, fuck*, he cursed silently.

“Mr. Howard, this is Geoffrey Price. Do you have a moment?”

Reece's heart was beating a thousand miles a minute, but he forced himself to take a few deep breaths and focus. “Of course, Mr. Price.”

“Sorry to phone you on Saturday, but we wanted to move forward with this position as soon as possible.”

“Of course, Mr. Price,” Reece repeated, silently smacking himself on the head at being so lame. “I mean, sir, that is not a problem.” He rolled his eyes. *Get a grip, dude.*

Geoffrey Price chuckled, instantly easing Reece. “Mr. Howard—Reece—the panel was very impressed by your interview on Wednesday. You are definitely the front-runner for the position.”

So, this wasn't a job offer, but Price's words made Reece feel confident—he was the *front-runner*. If there wasn't a real chance the job was his, he wouldn't be getting this call now.

Mr. Price continued, “We do have another candidate who impressed us as well.” Reece's heart dropped at those words, sure of who Geoffrey Price was referring to. “I realize this is extremely short notice, but if you would be willing, and able, to take vacation time next week, I have a task I would like you to complete. Think of it as a trial of sorts.”

Reece wasn't sure what to say. Next week? Monday? Could he wangle that? His head was spinning with what he had planned for the upcoming week.

“You would be financially compensated of course, in lieu of vacation-time lost,” Mr. Price added. “I realize this may prove difficult to arrange seeing as today is Saturday, and it is not an ultimatum by any means, nor is a test of your commitment to the job—old or new.” Mr. Price chuckled again. “But this opportunity became available on Friday, and in my opinion, it is the perfect way to see if the job would suit you like I think it will.”

Reece listened to everything Mr. Price had to say. He'd heard his assurances that it was not necessary that he do this, but he knew if he really wanted the job it was. Not only that, he wanted to do it—whatever “it” was. He wanted a chance to prove he was the better candidate. He'd been told he was the front-runner, but if he said no to this and Cameron Fielding was offered the chance to go instead, and took it, then the job was gone. Mr. Price could make all the assurances in the world, but if Fielding got a chance, he would prove himself, and then the job would be lost.

“I'll do it,” he blurted out, sucking in a breath before repeating in a more literate way, “I'll make myself available, sir.”

“Are you sure you don’t need a few hours to make sure you can get the time off?” Mr. Price asked, but there was a happy tone to his voice that Reece liked.

“No, sir, I’ll make sure I’m available. What do you need me to do?”

First, Reece called his mom to tell her he wouldn’t be over for lunch. Then he called Bec, to discuss the upcoming week and work out a plan so that she could survive it without him. He admitted to her what had happened with Mr. Price and, happy that he had her full support and confidence, called his immediate manager, lying through his teeth about why he needed the time off on such short notice. Finally, Reece opened the favorites on his phone: Simon.

“Reece, my man, have you changed your mind about tonight?” Simon’s voice was hopeful, and Reece had no intention of disappointing him.

“Well, actually...” he started, quickly running through the conversation with Geoffrey Price and how he’d managed to snag a week’s personal leave at such short notice. Simon was impressed.

“That definitely calls for a celebration!” He was filled with enthusiasm now. “I think dinner *and* dancing are required. I’ll rally the gang. The cab will pick you up on the way. Seven thirty?”

“I’ll be ready.” Reece was excited, any trace of his hangover long gone, and ready to celebrate.

He’d already done his laundry for the week and cleaned the house, so all he needed to do now was pack a bag for the next week and spend the rest of the afternoon working to lessen the load for Bec. The hours disappeared quickly, and only when the sun was low enough in the sky to shine into his living room and across his computer screen did he realize it was almost seven PM. He turned off the laptop and hurried to the bathroom.

When Simon texted at 7:25 to say the cab would be there in ten minutes, Reece was dressed and swallowing the last mouthful of a cold beer—it wasn’t his first. He trashed the empty bottle, turned off the lights, and for the second time today, picked up his keys and pulled his front door closed behind him,

deciding to use the elevator to get downstairs rather than the stairwell this time.

The cab had just pulled up when he walked out of the building. The back door opened and Simon leaned out. “Let’s do this!”

Reece climbed in, said hi to Toby, who was next to the driver in the front seat, and clapped Simon on the shoulder. “Yeah, let’s do this.”

CHAPTER FOUR

Thick ropes of come shot from Reece's dick as Cameron continued to stroke him. He blinked open his eyes, expecting the other people around them to realize what was happening and be looking at him in horror, but now, with his eyes open, there was no one, and the music wasn't music at all, but the incessant drone of his alarm, and the hand stroking the orgasm from his cock wasn't someone else's.

There was no club crowd, no dance floor. The dim light was nothing more than his bedroom at dawn, and he was alone, alone and naked in his bed, a pool of semen cooling quickly on his belly.

"Jesus Christ," Reece said to no one as his breathing settled, his thumb swirling in the come on his belly, and his head beginning to throb.

He got out of bed and went straight for the shower, his head pounding with every step. He needed to wash off the evidence of his dream, and fast. He replayed the night before: the cab, dinner with his friends, the clubs, the *many* drinks, and no sight of Cameron Fielding at all. He'd been discussed, joked about even. Reece had relished Simon's taunts about the man he was victorious over again—well almost. How that had led to a dream, he didn't know. The sooner he completed his assignment and got the job for certain, the better. He needed to be rid of Cameron Fielding once and for all.

The water, warm this morning, sheeted over his shoulders, relaxing him, but his mind wouldn't let him forget. He cringed as memories of the dream came to mind, hating that he'd had it, hating more that a demanding dream-version of Cameron Fielding calling him "baby" had made him come.

"I know you want me," Cameron whispered close to his ear. The voice a mere breath in the loud room, but still he could make out every word... every syllable. The heat radiating off the body behind him was too much... too close, even in the over-heated, over-crowded, over-sensitized environment that the club crowd around them was generating. "You've always wanted me."

He had. Oh god, he had. So. Fucking. Much.

“Yes. God yes,” Reece moaned, his body instinctively pushing back. The hard length he could immediately feel pressed against the crease of his ass like an invitation for carnal pleasure making him push back even harder. He wanted Cameron desperately—had wanted him then, and he wanted him now.

“So if you wanted me, why were you such a prick to me?” Cameron inquired.

Had he been? Yeah, he supposed he had. A real bastard. But then so had Cam—

“I couldn’t blame you. I wanted to hate you most of the time too”—Cameron nuzzled his nose against the sensitive skin behind Reece’s ear—“but... I didn’t.”

Reece’s breath hitched and his voice cracked. “You didn’t?” He knew the response sounded pathetic, needy.

“I couldn’t hate you and still want to fuck you as much as I did, Reece. And holy shit did I want to fuck you—” Cameron cut off his own words when he began to suck on that same sensitive skin. Reece let his head fall to the side, offering up every muscle, every nerve ending, to whatever Cameron would give him.

“You did annoy the shit out of me though,” Cameron continued. “Always right there with me, competing with me for top marks, for all the best projects... and now even jobs.” Reece felt a hand cup his cock through the front of his dress pants and squeeze. “Maybe I should thank you. I should thank you and give you just what you want. I should thank you for making me work harder to stay at my best—to be the best.”

Everything in Reece wanted to reject that—he was the best—and he tensed, causing Cameron to chuckle. But even though he wanted to turn around and tell Cameron Fielding to fuck off, he still wanted the guy with every cell of his body.

“You hate that don’t you? You hate me reminding you that I’m your competition.” Cameron subtly thrust his hips again, keeping his hand firmly

cupped around Reece's erection. "I am the best, Reece. Let me show you, let me show you just how good I can be."

Cameron's other hand moved off Reece's chest to join its twin. Together they undid his belt, unclasped the closure of Reece's jeans, slowly pulling at the zipper until the fly was open and he was exposed. He had no underwear on and his cock popped out, eager, pointing at the crowd. He didn't care. He didn't care as long as Cameron touched him. His eyes closed as he leaned his head back against Cameron's shoulder, Cameron's hot breath still there against his ear, his throat, the side of his face.

"Gonna make you feel so good..." Cameron purred as he took Reece's erection into one hand, pushing the other down into his jeans to cup his balls, rolling each between his fingers.

"Jesus!" Reece exclaimed, the feel of Cameron's hands on the most private parts of his body sending what amounted to shooting explosions of pure pleasure through him. The man had magic hands. There was no way he would last long. "Jesus!" he said again.

"You like that, don't you, Reece?" Cameron squeezed both hands harder. "And right here in front of all these people, just like the little slut I knew you would be."

Cameron was right; Reece couldn't care less if he came right here, right now. He didn't care if he shot his load all over the pretty blonde and her handsome, very straight, boyfriend dancing in front of him. He didn't care if the whole crowd saw him do it. All he wanted to do was come, and he wanted to come because Cameron was the one to make him.

Cameron's hand kept moving over his now-slick erection. Long, strong pulls that ended at the overly sensitive head, a quick but firm squeeze before he'd run his thumb over the tip... and then do it all again.

So fucking good. As good as he knew being with Cameron would be.

"So close." Cameron's teeth nibbled at Reece's earlobe as he muttered encouraging words, urging him on. "So hard for me, baby. Such a dirty slut. You gonna come here now, right here in front of all these people? Show them

what a slut you are. And then after you come, I'm going to pull these jeans down and ram my cock in your ass. I'm gonna fuck you right here, baby. Right here in front of all these peop—”

Reece laughed out loud. There was nothing in the world he hated more than being called fucking *baby!*

CHAPTER FIVE

Reece pulled to the side of the road. He hadn't wanted to stop, but the choice had been made for him when the front right wheel of his car began to shake violently. Instead of getting out immediately, he looked again at the screen shot he'd taken from MapQuest on his tablet before he'd left home, then compared it to the live version on his phone, pinching the screen out to where the flashing dot said he was on the map. When Mr. Price had filled him in briefly on the task, he'd jumped at the chance to drive his own car. He didn't get many opportunities to take it out on the road, but was now regretting his decision. At best he had a flat tire, at worst, it was something more serious, maybe an axle. He glanced up the long road, shaking his head in disbelief at the poor condition of it. At least he was only ten miles or so from where he needed to be.

He got out of the car and walked cautiously around the bright red body of his vintage '67 Mustang, hoping that if the problem was a flat, the spare wasn't flat, too. The tire was like a pancake, the rim sitting precariously, just missing the gravel. "Fuck," he swore—loudly—a bird of some description taking flight at his outburst. "Fuck, fuck!" At least it was the tire—something he could hopefully fix easily.

The sun was still hot, he could feel the rays licking at his neck already, and he'd only been out of the car a couple minutes. He didn't want to be out in the heat longer than necessary, so he hurried to the back, pushed open the trunk, and pulled out the medium-size suitcase he'd packed his life in for the next couple days, placing it beside the car in the shade. Leaning into the back of the car, he pulled back the carpet covering the spare, praying to whatever deities might listen that it be okay. "Yes!" he shouted when it seemed his prayers had been answered. Now he just had to change the thing. He wished it wasn't five thirty in the afternoon; he'd rather be sitting beside a pool having a drink, but there wasn't much he could do about it. Of course, he *could* get his act together and change the tire instead of bitching about it. If he did that then he could be on his way.

Reece had the jack in place and the lug nuts already loosened when he heard the sound of a car approaching. It was the first since he'd stopped, and he hoped the driver would at least slow down to pass him; a mouthful of dust wasn't something he wanted to deal with on top of the flat tire. He looked past his car toward the sound of the approaching vehicle but couldn't see anything for the low-setting sun. Not that it mattered, he wasn't exactly going to wave them to help or slow down, so he began to wind the jack, lifting the front of the car so he could get the damaged tire off. He'd gotten the front end of the car to the right height and was removing the previously loosened lug nuts into his hand when the approaching car slowed down, pulling in behind him.

Here we go, he thought, pushing himself to stand only after he'd pulled off the damaged tire, pushing it out of the way.

Reece heard the driver's door open and close. He glanced in the direction of the car again, but all he could see was the silhouette of a person moving his way. The sun was too bright, and he couldn't stand to look at it, so he turned back.

"Nice wheels," a man said, his voice low and deep, and at a guess, about Reece's age. Reece looked again. Now he could make out a tall frame, possibly jeans and boots, and what seemed to be short hair on the guy's head. Not much really.

"Thanks," Reece muttered and turned again to look away from the sun, returning to his mission of changing the tire.

"A '67?"

Usually Reece loved to talk about his car; today he couldn't be bothered. But not wanting to seem rude, he answered anyway. "Yeah, she is."

"I've always wanted one myself... beautiful machine. I had my eye on a '65 Hardtop a few years back but decided against it. Of course, one of the first Shelby models would be cool..." The man's words petered out, and it was a few moments until he spoke again. "You had this one long?"

Reece had the wheel on now and was hand tightening the lug nuts. “Couple years. She’s a hobby really—” He began to lower the jack. “Did a lot of the work myself.”

“Impressive.” The guy’s voice sounded like he meant it.

“Thanks.”

The guy hadn’t offered to help, but he was appreciative of Reece’s car and seemed genuinely interested. Now that the tire was on, some of Reece’s anger at the situation had diffused. It probably wouldn’t hurt to let the guy fuss over his car for a bit—and he could hardly discount a fellow Mustang enthusiast. The stranger had moved behind Reece to stand near the hood, and as he stood up so that he could finish with the lug nuts, he looked toward the guy again, hoping to finally put a face to the voice.

Reece’s eyes moved up the guy’s body as he straightened, lingering a little more than was possibly appropriate, but he couldn’t resist; the guy’s body was gorgeous. A hot guy who liked his car; that was a very appealing combination. Careful not to linger too long, he certainly didn’t want to offend some straight guy who was merely interested in his car, he smiled as he reached the guy’s face—the smile disappearing as quickly as it had formed.

“You have got to be fucking joking.”

The guy raised a brow and smiled back.

“Reece. Good to see you, man.”

What the fuck?

“I can’t say the pleasure is all mine.” Reece turned back to his car, using the wrench to finish securing the nuts to the wheel—with possibly a bit too much force. He needed to get a grip or he’d strip the nuts.

His mind was racing. What were the odds of Cameron Fielding appearing in his life twice in less than a week after not seeing him for years? About zero to nothing, he decided. It seemed his competition had been tasked with a trial run as well.

“This obviously isn’t a coincidence seeing you again, Fielding. Geoffrey Price asked you here for the week I assume.”

“Well not here, not to the side of a dusty road for sure”—*smart ass bastard*, Reece hissed in his mind—“but to the country club? Yes, yes he did.” Reece made note of Fielding’s mocking tone, determined to change it, and change it quickly. It wouldn’t be mocking for long, no, it would be desperate, anxious... Reece would make sure of it.

The spare wheel fitted, he picked up the tools and carried them to the trunk, then walked back to get the flat tire, rolling it back and quickly placing it, the tools, and his suitcase inside. He closed up, checked the ground for anything he might have missed, then seeing nothing there that shouldn’t be—except for Fielding’s feet—made his way directly to the driver’s door. He considered not saying a word and just driving away, but he was better than that, and didn’t want to give Fielding the satisfaction of him acting like a brat. Instead, he looked Fielding in the eyes and said, “Enjoy your time away on Mr. Price’s dime, Cameron, because that’s all you’ll be getting out of him.”

Fielding curled a lip and his eyebrow lifted again, as if in defiance.

“I want this job, and I intend to get this job,” Reece told him.

“I’m glad you want this job, Reece, and I’m glad you intend to win this job.” Reece didn’t miss the use of “win” as opposed to “get,” and he had to admit he was kind of impressed by Fielding’s tenacity. “I hope that means you’ll give it your best.”

“I always give my best, Fielding.”

“So I recall.”

Reece wasn’t sure what it was about Fielding’s tone, but the words were a challenge if he’d ever heard one.

“So what you’re saying is: Game on!” Reece didn’t form it as a question. The intention was clear.

“Oh yes, ‘game on’.”

Reece was almost excited. That “rivalry” he’d recalled—maybe he didn’t resent it at all. Maybe he missed it. This could be fun.

“Bring it.”

He climbed into the car and started it up, checked to make sure he wasn’t about to drive over the guy, then accelerated away. He was probably being childish, and it was probably too fast, but the thought of dust settling all over that bastard made him grin.

Game on!

The room Reece had been allocated on the third floor of the Riverdale Country Club’s main building was comfortable and tastefully decorated with a plush looking bed. He jumped on it, the action bouncing him like a trampoline, and he laughed, feeling like a kid. No matter how many hotels he stayed in, if they had a comfy bed, he jumped on it—he doubted he’d ever change, nor would he want to. He looked around, taking in the decor and level of amenities, filing it all away for future reference. He briefly considered a shower and then an early dinner in the main restaurant, but it was still light outside. It wouldn’t be for long, the sun was close to setting, but there was enough time for him to have a swim instead, then maybe a drink by the pool. It would be a good opportunity to see that part of the complex and assess the staff, especially at this time of day, and it would give him a chance to unwind as well, as long as he managed to avoid Fielding.

His decision made, Reece opened his luggage and pulled out his brand new Andrew Christian swim shorts. They were bright red with a white waistband and had only arrived last week. They were a more conservative style than he might wear in other circumstances, but he’d bought them for just this type of purpose—although the sexy model who’d been wearing them on the website had possibly helped his decision. Reece looked at his image in the mirror, deciding he looked almost as good as that guy had. The shorts fit his trim figure like a glove and made him very appreciative of the early morning workouts he forced his body to complete four days a week. Instead of using the hotel-supplied robe, he grabbed a clean tee and pulled it over his head,

running his fingers through his hair to settle any stray strands. He chuckled when his fingers barely got any purchase. He was used to having a bit more hair than his current, and very recent, haircut afforded him.

It was a nice pool, large and rectangular, and surrounded on three sides by the hotel. Floor to ceiling glass windows and doors opened onto the space, allowing easy access and views from the sitting areas and one of the restaurants. Large stone pavers covered the ground, the artfully placed potted plants and comfortable wicker furniture the perfect accompaniment. It was even better by the far side of the pool, where an infinity edge made it seem like the water was touching the deep green of the golf course beyond, as well as the horizon, which right now was a beautiful palette of gold, orange, and pink.

He found a pool chair, kicked off his flip-flops, and laid down the blue-and-white striped towel he'd picked up as he'd entered the pool area. There were more people at the pool than he'd thought there would be, most of them only sitting to have a drink, but it was a hot evening, and it was an almost perfect setting to spend it in. He'd only been sitting two minutes when a waitress approached to see if he'd like a drink. He ordered, impressed by her attitude and efficiency, and noted that in his head as well. Designing a marketing plan for this place was going to be a piece of cake if things kept on as they were.

The margarita he'd ordered was faultless, and after a few sips of the tart beverage, he placed it on the side table and stood up. He pulled off his tee and walked over to the pool, dipping a toe in to test the temperature. It was perfect.

Reece turned left and made his way to the deep end of the pool. He stood there for only a moment before diving into the clear water, swimming to almost the other end without taking a breath before popping his head up again. He swam to the edge of the pool, fascinated by how the water fell over the edge, his more technical side intrigued enough to lean over and look at how the illusion worked. Then he leaned his arms on the edge and watched the sun, fascinated just as much by the fiery orb falling in what seemed to be fast motion for the last bit of its journey.

As if on cue, the pool lights turned on, turning the water an ice-blue hue. It was almost ethereal. Reece ducked under the water again, popping up after a few feet and then swimming the pool from edge to edge until he'd had enough. His margarita calling him, he climbed the ladder and got out, picking up another towel on the way and scrubbing it roughly over his face and shoulders, then through his hair. He was almost at his chair when he noticed Cameron Fielding sitting on the deck chair beside his.

So much for a relaxing drink.

“Water good?” Fielding asked as Reece got close.

“Yeah. You going in?”

And soon hopefully, so that you're not annoying me, Reece added to himself.

Fielding was dressed in swim shorts, so he must have planned to swim, why else would he be poolside? But Reece couldn't help his eyes falling to the man's chest; even under a T-shirt, the very defined muscles of his pectorals were noticeable. Reece dragged his eyes away—he didn't want to notice.

“Not sure. Is it worth getting wet?” Reece wondered why something about that sounded sexual. He chose to ignore it—well, sort of.

“You should. It's very nice.” Reece smiled thinly as he sat on his chair and picked up his glass.

“Well, after that glowing recommendation I suppose I should.” Fielding stood up, reached for the hem of his tee, and pulled it off. Reece swallowed hard. The guy looked good in a tee, but Jesus, he looked sensational without one. “See you soon.”

Fielding walked away toward the pool, and Reece couldn't pull his eyes away. If the man had looked good when he was twenty-two, he looked damned sensational now at twenty-eight. He might be the candidate in direct competition for Reece's job, but that didn't mean Reece couldn't admire the visual, did it? Was there really any point in all the animosity? He was the “front-runner”, which meant if he did this task well, the job would be his. Why stress himself out about it. He still intended for it to be “game on”, and that

would be fun and keep him on his toes and performing his best, but that didn't mean he had to stress over it. Fielding was just some guy he knew years ago. He was smart and talented, but Reece was better.

Having determined that in his mind, Reece decided to appreciate the views while they were available—all the views. He brought the salt-rimmed glass of his margarita to his mouth and was just about to take a sip when Fielding looked back over his shoulder in Reece's direction, and winked.

This was not going to be an easy week.

“Don't take a breath before you go under,” Reece muttered, maybe a little louder than he'd intended. Fielding turned, a curious expression on his face, then shrugged and continued to the pool. He dived in like a professional.

Reece sighed and downed the remainder of his drink. He'd have liked to ask the waitress to keep them coming, but it seemed he was going to need every bit of his wits about him if he was going to best Fielding.

CHAPTER SIX

“Is this seat taken?”

Reece looked up from his newspaper. “Fielding,” he said, his tone disinterested.

Fielding’s smile was wide, his eyes almost sparkling with mischief. “Does that non-answer mean I’m welcome?”

“No.” Reece looked back to the article he was reading.

Fielding chuckled. And Reece continued to read, or was it just *look*, at the page; he couldn’t seem to find the right paragraph. He could feel Fielding hovering, not bothering to move away. Finally he looked up, raising his brow in a silent question, no words needed.

“Come on, man, we’re both here. We’re not exactly strangers. Why eat alone when we could catch up?”

“I like to eat alone,” Reece replied, as if that was all the response required. Fielding’s expression of calm disbelief prompted more before Reece could consider his words. “And besides, I eat alone every morning.” He almost instantly regretted it.

“That’s a shame,” Fielding said, placing his hands onto the back of the chair opposite Reece and leaning his body forward. Reece didn’t want Fielding’s pity. “Must be lonely.”

“It’s only ‘lonely’ if it’s not your choice,” he almost spat back. “I can assure you, it is my choice.”

Fielding nodded as if he understood, but the tilt of his head and confused expression rejected that. “You choose to be alone?”

What the hell was going on?

“Who are you?” Reece asked, his tone full of frustration. “The fucking dating police?”

Fielding seemed to consider this. “Okay, so not only do you choose to live alone, you don’t date either?”

Reece hated that Fielding was right; he didn't date. He had lots of sex, fucked a lot of hot guys, but date? No. He couldn't even remember the last date he'd been on. But there was no way in hell he'd let Fielding know that. "Not that it's any of your goddamned business, but I date. I date plenty."

Fielding only smiled. "Well good for you."

Reece wasn't quite at the boil stage, but his blood was definitely beginning to simmer. This guy! He felt like he was nineteen years old again, frustrated to the point of distraction by Cameron Fielding.

"Do I get to sit down now?"

"No!"

Fielding shrugged. "Your loss." Then he turned and walked away, choosing a table on the other side of the room, his back to Reece.

His loss? Not likely.

A waitress stopped and refilled his coffee; he thanked her and looked back at his paper. He could barely focus on the words, and when he finally gave up trying, he slapped the paper onto the table. The motion caused Reece to look up and across the room—well, he could tell himself that. Fielding sat there, calmly sipping his coffee and looking out at the view of the golf course, seeming to not have a care in the world. Reece clenched a fist, stood up, and as quietly as possible so as not to make a scene, stormed from the room.

The day progressed well. Reece met with various members of the Riverdale Country Club's management and marketing teams, looked over reports and budgets, took tours of the grounds and facilities, then retired to his room mid-afternoon to work on his presentation. He was happy with his progress, and the hours passed by quickly. When he closed his laptop just before five, he was ready for a break. He was having dinner with the club's General Manager and his wife, but not until seven thirty. As tempting as it was to visit the pool again and have a swim, he was cautious about doing so; he really didn't want to run into Fielding again—he'd done his best to avoid the guy all day and had succeeded—but he needed to get out of the room and

move. He usually exercised in the mornings, preferred to in fact, but a visit to the gym now was probably just what he needed.

Ten minutes later, he was dressed in his gym clothes and starting up a treadmill. He couldn't be bothered with weights, deciding instead to jog. It *was* just what he needed, almost feeling the tension drain away as his feet paced out mile after mile.

While he jogged, Reece watched people come and go, each doing their own thing—it was fun to people watch, relaxing him more. The gym overlooked the pool area through more of the large glass windows and was a nice spot to be, and would have been even if he wasn't working out. He felt a bit envious of the people using the pool. More were in the water today, some just paddling around and others swimming laps. He could imagine the feeling of the water on his body, and he wanted it.

Screw Cameron Fielding. He was going to the pool.

He'd worn his Speedo under his gym shorts in case he felt like a spa or sauna, so he didn't even have to go back to his room. He stopped the treadmill, not bothering to cool down, thinking he'd swim some laps instead, and left the room, going straight for the pool area. He found a pool lounge close to the outdoor shower, and as tempted as he was to just strip off and jump in the pool, he was very sweaty and didn't imagine he'd be real popular if he did. Instead, he took off his shoes, socks, shorts, and tank, placing them neatly under the chaise. The shower was nice on his skin, cool, and he took a moment to run his hands over his body and rinse away the perspiration from his workout. His heart rate was dropping though, so he didn't linger. He needed to get into that pool.

Reece turned the water off, not bothering with a towel; he was about to get wet again anyway. He walked instead to the edge of the pool and readied himself to dive in. A strange feeling passed over him, and he looked across to the other side of the pool. Fielding was sitting at a table, beer in hand, watching him. Actually, watching wasn't the right word; Fielding was leering at him. Reece shivered, and it had nothing to do with the temperature of the air. The beer was half empty, which mean Fielding had been there a while,

long enough to see him shower. Reece wasn't sure how he felt about that—weird for sure. He wondered how he'd missed seeing him there. If he had, he would have turned around as soon as he entered the pool area and left—wouldn't he?

It seemed like minutes passed, but Reece knew it was only seconds, as Fielding continued to watch him, and he stood there and let him. *What the hell?* Almost shaking himself out of his daze, Reece readied himself again to dive into the water, but he allowed himself one more glance across the pool. Fielding smiled, his lips curling almost seductively, and then lifted his beer.

Reece dived into the pool.

His heart was beating crazily in his chest as he pushed himself through the water, and he knew exertion had little to do with it. Stroke after stroke, lap after lap, not once allowing himself to look again in the direction Fielding had been sitting. When he finally completed twenty-five laps of the pool and stopped at the edge, Fielding was nowhere to be seen. And Reece couldn't help but wonder when he had left.

"I'm glad you are enjoying your stay, Reece." Mrs. Richards using his name brought Reece back into the conversation, and he smiled, hoping it would seem as though she'd had his full attention.

"I am, thank you." He avoided flicking his eyes to the table across the room—he'd done enough of that tonight. "The club truly is a credit to all involved." She beamed and looked at her husband, obviously very proud of him. It was a treat to be around such a warm and loving couple. "I believe I can put together a very forward-thinking proposal. One I hope will impress Mr. Price and your board."

"We wish you the best of luck, Reece."

"I'm not sure luck will have anything to do with it," Reece replied, full of confident cheek, and then he winked at Mrs. Richards.

"Something tells me to believe you, dear."

They all chuckled.

Mr. Richards rubbed his wife's hand on the table. The move was sweet and reminded Reece of his own parents—he wondered if he'd ever have something like that in his future.

“Reece, I hope you don't mind if we call it a night,” Mr. Richards said. “It's been a big week for us, and we're still waiting on that phone call.” The Richards had explained how they were waiting for their only daughter to go into labor any time.

“Of course I don't mind,” Reece replied honestly. “I hope you hear something soon. I don't envy women having to go through childbirth.” He shared an anxious look with Mr. Richards.

“You men,” Mrs. Richards chuckled. “Abigail will be fine. It's her father and husband that I'm worried for.”

“Tate and I will be fine.” Mr. Richards rose then pulled out his wife's seat. “Let's get out of here; we'll call on the way home.” Mrs. Richards seemed to like the sound of that idea. “Thanks again for joining us, Reece. I do wish you the best,” he said.

“Thank you.” Reece hoped he'd get a chance to work with Mr. Richards again, he was a good man. “If you don't mind, I'll finish my coffee then be off to bed as well. I'm having a round of golf in the morning, so I'd best be rested for it.”

“Come and see me if you get a chance and tell me how you found the course,” Mr. Richards offered. “I'll tell you a few of my more *humorous* anecdotes over that drop of Scotch I was telling you about.”

Reece could wait for that—Scotch was definitely not on his list of fabulous things!—but he nodded agreement and stood to see the couple off. As soon as they were out of sight, he beckoned for the waiter. “A refill please,” he asked, indicating his coffee.

“Certainly, sir.” The waiter hurried away.

Reece finished the coffee left in his cup and settled back in his chair, then allowed his gaze to drift. He really should have left, but he was intrigued enough to stay. Fielding was still sitting at the table. He was with another man, a good-looking guy about the same age. They seemed comfortable together, had talked and laughed during most of their meal. Reece knew that because he'd struggled to keep his eyes to himself, glancing their way at almost any opportunity. He'd been able to get away with it though because Fielding had his back to him.

The waiter returned with the coffee. "Thanks." The man nodded and left.

Reece wondered about the draw he felt, wondered why he was still sitting here when he could have left the room with the Richards. Was he curious in a business sense, or was it something else? He certainly felt unsure of his motives. Since that look this afternoon at the pool, he'd been out of whack. Not like before, when he had been just annoyed, but something different.

Fielding laughed, the sound was deep, joyful. Reece felt warmed by the sound, but he stopped himself when he felt his lips lifting. Fielding's dinner partner laughed, too. There was no smile for that; instead, there was a growl in his gut that made the coffee he'd just swallowed sit uncomfortably. Reece lifted his cup, deciding when the smell of the strong brew reached his nose to not finish the rest; instead, he pushed out his chair and stood, leaving the room as quickly as was possible.

CHAPTER SEVEN

The ninth fairway curled easily around the bottom edge of the country club's main building, ending at the green, which when completed, left the players only fifty feet from the Player's Bar. Reece liked this setup a lot.

The three men he'd played the first nine holes with were nice guys, two on the board and one a member of the club. They were all older than him, in their fifties at a guess, but they were interesting and had kept the conversation current. Plus they'd offered a lot about their experiences with the club. A lot that Reece could use in his quest for this job.

"You played well, Reece, it's good to see some young blood out there on the course."

"Thanks, Tom. I wish I had more time," *and inclination*, he thought. "I might be able to improve my handicap if I did," he schmoozed expertly as he took a seat and picked up a glass of cool iced tea. All the men laughed at that and he joined in, liking how his morning was playing out.

That was until board member Robert called out in a loud hearty voice, "Here they are," as he looked over Reece's shoulder.

Tom and Pete had glanced that way too, large smiles on both their faces, and Reece turned to see who was joining them. "They" were another foursome, obviously just finishing the ninth as well, their hair damp around their foreheads as they came out from the sun. Three of the men were older, like Tom, Robert, and Pete, the other not. Fielding. Why should he be surprised? It seemed par for the course at this place—bad pun definitely intended.

"Join us," Tom offered, "I'll call for more drinks." He motioned to the hovering waiter.

The men sat in the available seats, Fielding in a rush to lay claim to the chair beside Reece. Reece sighed.

“Have a good round?” he asked as he sat, leaning ever so slightly toward Reece; his words so polite they almost oozed from him. Reece could hardly ignore the man when six others were sitting and listening to their conversation.

“Sure.”

Not put off by Reece’s simple response, Fielding added, “Me too. Would have liked a few less on the card but didn’t do too badly—twelve. Hopefully, I’ll find a few on the next nine.” Fielding laughed at his own joke.

Reece took a drink of his iced tea as he digested Fielding’s words. He didn’t answer immediately, but the man had been so self-effacing that he couldn’t help reply. “Twelve over par isn’t too bad. It’s a difficult course. I don’t like your chances of gaining them back though; I’ve been assured the second nine is even harder.”

“So they say.” Fielding’s voice was soft and calm, as if his words were meant only for Reece’s ears. “And how did you go? Any under par?”

“I wish.” Reece smiled, his words sincere—he’d love to better his handicap even if he barely found time to play golf these days—and nodded his head at the possibilities. He automatically turned his head in reaction to join the conversation, bringing his eyes to meet Fielding’s—they were bright, the corners touched by tiny laugh lines. “I did hit par on the second and sixth though.”

“Nice.” Fielding actually seemed impressed. “What did that leave you with at the end?”

“Seven over.”

Fielding’s eyes widened. “Impressive.”

That was the second time Fielding had used that word to Reece, and he wasn’t sure how to take it, but for some reason he didn’t doubt its sincerity.

“Maybe we’ll get a chance to play a round together some day,” Fielding said. He almost sounded hopeful.

Reece shrugged. He wasn’t ready to say that maybe they would, but he wasn’t ready to say no either.

The conversation went on around them, Reece conscious all the time of the man sitting beside him, so conscious, in fact, that he was paying little attention to what was being said until he heard his name, followed immediately by, “Good idea, Robert. I’ll swap with Cameron... give the boys a chance to compare their long drives.”

Reece sat up straighter and looked at Tom. He was about to refuse the offer when Fielding beat him to it. “As long as you don’t mind, Mr. Johnson.”

Tom clapped Fielding on the shoulder. “It’s Tom, Cameron, and no, I don’t mind at all. I’ve been wanting to show off my new clubs to Greg since I got them.” The older men laughed as if that statement was the funniest thing in the world. Reece looked at them all like they were mad, then he looked at Fielding.

Fielding was faced away from Reece, but then he turned his head, looked at Reece, and smiled. He didn’t drop his eyes—Reece felt the moment drag out—but then seemed to realize it and shrugged as if apologetic. About what, Reece wasn’t sure: golf maybe, but he guessed not. It was almost as if the guy didn’t want to put him out... in any way. Reece shrugged back. It couldn’t hurt to play nine holes of golf with the guy.

“Let’s get to it then, the day waits for no one.” He surprised himself with his forceful direction, standing up rapidly and moving toward the bathrooms for a quick break before they began play. It almost felt like a self-imposed time-out.

A few deep breaths and a silent pep-talk to his image in the mirror and Reece was ready to rejoin the group. He had his hand on the door, ready to pull it open, when it opened before he had a chance. Robert strode into the room.

“Ah, Reece, my man. Ready for some golf?” Robert clapped him on the shoulder but didn’t move away. He was a little close, and it was Reece who took a step back to provide some space.

“Sure.” He smiled, trying to make his words seem sincere. “Hopefully, I can lose a few strokes off that scorecard on the back nine.”

“I hope you do,” Robert said pleasantly, but his eyes lingered a little longer than was polite.

The appraisal was flattering but unwanted, and Reece decided to remove himself from the situation. “See you out there,” he said as he moved to leave the room.

“You will,” Robert replied as Reece walked out the door. When it shut behind him, Reece breathed a sigh of relief. Now he’d have to keep an eye on Robert *and* Fielding. So much for a relaxing morning of golf.

It was hard to stay annoyed with Fielding, though. It was as if he knew how to break down Reece’s walls with just a smile. Reece remembered his mother often telling him as a child to smile at people, regardless of whether they smiled at you. No one could resist a smile, or so she’d said. He wondered if Fielding’s mother had said the same thing to him. No matter how often their eyes met, Cameron would smile at Reece—over and over. Reece was finding it hard to resist.

Reece spent a lot of the morning trying to figure the guy out. None of the antagonistic Cameron he remembered from college was to be found now. He’d determined that Fielding was either very confident in his capabilities to get the job and that’s why he was so relaxed this morning, or he couldn’t care less. Even though Reece doubted that to be the case, he wasn’t going to let it bother him. Tomorrow they’d have their proposals completed and be back home. Today he was going to enjoy a game of golf.

Having Cameron smile at him was one thing, watching him hit a golf ball was another. He had an amazing swing, strong and controlled; combined with the image of him in his navy polo and dark-grey slacks, it was quite a picture.

And Reece wasn’t the only one noticing. How he hadn’t discerned that Robert Johns was gay right from the beginning he’d never know. Whether morning tea or a change of partners had warmed him up or not, the man was sure making his preferences known now. Reece began to watch the man flirt, both with Cameron and himself. It was an interesting study.

Robert was a nice guy. Reece liked him well enough; he certainly didn't have an issue with him, or the flirting. He'd been hit on in much more aggressive ways than what Robert was doing before, so that was fine. But what he began to notice was an almost desperation about the man, and it affected him.

He remembered back to Mr. and Mrs. Richards the night before, and how he'd compared them to his parents. When he looked at Robert, he wondered if he'd ever had something like that in his life. Pete spoke about his own family, as had Tom before he had changed to the other group of four, but Robert made no mention of anyone. Reece knew he might only be single now, and being single was certainly not an indicator of happiness, but Robert—probably the first person to ever do so—made him question it all.

Did he want to be a perpetual bachelor? Maybe he was being ridiculous, he was only twenty-eight after all, but was he becoming like Robert? Did he want to? Hell no, he didn't. One day he wanted something more, something like his parents had. He wondered if it was time to stop screwing around and look for something more serious. He could go on a date, or two. It wouldn't be the worst thing. Might even be fun.

Reece found himself looking at Cameron. He'd just hit the ball, driving it far along the fairway, the ball going straight and long. "Well done," he said as he passed Cameron leaving the tee. He bent down and placed his own ball, readying himself with a few practice swings. He looked at Cameron before he took the swing, gaining yet another smile. He might have to take him up on that offer of a game of golf some other time—now that could be fun.

CHAPTER EIGHT

“Mind if I join you?”

Reece lifted his head from his book and looked at Cameron. He wondered when he'd gone soft, or maybe he *had* grown up; he sure couldn't seem to hold on to his grudge anymore.

“Sure.”

Cameron threw his towel over the chaise's striped cushion and sat down, keeping his feet firmly on the ground. His elbows were on his knees, his hands hanging loosely between his legs, and he was looking straight at Reece. “Big day. Big few days actually.”

Yeah, it had been. Between the meetings, the research, the dinners, and the golf, he was exhausted. It wasn't anything he wasn't used to, these things went down that way, but he'd pushed himself that little bit extra this time. Oddly enough, the person he had to thank, or curse, for that was Cameron.

“You all ready to finish up tomorrow?” Cameron seemed genuinely interested.

“Yeah, all ready. Finished my presentation this afternoon.” He wanted to let Cameron know he was organized. “You?”

“I'm right where I need to be.” That was an odd way of putting it, but it meant the same thing Reece supposed.

Reece studied Cameron, the handsome face, the huge smile, and decided he really didn't want to talk about anything to do with Riverdale Country Club any more today. There were far more interesting topics at hand.

“I was trying to decide whether to do laps first or have a drink, but I've probably had enough drinks for today.” He spared a quick thought back to lunch and wondered if Cameron was doing the same, considering the grin on his face. “Do you have a preference?”

“I think a swim sounds perfect.” His smile was warm as he added, “You did twenty—or was it thirty laps yesterday?”

So he had been there watching the whole time. The realization made Reece happy.

“Twenty-five, but I had been in the gym first—didn’t want to push myself *too* hard.” Reece liked watching Cameron swallow his emotion, his face shifting at the words, or was it at his tone? “I was thinking maybe fifty today. That’s not even a mile in this pool. You game?”

Cameron’s blue eyes looked determined. “Let’s do it.” Reece liked his intent, it was sexy. And he had no doubt of Cameron’s ability; he wasn’t just blowing hot air. He’d seen the guy dive and swim the pool, and he’d sure taken note of his fit body. He’d keep up.

“Okay.” He let his actions say the rest, standing and pulling off his tee, allowing a moment for Cameron’s eyes to move up and down his body—liking the feel of his appreciative eyes. Maybe a bit too much; he could feel his dick stirring. He abandoned his mini-striptease and turned for the pool, not waiting once he got to the deep end.

Cameron matched Reece stroke for stroke as they powered up and down the pool. Each time he took a breath he could see long arms cutting through the water at his side, urging him on. It was nice to have someone who kept up with him; although, when he thought about it, that’s what Cameron had always done. They were both overachievers. In fact, they were very alike.

Fifty laps over, Cameron met Reece at the edge of the pool. Both men were breathing deeply, and Reece watched with interest as Cameron’s chest rose and fell with each deep breath. It was an attractive sight. When Cameron shook his head and then pushed a hand through his short but very thick hair, it took everything in Reece not to reach out and do it as well. He wanted to touch the dark spikes; in fact, he wanted to touch every part of Cameron’s body.

“The sun’s about to set.” Reece wasn’t expecting the words, and he looked to Cameron’s face. Cameron’s smile was wide, inviting; Reece smiled back. “Let’s move over there and watch it,” Cameron said, tipping his head in the direction of the pool’s infinity edge.

“Sure.” Reece didn’t know what else to say, but he allowed Cameron to swim the few strokes to that edge of the pool and then followed him.

“It really is a nice spot here.”

“Hmm,” Reece agreed, but he wasn’t really watching the sunset. It was Cameron’s profile that had his attention: strong jaw, straight nose, lush lips.

Cameron broke the spell when he turned and smiled. Reece decided he really liked Cameron’s smiles—a lot—but when Cameron turned back for the last moments of the setting sun, he did too. The view was magnificent, with similar colors to Sunday night, but somehow even better, brighter, bolder. A bit like how he felt. Like a rolling stone, gathering moss as he rolled down the hill—but it wasn’t moss he was gaining, it was attraction, every smile and laugh building the feeling inside him.

Feeling bold, he let his arm float through the water, his elbow grazing against the skin of Cameron’s arm. He could deny it was on purpose if Cameron’s reaction was negative, but he hoped it wouldn’t be. Reece had held his anger in too long, and he wanted to finally let go of it. That didn’t mean he had any intentions of renegeing on his determination to get this job, but he didn’t have to resent Cameron for wanting it as well. He didn’t want to compete any more, and he didn’t want the last night he might ever see him go to waste either.

Goosebumps broke out over his skin at the contact of their arms, his confidence boosted by the hitch of Cameron’s breath. It felt right. Reece could feel that Cameron hadn’t turned his face, and that was okay, neither had he. But the moment had made him feel brave, brave enough to angle his body toward the man beside him. He let his hand drop, moving his fingers close to Cameron’s arm, their tips glancing across the skin near Cameron’s elbow. Finally Cameron turned, and when Reece saw his face, he realized it was about the best damn face he’d ever seen—a study in near-perfection.

Cameron, Cameron, Cameron... When had his thoughts changed from him thinking of this gorgeous man as the impersonal *Fielding* he’d been growling at in his head for the last week to *Cameron*? He laughed. He’d been a fool.

Cameron looked puzzled, the expression on his face more gorgeous than the moment before, and feeling even braver, Reece leaned in and touched his still pool-wet lips to Cameron's. It was just a touch, a gentle caress, but it was just what Reece needed. Every bit of animosity he'd ever held disappeared. Feeling philosophical, Reece decided that life was too precious to not take every moment you were offered... and this was his and Cameron's moment.

Reece reached up, pushing his fingers into the almost-there hair at the base of Cameron's neck; his first feel of the soft, silk-like strands. He didn't even need to urge Cameron forward, the man already tipping his head to meet Reece's lips more closely. The kiss was soft, a mere touch, and Reece let himself luxuriate in it, his eyes closing as he fell into the moment.

Cameron pulled away, leaving Reece disappointed; he hadn't wanted the moment to end, but when he opened his eyes and saw Cameron's soft smile, he knew there was no negative reason for it. And when Cameron glanced over Reece's shoulder, it reminded him they were still in a very open and very public area.

"Ready for that drink now?" he asked.

"Sure."

The men swam slowly to the pool ladder, Reece motioning for Cameron to go first—he wasn't stupid, he knew the advantages of being chivalrous. Cameron seemed to as well, because when he began to climb there was a definite exaggeration to the sway of his hips. Reece swallowed hard—this guy was gonna kill him.

"You know, I think we should order a bunch of appetizers and stay here," Cameron suggested, their first margaritas were finished and they were waiting on their second. "I don't really feel like bothering with the restaurant tonight—this is too relaxing to leave."

Reece looked out over the pool. The hills in the distance were a very dark shadow now, it was almost completely night, soon the only view would be of the night-lit pool—he didn't care. It was warm and they were comfortable, and he didn't want to leave either. "Sounds like a plan."

Over plates of sushi, Reece's favorite, and Spanish tapas, Cameron's, they caught up. It was easy to talk with Cameron, and Reece was surprised—or maybe not—by how much they actually had in common. It also seemed Reece had heard right. Cameron had been in Baltimore, deciding to come back to the Bay Area for the same reasons Reece stayed—he wanted to be close to his family. That seemed reasonable to Reece, and he liked it. It also meant that whatever happened with the job, Cameron was likely to stick around, even if he had to keep looking for something else, and Reece liked that even more. But he didn't want to discuss that now, so he left it alone—they didn't need the negativity.

By the time the staff were closing up the outdoor bar, Cameron and Reece had consumed their fair share of margaritas, and were rather pleasantly buzzed. And neither of them was ready to say good night.

“Do you have a really plush bed in your room?” Cameron widened his eyes at the question, causing Reece to chuckle and bring a finger to his lips as if to shush himself, continuing in a softer voice. “No... I meant, my room is really comfy. I always decide that depending on the bed. If the bed's comfy then the room, by association, is too.” Reece seemed to consider what he was saying then added, “Maybe you don't... you know, have a comfy room like mine. I am the *front-runner* after all.” Reece wagged his eyebrows as if he was the funniest and the cleverest person on the planet. Cameron was still looking at him as if he was mad—at least that's what Reece thought Cameron's expression meant—but he was still smiling, and that was a good thing. “Forget I said that. Let's just go to my room. Decision made.” Reece turned, ready to walk.

It was Cameron running a light finger across his jaw that stopped him in his tracks. Even with the close proximity, Reece could almost feel his body bending in an attempt to get closer. “I'll *walk* you to your room, not too sure about checking out any beds though.”

Reece pouted.

“You're adorable,” Cameron continued and Reece swooned, “but you've had too much to drink.”

“So have you!” Reece insisted, but didn’t deny anything.

“Yeah, a bit more than I should have, but I’m sober enough to—” Cameron stopped himself and took a deep breath. “Come on, let’s get you up there.”

Reece huffed, but cheekily added, “Okay. Reject me, I can take it.”

“I’m not rejecting you, Reece, far from it.” The words were low, a little disappointed, but full of heat at the same time.

Reece’s mind was racing. Maybe by the time they got to his door he could persuade Cameron to think differently. *Persuasion*. He could be persuasive. But a little more time would certainly help... “We need to go that way.” Reece pointed down the hall in the opposite direction to the rooms.

Cameron grinned. “Reece, the gym is that way, and the elevator to the luxury suites is that way. I know you’re not sleeping in the gym, so you must be in a luxury suite.” Cameron’s lips had gotten very close to Reece’s ear; he could feel warm breath with every word. “Are you in a luxury suite?”

“No.”

Cameron pulled back and Reece missed his nearness immediately. “Neither am I.” But then he smiled, the smile compensating for the loss. “So let’s go the other way, toward our *real* rooms.” Crap, Cameron was onto him.

“Okay.” He knew he sounded petulant, but Cameron chuckled again so maybe he hadn’t blown it. That was reaffirmed when Cameron reached out and took his hand, entwining his fingers through Reece’s. Reece couldn’t remember the last time he’d held someone’s hand. Maybe Simon’s when Simon was dragging him somewhere, or away from something, but Simon didn’t count—Cameron *counted*. He followed silently, for some reason not wanting to break the spell that Cameron seemed to be weaving around him. Spell? He laughed, couldn’t help himself. He really had become a sap. Cameron just looked at him, shook his head slightly, and smiled—and Reece liked every moment of his attention.

When they reached the door to Reece’s room, it only took a moment for Reece to open the small satchel he was carrying and pull the room card he’d

been using as a bookmark out of his book. “Shit!” he exclaimed, realizing he’d lost his spot.

“You really are adorable.” Cameron pulled him close, bending his head to breathe at the soft skin of Reece’s neck.

“So, does that mean you’ll come in?”

Cameron took a deep inhale, pausing as if to contemplate. “Not tonight.”

“I’m really not that drunk.”

“I know,” Cameron kissed his neck softly, “and that’s why I’m not coming in.”

Reece straightened, pulling out of the relaxed slouch Cameron had him in. “So you’d come in *if* I was drunk?”

“Put it this way, I’m sober enough to know it wouldn’t be the best thing to do.”

Reece recoiled as if slapped. “Ouch!” He felt surprisingly sober all of a sudden.

“That’s—Shit. That’s not what I meant.” Cameron held Reece’s hand tightly, not allowing him to pull away. “I meant that if I come in, looking at your bed won’t be enough for me—”

Reece couldn’t see the problem. “So?” He wasn’t letting Cameron get away with that. He pushed his satchel around and out of the way, moving closer to Cameron and edging him against the doorframe. “I really don’t see the problem.” Reece knew that his voice was low, seductive, and he played every bit into the words that he could. He was horny and he wanted some action—he wanted some action with Cameron Fielding.

He pulled their entwined fingers up to his chest, clasping Cameron’s hand close. With his other, he braced himself on the wall beside Cameron’s head, bracketing Cameron’s body as close as he could. The slight difference in their heights didn’t matter; Reece could feel every ridge and plane of the firm body pressed against his. He stared into the blue eyes before him, losing himself in their intense gaze before tilting his head and capturing Cameron’s lips. The

little gasp as their lips met encouraged the kiss, and Reece kissed him hard, grinding his torso seductively into the other man's. With his leg pushed between Cameron's, Reece could feel Cameron's erection against his thigh, and he started to rock—

“Stop,” Cameron said and pushed Reece away. Reece didn't believe him though—he could see Cameron's dilated pupils, the slight flush to his cheeks... he'd felt that hard cock.

“Come inside,” he insisted. Holding Cameron tight by the hand still linked with his, reaching for the keycard he'd slipped into the door with the other.

“I can't. Not tonight.” Cameron wriggled out of Reece's grasp. “I'm sorry.” Cameron's ragged breaths belied his words.

Reece wasn't sure he understood. “But you want to,” he pushed the point, using his low tone to gently encourage.

“You have no idea.” Cameron surprised him when he gripped the back of Reece's neck and pulled him close again, letting his lips graze over Reece's then deepening the kiss. But it was over as quickly as it started. Cameron broke the kiss, and the contact, and stepped away. “You have no idea,” he repeated.

“So don't go, Cam.” Reece pushed open the door, holding it wide. “Come in.”

Cameron was torn, Reece could clearly see that, but it didn't seem he was going to give in. He took another step back. “I really must go.” He was so serious, but then he smiled; it was shy, even hopeful. “I hope there's another chance to get together, Reece.” Cameron began to walk, took half a dozen steps, and turned back. Reece felt his heart begin to beat faster—he'd changed his mind. He stepped right back into Reece's personal space and cupped Reece's face. “Please let me see you again... soon.” He followed that with another firm kiss. The action took Reece's breath away. But as quickly as he was there, he was gone again, disappearing around the corner at the end of the hall only moments later.

Reece stood there stunned for a moment. He had no idea what the hell had just happened, not that his body seemed to care. His traitorous cock was hard and aching... and extremely dissatisfied. Reece shook his head, blinking away his confusion, and walked into his room.

Fucking Cameron Fielding!

CHAPTER NINE

The phone call asking him to be at the offices of Price & Associates at nine AM on Thursday had come when he'd been returning home from the country club on Wednesday. Reece hadn't lingered Wednesday morning. He'd ordered a light breakfast to his room, had checked over his proposal to make sure he had everything he needed, and had then checked out. He'd been in his car and driving out the grand entrance gates by eight AM.

Reece knew why he'd run—and he wasn't too proud to admit he was running. He hadn't wanted to see Cameron again, not before he found out who won the job anyway. He'd woken up still confused about Cameron's decisions the night before. Confused and still horny. Not a good combination. There'd been so many mixed signals; the guy had wanted him, but then he didn't... Jesus! Reece knew he couldn't deal with it again before he found out whether he'd been successful for the position.

He was about to find out.

Geoffrey Price's executive assistant had just handed him a cup of coffee, and now he was waiting. He looked around the room, taking in the rich wood furniture and opulent colors of the furnishings. This was the office of a successful man, one who had worked hard and had succeeded. Geoffrey Price's success was something to aspire to.

He heard voices and stood as the door opened, surprised when Geoffrey Price entered the room—and not alone. Shocked into muteness, he faltered briefly when Mr. Price walked over to him and held out his hand in greeting, recovering quickly enough, he hoped, to not seem rude.

“Morning, Reece. I hope Charlotte looked after you?” Mr. Price stood for a moment and then moved to his desk, gesturing for Reece to sit down again.

“Yes, sir, thank you.” He held up his coffee cup to substantiate his words.

“Okay,” Mr. Price started, his voice full of authority as he sat down, “let's get this show on the road. Seeing as you already know Cameron, I don't imagine introductions are necessary.”

Reece looked at Cameron, who had taken the seat beside him. He was sure he must have looked confused, but Cameron smiled—as Cameron always did—and Reece calmed... for a moment. The next words out of Geoffrey Price's mouth had him even more confused.

“Reece, Cameron and I have spent the last hour looking at your proposal.” Reece's head almost spun on his shoulder's as he turned to look at Cameron. What the fuck was going on? Why would Cameron Fielding be going over his proposal with Mr. Price? Mr. Price continued—hopefully he would answer that question—“We are very impressed with your ideas. You dealt with the brief in a way that gels very much with our philosophy here at Price & Associates, and we believe you would continue to deliver similar results on other, more varied projects. Cameron had lengthy discussions with Edward Richards and other board members while he was at the club, and I spoke to Edward at length, too. He asked that if you come to work for Price & Associates that you handle their account from now on. That is how impressed he was with you.”

Reece was struggling to accept the compliments with his mind spinning in confusion. He was really no nearer to knowing what Cameron's involvement in this was, but he managed. “Thank you, sir.”

“Cameron, maybe you should fill Reece in on your role in this.”

Yes, please. Reece almost wished he'd said it out loud.

“Reece, I haven't been totally straight with you.”

Reece glared at him. *You think?*

“I left Baltimore almost twelve months ago and have been working here at Price & Associates since then.” *What?* “I've managed to acquire multiple new clients over that time, but with the firm's growth exceeding all our predictions in the last two quarters, we felt the job too big for me to do alone. When Geoff suggested hiring to meet our needs, I immediately thought of you. I knew you were still based locally, and of course I knew your capabilities, so—”

Reece interrupted. “So you're the reason I was contacted directly. You headhunted me.”

“Well, after I mentioned you to Geoff—”

Cameron was cut off for the second time, this time by Mr. Price. “Yes, Reece. Assuming you decide you’d like to work for me, you can thank Cameron that you are here.”

Reece’s head was a muddled mess as he went back over every moment of the past week. Cameron in the waiting room after his interview; Cameron meeting him when his car had the flat tire; Cameron leading him to believe he was a candidate as well... This was ridiculous. He felt like telling them both to go to hell, but he was professional enough to take a breath and listen to what they had to say. Things said at the spur of the moment never ended well. He’d have plenty of time to tell them—both—to go hell when he had calmed down.

Reece directed his attention to Mr. Price. “Can I assume from what you are saying that you are offering me a job?”

“Yes, Reece. I would very much like for you to join the team.”

“And my role...?”

“You would be employed in the same capacity as was discussed, the only difference being you would work beside Cameron.”

“Not under him?” Reece was too angry and far too astounded to even consider the humor in that remark.

Mr. Price shook his head, seemingly oblivious to the possible innuendo as well. “I’m not expanding my management team at this point. But I do believe in placing staff where staff is needed. Cameron’s job was too big for one person, so I have created two equal positions. You will each have your own clients and work independently. Of course, I would expect you to utilize each other as valuable reference and each client will be discussed in weekly meetings or as required.”

“Sorry if this seems naive, Mr. Price, but you mentioned me as the front-runner for the job. Is there really another candidate?”

“Firstly, I ask that you call me Geoff, Reece. We’re rather informal here in that respect.” He glanced at Cameron, then back to Reece. “But yes, there is.

He was actually at Riverdale as well. A very capable young man, who, if you don't take the position—even though I hope you won't disappoint me—we would contact to see if he's still interested.”

“I met with both of you while we were at the club, Reece.” Cameron met Reece's narrowed eyes evenly. “And as mentioned, I spoke with the board. I then gave my recommendation to Geoff.” He almost looked sorry, Reece thought. Was that for deceiving him?

He had a lot of questions, but not for Geoffrey Price. He was too blown away by the events of that last fifteen minutes to think clearly, but he was lucid enough to know that he needed a moment to think, maybe even twenty-four hours. He also knew that he needed to speak to Cameron, privately. They had a lot to discuss.

“I am definitely interested, Mr.—Geoff, but I'd like to request some time to consider my options. Is that possible?”

“Of course,” Geoffrey answered. “Would twenty-four hours be enough?”

Geoffrey was being so gracious—he would be a great boss, Reece was sure. What he wasn't sure about was whether he could work with Cameron.

“I appreciate that, sir.” Reece stood. “Hopefully I'll have an answer for you later today, but definitely by the morning.”

Geoffrey stood and came around the table, shaking Reece's hand warmly. “I look forward to it.”

Farewells were made and Reece left the office, his head still in a spin and unsure of where to go. Deciding that home was as good a place as any, he walked for the elevator and the same parking garage he'd stormed into just a week ago.

“Reece.” Cameron's voice was not unexpected. “Please wait.”

Reece pressed the elevator button and waited, very aware of Cameron once he was standing beside him. They didn't speak, and when the elevator arrived and Reece stepped inside, Cameron followed him in.

“Ree—” Cameron started, but Reece stopped him by holding up a hand. He needed a bit longer to process what had just happened.

The elevator descended, arriving quickly at the basement parking garage, and Reece stepped out, Cameron again following him. “I need longer to think about this.”

“I’d really like to explain.” Reece couldn’t see his face but he could hear the sincerity in Cameron’s voice.

“I’m sure you would, but it will have to wait. Do you know where I live?” Expecting yes, he wasn’t surprised by Cameron’s reserved agreement. “Come over when you finish work. I may have made a decision by then, but either way I would like to hear what you have to say.”

“Reece, I...”

“Save it for later, Cam.” He was surprised by his use of Cameron’s shortened name; it seemed far too personal considering what had just happened. And after what had happened on Tuesday night, so full of disappointment. He began to walk to his car, already beginning to weigh the pros and cons of accepting the job, and he could feel Cameron’s eyes on him the whole way. He didn’t look back when he climbed into the Mustang and drove away.

The knock on the door wasn’t unexpected, but it made him flinch anyway. Reece looked at his watch. It was five fifteen; Cameron hadn’t wasted any time in getting here. He opened the door. Cameron stood there, obviously having come straight from work and still dressed in his suit and tie, making Reece realize he hadn’t even taken his jacket off since he’d been home. Not that he’d been home long. He hadn’t gone straight home when he’d left Cameron earlier, instead detouring via Simon’s office—his best friend imparting the wisdom that Reece had counted on.

“Hi,” Cameron said. His blue eyes looked worried, and even though Reece hated to see him look like that, the guy deserved it. Reece invited him in,

holding the door open for him to pass. Cameron looked longingly at the sofa. “Should I sit or will this be quick?”

“Sit down, Cameron.”

“Geoff said he hasn’t heard from you yet.”

“Not yet.”

Cameron seemed to think on that. “Have you made a decision?”

“I think so.” Reece walked past Cameron and into the kitchen. He opened the refrigerator and pulled out a couple of beers, holding one up to Cameron in question. “You want one?”

“Sure, thanks.” Cameron reached for the offered beer from Reece, taking a long pull once he’d twisted off the cap.

Reece needed to get this over with, so he started. “The job is a great job—I obviously don’t have to tell you that—and I am very interested in working for Geoff, but I gotta say, Cam, the fact that you lied to me while we were at Riverdale... that really bothers me.”

“I’m sorry, Reece, I really am. I never meant to deceive you, I mean, that was never my intention, but when you snapped at me on the side of the road after I’d stopped when you blew that tire, well, I panicked. I thought you’d just turn around and go home if I told you the truth. So when you assumed I was up for the job as well, I sort of... I sort of let you believe it.”

Reece remembered that moment when he’d realized Cameron was the man in shadow. He had been rude. “And once we got there? You had a captive audience then, you could have come clean to me numerous times.”

“Yeah, I didn’t play it well at all,” he admitted. “I think a part of me hoped you’d mellow toward me, and you did. And it got harder to admit the truth.”

Reece considered all of that for a moment. “And Tuesday, at the pool... at my room?” He moved over to the sofa and sat down, not close, but not too far away either. “That was pretty intense.” He took a moment. “Is that why—why you didn’t want to come in?” Reece had pondered that, tying together

everything that had happened that night and concluding that Cameron was acting on his conscious.

“I had to, Reece.” He turned his body on the sofa to face Reece. “I wanted to, Jesus, I wanted to, but I couldn’t. I couldn’t compromise my professional integrity that way—I was already pushing the line.”

Reece laughed. “Oh yeah, you pushed the line, buddy.”

“I suppose it comes down to this,” Cameron started. “I really want you to take the job. Some of that’s because I’m selfish and I want to see you, but mostly it’s because I want you to work with me. Geoff is a great boss, and the company is awesome—there’s so much scope for growth—but it’s too much for me. I need someone I can trust to take us forward—and I trust you, Reece.” Reece was tempted to reach over and touch Cameron, but he held off. Hopefully, there’d be another time for that. “I honestly suggested Geoff look into you for a reason—you’re good. And apart from that, you make me work harder to be good. You always have.”

Reece chuckled, that was exactly what he’d decided, almost immediately after the interview. “I do get it. I get why you let me believe it. If I’m honest, and things had played out the same for me, I probably would have done the same. The job isn’t our biggest issue though, Cam. Can we work together knowing what’s happening between us?” Reece had no intention of not addressing what he considered to be the most important part of this. “Is there something happening between us?” Reece thought there was, but maybe Cam didn’t—he had to find out.

Cameron answered the question by shuffling closer on the sofa. His thigh was now touching Reece’s, and he was sure he could feel the heat of Cam’s skin, even through two layers of fine wool.

“Would it be cliché to say I was pretty hot for you back in school?”

Reece shook his head and chuckled, looking to the spot where their knees touched.

“Reece?”

At Cameron’s tone he looked back. “Not cliché at all.”

“It’s true.” He seemed to want to convince Reece, but there was no need.

“I know.” And he did. He remembered it very well—his own memories at least. “Do mutual hard-ons make for a good working environment? We haven’t got a great track record.”

“I think we can make it work for us—the competitive streak, I mean.”

Reece reached up, his hand hovering close to Cameron’s face. “You game?”

“Absolutely—game on.”

Cameron closed in the final distance, tipping his head to meet Reece. Their kiss a tentative taste of what was to come.

THE END

Author Bio

Bette Browne is wife to an extremely understanding husband and mother to two very tolerant children. In her mind they are the most accepting family in the world, allowing her the freedom to indulge her passion for fiction, whether it is reading or writing it.

She enjoys traditional male/female romances, but male/male is her passion. In her mind nothing is more erotic than two (or more) beautiful men finding love together.

For Bette, the fight for tolerance in all its guises is an important one, and hopefully her contribution, even if it is only in the form of the occasional love story, is one she will continue to happily find the time for.

Bette's story, Dirty Martini, is part of the Second Chances Anthology by [Bottom Drawer Publications](#).

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