

MC Houle

Lucky Panties

A "Love has no boundaries" story



Love Has No Boundaries

An M/M Romance series

LUCKY PANTIES

By MC Houle

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.

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LUCKY PANTIES

By MC Houle

Photo Description

A young man is standing against a mirror. He is only wearing a pair of pink panties.

Story Letter

Dear Author,

This boy likes to wear sexy women's underwear but it was his secret. He got caught out in a car accident by very manly, sexy, dominant rescuers. How did he get from there to "Property of xxx and xxx" tattooed on his ass after that fateful day?

If you really want a challenge—I would prefer if nobody cries (they can get angry and lash out instead or if they have to, cry in private), communication of feelings is difficult most of the time and the word love isn't mentioned or thought until it has absolutely beaten them over the head and it dawns on them that is what is going on.

I am a big believer in the generalization that men "show" their feelings before they "say" their feelings.

This was my contribution to the event last year but the story wasn't able to be completed so I'm trying again so it might look familiar... but it's not too much to ask, right?

Sincerely,

Jen McJ

Story Info

Genre: contemporary

Tags: cross-dressing, submission, poly-mmm, friends to lovers, hurt/comfort, police officer, doctor

Content Warning: attempted non-con

Word count: 18,357

LUCKY PANTIES

By MC Houle

Byron Leighten's grin could have reached the sky, if he weren't walking on clouds already. He'd woken at peace, something that hadn't happened in months. His first day at MeShoes had gone well. And after that, when he went to Pink Laces to buy a pair of lace panties for a non-existent girlfriend, he hadn't stuttered to the clerk over there. Nothing could compare to that feeling of pure happiness.

Silence reigned when he arrived home, as his calls for his sister went ignored. He assumed she was with friends or listening to loud music. Two years had been enough to change his sweet little sister into a twelve-year-old rebellious teenager.

Then his father appeared from the kitchen, holding Byron's washed-out black backpack. The last time his father had looked that red and puffy Byron had broken the window of his father's beloved car. He was seven at the time, and that face still scared Byron to the bones.

"Dad?"

"Don't you fuckin' call me Dad."

Byron stepped back. His voice was smug and confident, but he didn't feel as such. "What have I done this time?"

One twist of fate and the day had turned sour.

The slap stung, but not as much as the act itself. His father was known to anger easily and violently, but never against them. The wall, sometimes, but never Byron, Amber or their mother, while she still lived.

"Get out of my house."

"What? Dad!"

Byron stopped listening to his broken pride and implored him. They had moved after his mother's death, just before college. He had nowhere to go, knew no one in the neighborhood.

His father got very close, very fast, and his breath smelled strongly of bourbon. Byron's body tensed in expectation of a slap that didn't come. "Get out of my house, faggot."

His first reflex was to deny it. He *wanted* to deny it. He did it for twenty-two years, one more wouldn't hurt. Hell, two days ago he would have denied it.

The words stuck in his throat.

That morning, for the first time in months, years, he had accepted he was gay. And now he was forced out of the closet.

He closed his mouth without saying anything.

His father leaned in. Byron's reflexes kicked in, and he squeezed against the wall. If he hadn't moved, the edge of the door would have hit him in the shoulder when his father opened it.

His father grabbed him by the shoulder and pushed him outside. Byron stumbled out the door where he was able to stand in the wild garden instead of crashing onto the cement.

His father slammed the door.

Byron knocked furiously, calling for his dad, even calling him "Daddou" like he hadn't done in years.

"Please, let's talk about it."

After a while, he accepted that his father wasn't going to answer. He stepped back and caught Amber looking at him. Her hand rested against the window as if she wanted to reach out.

He blew her a kiss for comfort, as tears began to pour down her face. She opened the window.

"Don't go. Please don't go."

“I’m fine, Gem.” He even used her childhood nickname, hoping to make it better. “Don’t worry about me.”

He saw his father go into her room and force the window closed. Just before he lost contact, he heard his sister yelling that she didn’t care, and that she loved him.

Byron promised to call her, but he didn’t think she heard him. He waited to be sure his father didn’t hurt her, only left her to cry in her bedroom.

Instead of contacting her again and risking his father’s wrath falling on her, Byron opened his bag and checked what he had: some clothes, his wallet, his uncharged smartphone, and his non-refundable airline ticket for the end of the summer. At least he had money to survive on until a solution came along. He still had school tuition and the rent on his apartment back in Philly to worry about.

After glancing one last time at the house, he walked down the street and headed toward the rest of his life.

Byron drifted away from the suburban neighborhood. The sky had darkened before he made it to the downtown area. He used his credit card to pay for the last train to leave that night.

“I’m sorry sir, but the card has been declined.”

Byron’s nerves exploded in laughter, but he calmed when he realized that the woman at the counter was looking at him as if he had two heads. He walked away.

“Sir, don’t you want your card?”

He didn’t turn to her, just gestured that he didn’t care. And there went his sleeping plans. Hell, there went any plans involving money. The twenty bucks in his wallet wasn’t going to get him far. For a second, he thought about sleeping on the station’s benches, but the large lettered sign “NO SLEEPING HERE” was a dead giveaway.

Besides, he already shivered from the cold. That early in the summer the nights were still fresh and cool. The only idea he had was to head back to Philly where he might find some friendly soul to shelter him. Unless the word has already gotten around about what happened with his ex-roommate, Truman. He still needed to get there. He couldn't get the money back for his ticket, but he hoped maybe he could sell it.

He put his hand in his pocket and grabbed the panties he bought at Pink Laces. He had forgotten about them but now that he thought about it, the soft fabric between his fingers made him feel somewhat safe and optimistic, like suddenly the situation wasn't so miserable anymore.

He wanted to wear them so badly he went to the closest restroom. An odor of piss and bleach assaulted him and he gagged. He sighed at the feel of the fabric against his thighs, and it felt even better on his cock. Maybe a little tight, but he would know to get a larger size next time. He put his forehead against the door. The soft blue paint crackled, but he smiled anyway.

He felt it again, the sense of power he had when he'd picked them up in the shop, and it didn't faze the salesgirl. She'd assumed they were for his girlfriend, and he hadn't contradicted her. He'd gotten out of the store feeling as if nothing could put him down anymore, like he was the king of the world.

And he felt it again.

The door of the restroom opened, and he jumped at the sound of two strong, drunken voices. He buried his boxers in his bag and slipped on his jeans. He washed his hands, somewhat intimidated by the aura of the two bear-type, forty-something drunks. As he was leaving, one of the men stopped him.

Byron had a great view of his soft cock, still dripping with urine. He stepped back when the man shook it.

"You're not leaving already, are you, sweet pea?"

"I need to take the train before it leaves."

The other man laughed loudly, sending a displeasing shiver through Byron's spine. "Well you're not in luck 'cause it already left."

Byron wasn't afraid of fighting, but he was tired, and they were taller, and bigger, and probably stronger than him. He could have gotten away with it if the guy was alone, but two to one was against the odds.

He could almost read the headline. "Pansy-boy found dead in downtown restroom. He was wearing women's underwear."

He wasn't planning on letting that happen. He moved one of his legs back, ready to pounce at the first sign of attack. The first man stepped toward Byron when the door behind him opened. The light from the outside lamp blinded Byron, and all he could see was the silhouette of a man about the same size and shape of the other two.

He stepped into the restroom, and Byron got a good look at his face. "Everything okay in here?"

Byron muttered something about having a train to catch and left in a hurry, trying to put the most distance between those men and him.

The street was empty of pedestrians, and the cars drove by fast, heedless of him. He ignored the eighteen-wheeler truck that slowed down, but he couldn't ignore the low voice calling for him. The truck had the black logo of Aboil Inc. The driver opened the passenger door and Byron noticed it was the same man who had given him the opportunity to escape earlier.

"You going somewhere, boy?"

"Rosetown."

"You need a lift?"

Byron didn't hesitate for long. He was sick of walking. And how much trouble could he get into in half an hour? He pulled himself up into the truck.

"Thanks."

The radio played alternative-rock shit. He yawned and leaned his head on the seat. He was almost asleep when the man spoke again.

"Bad day, eh?"

“Yeah.” He kept his answer short on purpose, hoping the driver would understand and shut up.

Byron closed his eyes, and leaned back again. Yet he couldn't fall asleep. He kept having the freaky feeling of being watched. He opened his eyes to get confirmation that, yes, the driver was glancing at him. The driver smiled at him, and Byron's bad feelings were confirmed when he suddenly felt a hand caressing his thigh.

He moved his leg away, and sat up, alert.

“Don't,” he said loud and clear.

If he had apologized, Byron would have let it go.

“You didn't think you could get a lift without paying your dues, did you?” The driver grinned at him.

“I have cash.”

“I don't need your money, boy. Just a blow job.”

The driver put his hand behind his neck and pulled Byron in the direction of his crotch.

Byron pushed back and made an attempt to open the door, but it was locked. The hand gripped his hair, hard, and pulled again. This time, Byron pushed against the man's shoulder. The truck swerved in the middle of the road, as if unable to decide which lane to take.

The driver ignored Byron as he tried to right the truck; so he used the time to shake the door handle to open it.

“It's locked, little bastard, and don't you dare leave without delivering on your promise.”

“I never promised anything.” Byron's voice was shaky and breathless.

“You did when you got in the truck. NOW. SUCK. MY. FUCKING. DICK!”

He grabbed Byron by the hair and pulled. He forced Byron's head down towards his thigh. Resisting didn't get Byron far away from the driver, but it did help him not to get too close.

Byron had his nose an inch away from the guy's cock, which he must have freed while Byron was trying to escape.

He grimaced in disgust, as the driver's hand got harder to fight off. In a last attempt, he grabbed the man's throat with his left hand and pushed back while his free hand grabbed the half hard cock and pressed until the man screamed, a high-pitched cry of pain.

As the man pushed him away from him, Byron grabbed the steering wheel.

He felt the vibration when the truck hit the shoulder of the road. The street seemed to dogleg to the left, as Byron's head hit the roof of the truck. He felt a sudden pain in his back and then everything went dark.

It seemed to Byron that he had a ton of bricks on his chest, making sitting up impossible. He wanted to speak, but something lodged in his throat wouldn't let him.

He didn't know where he was. Last thing he remembered was—Amber begging him to stay. No wait. The driver trying to—he shivered just thinking about it. Wanted to throw up. Someone came in—a cute, blue-eyed man, and Byron fell back into limbo.

When he woke for the second time, he felt better until he sat up too fast. He coughed, and his vision blacked out. The room spun, but his balance came back after a second or two. This time, the whiteness of the room and the backless gown gave away his location: a hospital. He was alive, and that was better than the alternative. The small but persistent pain in his left leg turned out to be related to the cast that went from his toes to above his knee. He had to use his hands to help move his broken leg, and just doing that took so much effort it left him breathing heavily. He thought about lying down again, but then the cost of the hospitalization came to mind, and he decided against it.

He put his good foot on the ground, but when he did the same thing with the other one, a flash of pain travelled up his leg and he hissed. He grabbed the edge of the bed, refusing to let the tears escape his eyes.

A blonde nurse came over to him and pushed him to lie back on the bed.

“But I need to go.” Byron wasn’t proud of the whining in his voice.

“Your doctor needs to see you before we let you leave, okay?”

“I don’t—”

“It’s hospital policy. We just need to make sure your situation isn’t life-threatening anymore.”

Too exhausted to oppose, he surrendered to the confines of his bed.

The next person to enter into the room was a tall man wearing black pants, a light blue shirt, and a black tie under his white coat. There was an authority in his demeanor that excited Byron in the same way Professor Goldbarth had during his first semester.

“I’m Doctor Cobin Shrenk. Can you tell me your name?”

“Byron.” He seemed to be waiting for something, so Byron continued, “Leighen.”

“Well, Byron Leighen, how are you feeling today?”

“Really good. Can I go?”

“How’s your leg.”

“I’m telling you I’m fine.”

“How old are you, kid?”

Byron was exasperated, but he answered anyway. “Twenty-two.”

The doctor was skeptical; Byron could see it by the way his eyebrows flinched.

“Look it up. I have a file here. L-E-I-G-H-T-E-N.”

Doctor Shrenk made note of it in the little pad of paper he had with him, then tore off the sheet to give it to the nurse. “Get me his file,” he told her, before going back to Byron. “You have insurance?”

“I used to, but not anymore.”

The nurse was back with the file, and the doctor ignored Byron while he read it. Byron shifted. He didn’t like being ignored.

“Actually, your insurance seems to still be valid.”

“Not for long.” Byron muttered.

“Why the hurry then? Stay at least one more night.”

Byron hesitated, but seriously, where else would he go? His father wouldn’t think about the insurance for a while anyway. And it wasn’t like his father wasn’t somewhat responsible for his predicament.

“Good, because you did give us quite a scare you know. If you need to call someone, ask one of the nurses or there’s a pay phone in the hall.”

Byron nodded. There wasn’t anyone to call.

“If you’re good now, I’m going on to my next patient, and you can ask the nurse if you think of something.”

“My leg does hurt, and I kind of have a headache.”

“Of course you do, especially with the whack to your head. I’ll get you some acetaminophen.”

Byron wanted to look at the hot doctor some more, but he didn’t say anything as the man left. He couldn’t help thinking about how his ass must look under the coat.

The nurse needed to clean the cut on his back.

“Couldn’t I clean it myself? Haven’t I had enough humiliation for today?”

Earlier that day, he was given the clothes he had been wearing, with the panties on display. Byron hadn't been able to look into the girl's eyes. She had a great view of his bum as she cleaned his lower back.

"There, it's over. It wasn't so bad, was it?"

"Did you hear what I said about being humiliated?"

She wasn't angered by his dry tone, and she didn't look guilty at all. Instead, she sent him a compassionate glance and he hated her more just for that.

Byron was alone for five seconds before the nurse was replaced by a cop. Byron knew it had to come at some point, but he preferred not to think about his father, the driver, or the accident. There was too much to think about, too much anger and frustration, and deep down, pain and sadness.

"I'm Officer Rick March. I have some questions about the accident."

Despite himself, his voice cracked. "Did anyone die?" He wouldn't be able to forgive himself if someone had died because of him.

"The driver didn't survive. But there were no other casualties."

Byron sighed. "I don't want to talk about it."

"It's just a few questions."

He couldn't bear talking about the attempted rape. "Don't I have the right not to answer?"

"You do. But it doesn't look good. The driver was found unzipped. If it is proven that you were—hum—satisfying him before the accident, you could be arrested for manslaughter."

"What? No!" Suddenly, his mind was going to the worst-case scenario. He didn't consider himself pretty, but he was sure he wouldn't survive being around those kind of men he'd find in jail and getting away untouched. "I didn't do anything. He—he was—"

He couldn't talk. The words collided together; his heart beat so hard he was convinced the officer could hear it. He was saved by Doctor Shrenk.

“I said to take it easy, not to attack the poor kid.”

“You don’t really have a say.”

“I do have a say if it’s for the well-being of my patient.”

They looked at each other, both trying to out-dominate the other, and Byron glanced between the two men. It was really impressive.

The cop finally bent. “I’ll come back with a warrant.”

With the cop gone, Byron muttered, “I didn’t want to.”

“I believe you.”

“You do?” Byron couldn’t hide the surprise or his pleasure in hearing that.

“People do stuff they don’t want to when they don’t have money or feel lonely.”

Crestfallen, Byron shook his head. “You don’t get it. I didn’t let him, and then I—”

Doctor Shrenk touched his shoulder and squeezed. “It’s okay. You don’t have to explain yourself to me.”

Byron wiped his eye with a rude gesture. “I’m not going to cry over this.”

He was glad the doctor didn’t say anything about his moment of weakness.

Just having Doctor Shrenk—or Cobin like he’d started to call him in his head—in the room was enough to relax Byron. He was always nice to him, and despite knowing it was only his job to do so, it gave Byron a warm feeling.

The cop didn’t come back with a warrant, but he did bring Byron’s backpack to him. The backpack smelled of smoke, and it was burned in places. Byron was lucky to get the rest of his stuff back.

Byron was feeling more comfortable now that he was wearing his real clothes (including his brand new underwear), so he barely felt himself

blushing when he asked Cobin point blank if he was single. Damn panties were making him do stupid stuff.

It was better received than he expected from someone he wasn't even sure was gay. Cobin smiled at him and didn't actually reject him.

"I can't date a patient."

"Well, I wouldn't be a patient anymore if you were to release me."

Byron would swear that Cobin's laughter was flirtatious.

"And have you on the streets? I much prefer to have you well."

He wanted to tell Cobin he didn't need his help, but he did need it. He just wasn't going to tell him that either. Plus, it was really sweet of Cobin to say that.

Byron gazed into his eyes and only glanced away when he heard a familiar voice from the reception desk. It wasn't even close to the room but the loud voice carried.

Cobin went into the hall and headed in the direction of the desk.

Byron gripped the crutches next to his bed and hobbled towards the hall but stayed inside the door.

"Is there a problem?"

"Doctor, this man here wants me to cancel a paid insurance claim."

"Sir, you need to contact your insurance company for this. We only send them the bill. If you really want to, I can direct you to the billing office."

Byron was really impressed with the way Cobin was able to get his father to back down. His father calmed down, but when he saw Byron in the doorway, he bypassed Cobin and came screaming at Byron.

Byron's retreat was hampered by his cast, and he could only back up towards his bed. He heard the nurse calling a Code White and Cobin needed the help of two guards to keep Byron's father away from him. He was still calling Byron a fag as he was escorted outside.

Other patients came out into the hall to see what was happening, but Byron didn't care because he had Cobin asking him if he was okay as Cobin put a hand on his shoulder.

Byron held both crutches in one hand so that he could dig the folded pamphlet for the local shelter out of his pocket. Despite his efforts to keep them under his arm, the left crutch slid on the ground and it took all of his balance to stay upright. He cursed and bent down to pick it back up. Damn cast didn't allow him to bend at the knee, so he had to get into an awkward position to retrieve it. Doing so without putting any pressure on his broken leg was nearly impossible. He had just enough reflexes to put the palm of his hand out on the cement to protect his nose as he fell. He sat and placed his leg in a more comfortable position by using his arms to move it.

He wasn't going to cry. He'd promised himself that, but it didn't make it any easier.

A nervous laugh bubbled inside him, and he had no other choice than to let it go. If only he hadn't alienated the few friends he had, maybe he would have someone to call. It didn't help that his cellphone was destroyed in the accident. Now, all he could do was find a way to survive until the end of the summer so he could catch his flight and mend his friendships. Maybe he could convince his ex-boss to hire him again. He was going to need a new job more than anything. Of course, he could always keep the one at MeShoes, but the long commute would be a pain.

Feeling confident of his new plan, and with hope warming him (despite the already warm day), he used his good leg and his hands to stand again. He was almost there when he fell again. He didn't reach the ground this time because someone was suddenly holding him from behind.

“You okay, kid?”

Byron recognized that smooth voice because he'd been fantasizing for days about it whispering the most obscene things to him.

Byron turned to the left, but Cobin didn't move. His arm slid around Byron's lower back and left a heated path in its wake. With his nose almost in Cobin's neck, Byron picked up the scent of his cologne. It was intoxicating, but not as much as feeling the strong, obviously-well-maintained body against him, or Cobin's touch.

"What are you doing outside?"

"I was leaving."

"Already? I thought we had decided you'd stay until tomorrow?"

Byron's voice echoed the regret of Cobin's demeanour. "It wasn't really my choice. My father revoked the insurance."

"I'm sorry to hear that." Byron believed him. "You have somewhere to go?"

"They gave me the address of a shelter close by. I guess I'll go there until I get a job or something."

Byron tried to not sound defeated, but Cobin picked up on it. "Not the most fun, eh."

"Well, I'd much rather stay with you, but I don't suppose it's a possibility." He said it like it was a joke (a really flirtatious one at that), but deep down, he couldn't be more serious.

Whatever he thought Byron's intentions were, Cobin moved slightly and squeezed his shoulder. "I've been told my couch is really comfortable."

Byron coughed, hoping he heard right. "I didn't mean your *couch*—" He couldn't help the childish inflection on his last word. He figured there was nothing wrong with some flirtation. It wasn't like it was going to go somewhere, was it?

"I'm afraid it's all I can offer for now."

"Really?" Byron stepped back as he realized Cobin was serious. "Because that would be way better than the shelter."

Cobin smiled and pointed towards the parking lot. "My car is that way."

Byron took a step and then stopped. “Wait? Aren’t you working?”

“Oh no, I just forgot something in my locker yesterday and was picking it up. I can get it later,” Cobin said quickly.

“No really, you should go. I can wait.”

“You sure? Well, at least get back inside and sit in the waiting room.”

Cobin led him inside and hurried away. “Can you believe I forgot my phone at work?” Cobin said as he returned and Byron smiled back at him. The apartment building they drove to was on the north side of town, not so far from the hospital. A safe, middle class neighborhood which had been developed a lot in the last couple of years.

Acting like the gentleman Byron was hoping he wasn’t, Cobin unlocked the door and let him go first.

“You don’t want the elevator to be out of service.” Byron said when he saw Cobin clicking on the twelfth floor button.

“They have a great service. The first and second basements are for storage, and the first also has the utility room.” Five girls took that moment to stop the elevator door from closing and got inside. Cobin nodded at them, and had to move closer to give them space, but didn’t stop talking to Byron. “The janitor’s office is on the ground. There’s a gym on the fourth; I’ll try to put you on my membership if you want.”

Byron had a hard time concentrating on something other than Cobin’s scent and his proximity.

“I’d like that.”

“Good. We also have a playroom on the fifth, and the rest is all apartments and lofts.”

“Wow.”

“Yeah I know. All that’s missing is a pool, but there’s one about two blocks down the street.”

The group of girls left them on the seventh, but Cobin didn't move away. They were quiet for the last few seconds of the ride. The hallway smelled like cleaning products and there were only three doors. Cobin unlocked 1202 and once again let Byron go through first.

The loft was narrow but long, with a lot of empty space. The walls were neutral colors but Byron loved the art that hung on the walls. It was classy, warm and welcoming.

Byron heard the patter of feet on the light hardwood floor, then a whimper as a pug ran to them. He was the cutest little thing, all black and compact, and Byron bent to rub his head.

“You're a good dog, aren't you?”

“His name's Percy. I have a cat too, but he's most likely hidden under the couch. I hope you're not allergic.”

Cobin told Percy to go to his bed.

Byron faced the kitchen at the corner to the left of the loft where the counter made a U-shape with the stainless fridge and stove. Byron didn't look long though, as the whole wall behind it was actually a window. He skirted the counter, passed under the spiral staircase, and hurried to the window as fast as his leg allowed him. If it wasn't for the crutches, he wouldn't have been able to stop himself from leaving his handprint on the window. Beyond Rosetown, which he bet had a view that was even more beautiful at night, he could see Lake Erie.

“Wow.”

“You should see it at sundown. It's worth the price of the loft in itself.”

Byron turned from the window to smile at Cobin. At his left was the living room, with an actual real fireplace instead of one of those fake things. Behind the black leather couch was a painting—a colorful interpretation of a romantic walk in the park. Byron went closer in an attempt to see the painting at a better angle. He bent his healthy knee on the couch in between the green and purple cushions—there were six in total, each one of the colors of the rainbow. His

other leg dangled over the couch's edge. A black and white cat ran from beneath the couch back towards the kitchen.

The couple on the painting was holding each other close under an umbrella.

“It's two men!”

He heard the soft laughter of Cobin behind him. “According to my mom, it's me and the future love of my life.”

If Byron would have turned his head any faster he would have broken his neck in addition to his leg. “Your mom?”

“She painted it.”

“Really?”

“She's a talented artist. Every painting in the loft is by her.”

“You're really lucky.” Byron could barely hide the little bitter part of himself from being heard in his voice. It made him miss his mother. She would have been okay with him being gay and she would have been able to calm his father.

Cobin put a hand on his shoulder and Byron sat on the couch. It was good to have his leg in a normal position for once.

“My bedroom and the bathroom are upstairs. You can't see it from here, but the bathroom door is on the left. You just have to push.”

The upstairs was about a half of the total loft, protected from falling by a curved stainless railing. The peculiarity of the loft was that, from where he was sitting, he could see himself.

“A mirror. The wall is a mirror?”

Cobin shuffled his feet. “Not my idea. I should tell you that it's a one-way mirror, so it's basically a window from my side of the bedroom. We'll have to find some way to give you some privacy.”

Byron was honest when he said he didn't mind. It was so much better than the homeless shelter anyway, and he didn't *have to* do anything to have a safe place.

“At least they put an actual wall in the bathroom. They did, right?”

Cobin shrugged apologetically. “You get used to it.”

“Oh my God!” Byron put his hand on his mouth. “Who designed that shit?”

“I don't know. Someone with a weird God complex.”

Byron lowered his voice on purpose. “I see everything. I am everything.”

Cobin burst out laughing, and Byron liked how it made his shoulders relax, how he bent in two and held his chest, and mostly, how the strong, low tone sent sparkles up his spine.

His cock hardened. He was young, and hadn't had sex since things had gone to shit with his ex-roommate/fuck-buddy/boyfriend/whatever. He grabbed Cobin by the belt and pulled. Cobin fell atop him. His cologne made Byron's head spin, and he felt Cobin's minty breath against his skin. Cobin glanced into his eyes and then at his lips. He wasn't making any moves, so Byron didn't hesitate to stretch up and kiss him.

The touch was electric. Byron reacted to it, opening his mouth to welcome Cobin's tongue. He moaned, or maybe Cobin did.

Byron reached behind Cobin to pull him closer, wanting to touch him. His free hand reached for his belt.

But Cobin didn't let him. He moved backward, breaking the kiss. He pulled Byron's hand away from his belt. “You don't have to do this.”

“But I want to.” Byron went to kiss him again but Cobin moved away from his reach.

“I'm serious, kid. You don't owe me anything.”

Byron opened his mouth to deny it, but Cobin was already on another subject.

“Are you hungry? I know you missed dinner at the hospital. Or you can watch TV. I have cable and all.”

And as Cobin went to the fridge and babbled about what he had and could do, Byron kept thinking about how now he was going to have blue balls all evening.

By the time Cobin put something into the microwave, Byron made his way slowly to the wall opposite the window where a display was installed on the wall. A curvy contemporary piece of dark reflective metal was in the middle, with two frames on each side. Cobin was in the first picture with a baby wrapped in his arms, a young teenager, barely older than Amber, maybe thirteen or fourteen, and an older woman with a salt-and-pepper version of Cobin’s hair color.

The next picture showed a man in his thirties, looking a lot like Cobin—the same nose—but bulkier and wearing flannel and overalls. He had a fishing pole in one hand, and the other was holding up a trout. The boy at his side, around eight, was holding up the tail of the fish. His chin was high, his eyes gleaming, and his father looked just as proud himself.

Byron recognized Percy the pug in the third picture. A baby in a white dress was holding the dog by the neck but Percy didn’t seem to mind. The cat was trying to get into the fun too, putting its paw onto the baby’s back.

Cobin was also in the last picture, this time with a shorter man. He had an arm around Cobin’s shoulder and was laughing into Cobin’s neck. There was so much emotion in the picture, in the way their eyes sparkled, in the way the man held Cobin close, and in the laugh lines on Cobin’s face.

Byron smiled derisively. The boyfriend, he thought. “You look happy together.”

“What?”

“You and the hot guy, you look great together. I’m sorry I pushed. I didn’t know you had a boyfriend. I’ll keep my hands to myself from now on.” Byron

hadn't heard Cobin coming, so he shuffled back a step, right into Cobin's chest.

"That's Nathan, my best friend. We're not—we're just friends."

Byron turned to face Cobin, but he didn't move away from him. "But you'd like that, wouldn't you?"

Cobin's eyes on him, his scent, and his proximity, all hypnotized him. "Some things aren't meant to be."

Byron bit the corner of his mouth. He only had to move forward a little; he didn't even have to move his injured leg, just stretch his neck, and his lips would touch Cobin's.

But then someone knocked on the door and Cobin was walking away. Byron hunched and tightened his lips but didn't say anything.

He forced a smile when he saw the man from the picture at the door. The man was keeping him away from Cobin so Byron resented him. What was he doing here if he didn't want Cobin anyway?

The man—Nathan—was welcomed by Percy, but as soon as he saw Byron he gasped, and slowly stood up.

"Hi." The sound was drawn out.

"Nathan, this is Byron. Byron, meet Nathan. He's also the man who rescued you from the truck."

"Really?"

"Yeah, you look great. I mean healthy." They glanced at each other. No words. No gestures.

"I was making sandwiches, do you want some?" Cobin said.

Nathan glanced away from Byron and told Cobin he had already eaten. Byron couldn't stay now. He didn't think he had ever been with so many hot guys in the same room before.

Cobin went back to the kitchen counter and the sandwiches, and Byron followed Nathan's glance at Cobin's ass.

Byron made his way to the counter as he imagined how totally hot Cobin and Nathan would be together in a bed, naked. Nathan joined them at the counter.

Cobin slid a plate to Byron who sat on the bench and took a bite. He devoured the sandwich like he hadn't eaten in a week, which might as well be the case with Rosetown Hospital's food.

Byron swallowed. He wasn't sure what deity had possessed him to torture himself like this but he asked Nathan how long he'd known Cobin.

"He patched me up after I got shot the first time."

Fucking shit, Byron thought. "You've been shot? That sucks."

"And it hurts like shit. But anyway, he operated on my shoulder and got the bullet out without ruining my shoulder and the rest is history."

Byron ate the rest of the sandwich, emptied his full glass of water, and excused himself.

"I don't want to get in the way of whatever you have planned."

"Don't worry." Cobin put a hand on his shoulder, and Byron pushed away the sudden happy jitters that gave him. "We were just going to the gym."

"You should go then. I can entertain myself. I'll try to call my sister and watch TV." *Please stay*, he thought.

"If you're sure—" Cobin grabbed a piece of paper and scribbled something. "This is my cell number. I'll have it with me and I won't leave the building. Call if there's anything. You can use my computer on the living room table."

Cobin and Nathan hesitated a little, but in the end Byron looked secure about not needing them. He refused to be a burden.

Nathan picked up a gym bag near the door as Byron was walking to the living room area.

Byron bypassed his father by calling Amber on her cellphone.

“You give me just a minute, Kerry.”

“So I’m Kerry now. Is Dad nearby?”

For a moment, all he heard was Amber breathing on the phone.

“Not anymore.”

“He’s treating you all right, isn’t he?”

“He’s an asshole, that’s what he is. Can you believe he actually went through *my* cell and blocked your number? Now the only one I have access to is the one from my contact list.”

“How did you—”

“I asked Lindsay to hack into Dad’s account and we played with the parental permissions.”

“Amber.” He wanted to scowl at her but he couldn’t pretend he wasn’t happy to hear her voice.

“He won’t know. He had to ask Lindsay’s father how to change them in the first place.”

“Just don’t make it difficult for him, okay?”

“Don’t defend him. After what he did to you!”

“I’m not defending him but you are living with him.”

“I could go live with you.”

Byron heard the whining, but he refused to encourage it. “Gem, it would be illegal for you to come live with me without Dad’s permission.”

“I don’t care.”

“We’re both too pretty for jail.”

Her laughter caught in a sob and Byron’s chest tightened. “You know it wouldn’t be realistic. But, eh, I’m fine. I’m living with a—friend.”

He hadn’t been sure how to classify his budding relationship with Cobin but he had figured that friend worked.

“A boyfriend? Are you like *doing it* with him?”

Byron thought he was going to choke on his own saliva. “A *friend* friend, Gem. Why in hell would you think something like that?”

“Girls think about sex too, you know.”

“Not twelve-year-old ones, no.”

He could almost see her roll her eyes. “Thirteen. And Ashley already did it, you know.”

No no no. That could not be happening. I need to ask Cobin to steal deadly drugs and kill me before it gets to be too much.

“You mean sweet little Ashley? With her ponytails and sparkling ribbons?”

Amber had hummed on the phone but she hadn't stayed serious. “You're so gullible.”

“Don't joke about that. I almost had a heart attack.”

After that, they talked a little and Byron was all smiles when they hung up. He was still smiling when Cobin came back from the gym.

“Someone's happy.”

Byron sank back into the couch. “Yeah.”

Cobin smiled back and said something about a shower before going upstairs. Byron watched him, thinking that it couldn't feel better than at that moment.

Cobin had been in the shower for two minutes when Nathan entered the apartment. He was still sweaty, his hair stuck to his forehead, and still wearing his workout clothes. He called Cobin's name so Byron told him where he was.

He was jumpy and his breath was fast and shaky. “Oh. You mind if I—” He fingered the couch.

With his tight T-shirt and shorts, his square build, and the muscled arms, Byron's brain couldn't find any good reason why he couldn't sit there too.

With friends like that, no wonder Cobin hadn't accepted his proposition. He wouldn't want himself either if he had someone like Nathan in his life.

Nathan sat next to him, but kept two pillows between them and crossed his arms on his chest. Byron would have taken it personally if it wasn't for Nathan's tensing at every movement.

"You okay?"

Nathan waved him off; his teeth tightened and pain flashed through his eyes, eyes that seemed too blue to be natural. Byron pushed the pillows to the ground and used his hands to get closer to Nathan without hurting his leg. Nathan's trapezius muscle tensed as Byron gripped his shoulder. Byron's mouth was dry and his voice flirtatious as he whispered in Nathan's ear that his ex-boyfriend loved his massages. Byron's eyes followed Nathan's Adam's apple as it moved up and down. He rubbed Nathan's back muscles and shivered when Nathan moaned low. It wasn't long before Byron's ministrations and Nathan's reactions got Byron hard.

If Nathan was this hot with just a massage, he didn't want to imagine what he would be like if he was blowing him. The image was just too clear in his mind—on his knees, worshipping him with his tongue.

His cock was pressing against his jeans so Byron moved on the couch to find a more comfortable position. He thought that maybe his cock may have brushed against Nathan's lower back, but Nathan didn't react. Instead of backing off, Byron raised himself up, kneeling behind Nathan with his broken leg touching the wooden floor.

His hands slid down Nathan's back, and Byron lowered his head. He was close enough to kiss the base of Nathan's neck; his cologne was reaching his nostrils, stronger and spicier than Cobin's, when the bathroom door opened and Byron jumped in surprise.

He was glad when Nathan moved away from him. What kind of whore was he, jumping on the best friend after having been rejected? Suddenly, he didn't want anything more than to disappear, to be anywhere but there, feeling so dirty.

“I think I’d like to go to the bathroom.” His words were fast, and he stood as he said them. He hurried as fast as he could to the stairs. He heard Nathan moving behind him.

“Need help?” Nathan’s voice went straight to his cock.

His refusal was louder than he had intended it to be, and the stairs were harder to go up than he thought. He almost fell twice and then Cobin was grabbing his arm. Cobin forced him to stand and Byron’s arm circled his back to make things easier, only realizing his mistake when Cobin’s fresh-out-of-the-shower smell, and the heat of his bare chest against Byron, doubled his arousal.

As soon as they hit the top of the stairs, Byron pushed open the bathroom door and disappeared inside.

Just before the door closed behind him, he heard Cobin asking Nathan what the hell had happened while he was in the shower.

Byron purposely avoided watching them through the one-way mirror. He didn’t want to know what they were saying. He still couldn’t believe what he had almost done. If Cobin hadn’t been there, he would have propositioned Nathan too. He watched himself in the mirror above the counter and couldn’t stop a nervous chuckle. No wonder the two guys at the station and the driver had wanted a piece of him. His mouth had a sour tang to it; his lips curled, and he swallowed.

Cobin had said the neat, light scars would fade with time but Byron couldn’t bring himself to care.

He was a fucking easy slut.

He turned away from the mirror. The bathroom was simple—white, with a bath and a shower, but nothing outside of the ordinary either. Well, besides the one-way mirror.

He glanced at the living room. Cobin must be dressing in his bedroom because Nathan was alone on the couch, crossing and uncrossing his legs,

readjusting himself. A flash of desire vibrated through Byron and he turned away.

He splashed cold water on his face, hoping it would calm his erection or his fast-beating heart. He didn't do anything more than that, both as punishment for being such an easy lay and because he was too petrified to do that with both men so close.

He looked back at the living room but it was now empty. Deciding that he couldn't stay hidden forever, he left the bathroom.

Cobin joined him upstairs, taking two steps at a time. "I'm going to help you."

He didn't trust his voice and nodded. Back downstairs, Byron looked around.

"He's gone back to the gym. He wasn't done yet I guess."

Byron rolled his eyes. Really? *Asshole*, he thought. "Well, there goes all my effort."

Cobin's question could be seen all over his face.

"He was over-exerted so I massaged his back. Now he's going to undo all I did."

He hated that sort of patient. When he did his first internship at the school gym, he always had to fight with the students to listen. He thought a cop, of all people, would know not to overdo it. It was making Byron moody but Cobin laughed it off.

"That's Nathan for you. He probably was trying to impress some twink with how much he can lift."

Byron frowned. He felt his cheeks reddening and his words rushed together as he spoke. "It's not funny. He could hurt himself. Gravely, even. Maybe even have to leave the police force with just one little injury."

Cobin raised his hands, and realizing he was getting a little too enthusiastic, Byron apologized. “It’s what I’m—was majoring in. Physical Therapy. I want to work with athletes.”

“So you like sports?”

“All of them. Hockey, football, soccer, baseball, swimming, even fuckin’ artistic skating. I like to watch and play, but I’m not good enough to be a pro. And I could never choose just one sport.” Once again, his arms moved in excitement as he spoke, and he hit a frame which crashed to the floor. Byron put his fist in his mouth. “Fuck.”

Cobin bent to put it back. The glass was broken right from the area of the baby’s head ending on the cat’s ear.

“I’m so sorry.”

“It’s nothing. Just a frame. I’ll buy a new one.”

“I’ll pay you back.”

Byron thought he was going to refuse, but he must have looked imploring enough, because he didn’t say anything. Byron sighed.

A growl took his attention away from Cobin and the picture. He hadn’t felt it but Percy was patting his cast. Byron grabbed Percy under his front legs and took him in his arms. He nudged his nose against Byron’s neck as Cobin was looking for the cat.

“Not the most gay-friendly job, is it?”

Byron didn’t want to talk about it. Didn’t want to think about it. About how much of a homophobic ass he’d been in high school, and even in college. How he hurt his childhood best friend because he was gay, all the while crushing on him, or how he hurt his roommate, Truman, because he was so damn terrified of anyone finding out they were having sex.

He fidgeted on his feet but he didn’t have to say anything because the clock chimed five and Cobin’s smile wavered.

“What?”

Cobin's lips pressed together in a slight grimace. "It's injection time."

It didn't explain much to Byron who frowned.

"Horace is a diabetic."

Byron tilted his head to the side. "Horace?" Who the hell was Horace? Not another hot friend was he? Wasn't Nathan enough to torture him?

Cobin laughed and the sound sent shivers through Byron's body.

"The cat. He needs insulin, but he's a brat. Let me just find him and you'll see."

Nathan was back just in time to see Horace fleeing the living room. He threw the gym bag near the door.

"I see you still haven't flogged him into submission."

Cobin, his clothes and hair flattened by his struggles with Horace, burst out laughing. "You're the one who likes impact. I'm more of a punishment kind of guy myself."

The light sexual undertone made Byron blush. His plan was to ignore the attraction and not act on it. That didn't help him much. All he could think about now was Cobin, ruler in hand, scolding him for some fictional homework he hadn't done.

He shuddered and found an escape by concentrating on Percy in his arms. He heard a cough but he ignored it and still nuzzled the pug. Nathan laughed deep and shoved Byron's shoulder. The impact gave Percy the opportunity to jump to the ground and escape to his bed next to the couch.

"So now you're getting prudish."

It didn't really matter if it was Nathan's intention to elude the massage, but Byron didn't like to be made fun of, and he still had the dirty feeling of wanting both men. He kept his back straight, his chin high when he said with a calm that contradicted his queasiness, "Well, maybe next time I'll let you hurt yourself by overworking."

Nathan opened his mouth to say something but Cobin put a hand on Nathan's chest.

“Down boy. No need to get aggressive. Are you staying for supper?”

The way Nathan responded to Cobin's gesture and tone surprised Byron, but if Nathan was anything like he was, Nathan would want to please Cobin above everything else. It was fascinating to see Nathan nod and submit completely to Cobin. Byron licked his lips and kept them apart. It was so hot to see them like that. The sex between Nathan and Cobin would be passionate, no doubt, if only they let go.

Byron's chest felt heavy at the thought. It was just his luck to meet the two hottest men in all Rosetown and have them so close and yet so out of his reach.

Cobin stepped back from Nathan. “Sorry, kid.”

Byron ground his teeth. “What's with you two calling me kid? You're not that much older than me.”

“We're thirty!”

Like that explained everything, but Nathan coughed, apparently also disagreeing with Cobin's statement. “We're twenty-nine, thank you very much.”

“Not for very long.”

“Don't talk to me about it.”

Cobin leaned on Byron to whisper loud enough for Nathan to hear, “His birthday's this month while mine's next year. He's cranky about it.”

Byron laughed into his hand and Nathan glanced at them.

“So what are we eating? Takeout, or is there anything edible in that kitchen of yours?” Nathan asked Cobin. Then he turned to Byron and he whispered in his ear, “He likes to pretend he knows how to cook, but really, don't eat anything he tells you he made.”

“Once. You were sick once, and I still hear about it every fuckin' time.”

Byron liked the bickering between them and he forgot his earlier behavior and no longer felt stuck in the middle. For a second, he cultivated the fantasy of an *us* instead of a *them*.

Nathan went to the fridge, and Byron sat on one of the forest-green stools while Cobin stood behind him. Byron tried to ignore Cobin's hand on his lower back but all he could see was the equally distracting Nathan bending over. That ass was just too great not to be looked at every chance he had.

Nathan twisted his body with his ass still in their direction. He had a square container in his hands. "Your mother's recipe?"

"Yeah."

Nathan stood and glanced at them. "How do you feel about spaghetti, kid?"

Byron rolled his eyes and heard Cobin chuckling behind him. "Fine by me, old man."

The chuckles just got louder, this time joined by Nathan. "I like you more and more, kid."

Byron refused to admit that the comment flustered him.

After a whole two weeks doing nothing but watching TV and playing video games, Byron was itching to move, to do anything but hang around doing nothing. His days were lonely since Cobin worked most of the day.

But now his leg felt better and didn't hurt every time he put a little pressure on it. He still needed the crutches, but he could walk around the loft for longer periods of time. He'd tried to take a walk around the neighborhood, but it was too soon and it hurt too much so he went back to the loft.

That Friday afternoon he borrowed Cobin's membership card which was lying on the kitchen counter. He couldn't do much with his lower body but at least he could keep his upper body in shape. He'd already noticed his abs were less visible and his belly was softer. A broken leg didn't mean he should get complacent.

It was a good thing Cobin had taken him shopping for some clothes at the thrift store (it was the only way Byron would have allowed him to pay). He grabbed some comfortable clothes to wear at the gym.

The gym was mostly empty. Two girls were using the treadmills, and Byron recognized them as two of the girls he saw in the elevator when he first started living there. He tried to ignore them but they stayed in front of him, distracting in their tight white T-shirts and tiny—purple for one and pink for the other—shorts. They had nothing to interest him but it wasn't like they were leaving room for his imagination. He kind of wished they would cover themselves, especially since he'd forced himself to pretend he enjoyed such a view for so long. Some habits died hard.

They stopped their workout, and as they wiped the sweat from their necks, Byron made sure he wasn't looking their way. He didn't want them to think they could approach him.

Luckily, a young man started using the treadmill next to him and Byron moved quickly. If he was already talking to someone, there was less chance of getting chatted up by the girls.

Irvine was only a couple years older than Byron, new in the building, and was at the gym to lose some twenty pounds. He looked too juvenile with his sandy blond hair and oval clean-shaven face to attract Byron, but he was nice and fun to talk to. Byron gave him some pointers for a more effective training session.

The two girls passed near them. One had an obvious disgust for Irvine but sent Byron a bright smile, brushing her hand on his side. Byron stepped away from her and closer to Irvine.

If Irvine noticed, he didn't say anything about it. Byron gave him some more advice, laughing at some of his funnier comments, and started a new series of arm extensions.

"I was thinking, after you're done here, maybe you'd like to get a coffee or something."

"Oh. You mean like a date?" Byron asked.

Byron had never been on a date before. Not like that anyway. Things with Truman were based on stolen moments in the apartment, and the few “dates” he had with girls were more excruciating than anything else.

“You’re not gay are you?” Now Irvine looked afraid. “I’m sorry, pretend I didn’t say anything.”

“It’s not that, it’s just, it’s—complicated.”

Irvine sent him a crooked smile, a conversational “isn’t it always?” and went to work on another set.

Byron completed his workout shortly after that. He waved at Irvine and received a “see you later” in return.

Cobin was awake when Byron came back from the gym. He’d been asleep when he left, as he had worked the midnight-to-noon shift for the last three days. He looked less tired than Byron would have expected, considering the lack of sleep he had.

“Already up?”

Cobin didn’t usually wake until at least eight p.m. when he worked the night shift. “Not if I want to shift back to a normal schedule. Plus, I have to be at my mom’s house by five. You want to come?”

“To your mom’s?”

“Yes. For some reason, she insisted on hosting Nathan’s birthday party.”

“I wouldn’t want to intrude.”

“If you knew my mother, you’d know that’s pretty much a fallacy. She has probably invited a million people already. What’s one more?”

Cobin’s mother lived one town over in an old suburban neighborhood where all the houses were the same: bricked single-story rectangular houses. Byron was pretty much certain the interiors were the same too.

Byron heard music and loud voices before they got to the backyard. They went directly to the off-white picket fence with the peeling paint.

A woman Byron recognized from one of the pictures in Cobin's loft hurried over to them. She went directly to Byron. "Oh you poor boy, don't stand like that. Sit. Sit. You don't want to hurt your leg more."

Cobin reached to pull his mother back. "He's fine Mom. As his doctor, I can guarantee you he'll survive standing."

"Don't be an ingrate. Let me take care of the poor boy and go wish Nat a happy birthday."

Byron was smiling at Cobin when he said, "I could really use a seat. My leg is killing me."

"Says the guy who was at the gym less than an hour ago."

Byron was surprised to have the conversation broken by a small hand touching his healthy leg. A boy, probably no older than four, was pulling on his cargo shorts.

"Are you a robot?"

"Why would you ask that?"

The boy was serious, and even conspiratorially so, when he loudly whispered, "Your leg is hard."

As he was talking, he touched the cast, and Byron had a hard time keeping his expression serious with Ms. Shrenk and Cobin chuckling at his side. Byron didn't want to insult the boy, but his naïveté was funny.

"I was in an accident, so the doctor put a cast around my leg after it was hurt."

"Wow. My uncle is a doctor."

"I know. He's the one who put it there."

Byron thought he might be the baby from the picture and was probably talking about Cobin. And if he wasn't? Well it didn't really matter, did it?

The boy's eyes got bigger. "Can I draw on it?"

Byron was saved from answering by Cobin. "Not now, Sid."

“But I want to draw on it now.”

“Why don’t you let me meet some people and maybe after supper you can draw whatever you want.”

“Even monsters?”

“Even monsters.”

Satisfied, Sid ran to better things.

Cobin put a hand on Byron’s lower back. “You don’t have to do that.”

Byron shrugged. “The cast is off in a week and a half and no one’s gonna write anything on it anyway.”

“He’s not an artist.”

“He’s like what? Three? Four? Nobody’s good at that age.”

After that, one of the cops present noticed that the grill was smoking and he went to help but Ms. Shrenk pushed him away. Cobin showed Byron around, introducing him to the people he knew.

At some point, Nathan left a group of three uniformed officers and came over to them.

“How the hell did your mother get all those people here? I don’t think you know even half of them.” He nodded at Byron. “Hey, kid.”

“Probably handed out invitations at the station.”

Byron nodded back. “Hey, old man.”

The meal was delicious. Steak, hot potatoes, homemade gravy, and salad. Some people came and went, and at some point while Ms. Shrenk was back in her kitchen preparing dessert, Sid drew on the cast. It was colorful and abstract but apparently so was Sid’s mind. Nathan and Cobin had been gone at that point, helping in the kitchen.

Byron didn’t mind staying with Sid and everyone else but he didn’t know anyone. He watched Sid and listened to the discussions around the table. He only spoke when included.

Byron's full attention was only claimed when the people present (mostly cops) talked about his two favorite persons. They all seemed to agree that the tension between them was palpable, but they all disagreed on when they would finally let it burn.

Byron raised his head on an impulse. "How much would you bet I can get them together before the end of the summer?"

It ignited the conversation with everyone taking sides on whether or not Byron could do it.

Uninterested with the results, Byron leaned closer to Sid. "What do you think, kid? Are Nathan and your Uncle made for each other?"

Sid completing a rainbow on his cast was all the imaginary answer he needed.

The following week, he checked the university website. He worked to get things sorted out and applied for a loan. He also applied for student housing because, frankly, he couldn't pay for a high-rent apartment, even if he could make up with Truman. He wasn't sure he wanted to. It's not like he was in love with Truman, or Byron wouldn't have been such an asshole to him, and he would actually miss him. He looked for a job in Rosetown, hoping he could stop freeloading on Cobin, and also emailed his old boss even though he didn't expect an answer. He got an interview on Friday, and another one on Saturday, but still hadn't had an answer from the boss.

On Tuesday Byron worked on his upper body at the gym, using his time to watch Cobin running on the track. He was watching Cobin's behind as he ran past him when Irvine got on the gym equipment next to him.

He had a spot of sweat under the armpit of his shirt and his towel hung around his neck. He pointed his chin in the direction Cobin had taken.

"Is that Mr. Complicated?"

"Sort of. He's in love with someone else."

"Sucks."

Irvine was doing his moves all wrong, so Byron corrected him. He still wasn't doing it correctly, so he left his bench to help him. Byron directed Irvine's elbow in a way that wouldn't hurt him when he heard cursing from behind. He turned his head and saw Cobin holding his foot and grimacing painfully.

Irvine nodded in direction of Cobin. "For someone who's in love with someone else, your man doesn't like me much."

Byron chuckled, trying not to get his hopes up. "That's because you haven't seen them together."

Later, Byron felt Cobin's eyes on him when they were in the elevator.

As soon as they stepped into the loft, Cobin lifted his T-shirt over his head and headed for the bathroom. Byron watched him head up the stairs as he sat on the couch. Percy jumped up on Byron to be rubbed while Horace peeked out from under the couch. With one hand on Percy's back, and his other under Horace's chin, he thought about what he needed to do to get Nathan and Cobin together.

It was torture to see Cobin come out of the bathroom, shirtless, with his towel hanging low over his hips. Those hips formed a V which made Byron fantasize about getting rid of the towel.

One of the advantages of living with a doctor was that he could do a small thing like getting rid of a cast, free of charge, even without valid insurance. Cobin had taken Byron to his office at the beginning of his shift, and now Byron had exercises for his leg that he could do once he returned to the loft.

Byron was about to take the bus when a police car stopped on the side of the road. Nathan told him to get in. He nodded at his partner, a man he briefly met at the birthday party, and got inside.

It was strange sitting in a police car, but at least this time, he wasn't there for public indecency. He'd been so drunk the night before he was to leave for

his father's house, he still couldn't believe he'd sunk so low. No wonder Truman had dumped his ass.

After they dropped Nathan's partner at the station and changed cars, Byron kneaded his leg.

"You're okay?"

"Post-cast fluffy leg that's all."

Byron knew the city just enough to realize after five minutes that they weren't going to Cobin's loft.

Nathan stopped on the side of the road not long after that. He left the car and invited Byron to follow.

Byron closed the door and looked around. It looked like any other neighborhood but every few shops displayed a rainbow flag. Byron wasn't sure what to expect, but it was obvious he'd been stupid to fear coming here the few times Truman had suggested it. He watched two men passing by, their hands in each other's pocket, laughing like any other couple, as if it was the most natural thing in the world.

Byron grinned with the realization that here it was the most natural thing in the world.

The thought of being this close to another man in public had seemed the worst possible thing only a few months ago, and now he was itching for it. Itching for the kind of connection the two men shared, for the freedom of doing the same.

"Ever been in this part of Rosetown?"

"Hell no."

"I assumed you'd like to celebrate. If you're too tired, we can go back to Cobin's."

"I couldn't be any less tired than right now. What is worth seeing around here?"

“Well, there’s a couple of great bars around but it’s pointless at this time of the evening. Some great boutiques and a sex shop where I buy, like, everything.”

Byron leaned forward, his touch lingering lightly on Nathan’s arm, “Sex shop, eh? Anything kinky you’d like to share?”

Nathan smiled back at him. “You have no idea.”

There was something quite exhilarating about flirting on the street, and kind of scary too, like he was making a statement or something. He liked the feeling. It was a rush, making him feel like he was on the field.

“Where are we going first?”

“You need new pants. The T-shirt will do, even though it says ‘I’m straight and got lost in Gay Town’, but the sweat pants? Really, they need to go.”

Byron faked being insulted but he had to admit he wasn’t at his sexiest. “And what do you propose?”

“One of my exes has a clothing line down the street that would be perfect for you.”

“And I won’t look like I got lost?”

“Oh, that? No.”

Byron had always made sure to look his straightest at all times, but if he was to live his life openly like he’d decided, he couldn’t hide behind his clothes anymore. It could be a new step into embracing who he was, like buying the panties had been.

It was time to embrace his real Byron.

The window showcased three male mannequins. One of them had tight yellow pants, a black “*Some people are gay, get over it*” T-shirt, and small sunglasses, while another modeled black leather pants, a white button-down shirt, and a black, leather sleeveless jacket. The third one was the one that caught Byron’s attention the most. The mannequin, even though obviously

male, was wearing a tight, sparkly, green dress, a red-haired wig and tall black high heels with some silver glitter on the heel. He just couldn't turn away from the scene.

“*Golden* has a drag queen section, if ever you're interested.”

Byron was powerless against the heat in his cheeks and the blush he was sure Nathan could see. He'd always been good at pretending he didn't notice women's clothing too much and getting caught *in flagrante delicto* was new to him. But when he faced Nathan there was no disgust, no expectation in his eyes. Byron realized Nathan was only expressing facts about the shop.

A small bell rang when they went inside, where Nathan was soon hugged by a skinny man wearing pink jeans and a white, almost transparent shirt. The man kissed Nathan on both cheeks, leaving a trace of his lipstick the color of his jeans.

The salesperson, Stephen, as introduced by Nathan, took one look at Byron and headed directly to the section next to them. He took a few pair of jeans and pants, all at least one or two sizes too small in Byron's opinion, and hurried Byron in the direction of the changing rooms. As they walked to the back of the shop, Stephen also picked out some T-shirts.

Left alone in the room, he changed, taking the first shirt and the first pants he had in the pile. He looked hideous in the mirror with the off-yellow pants and the red shirt.

Nathan laughed when he saw him come out, but Stephen just looked at him with a pensive face. He then turned to Nathan.

“When you said he was the gay anti-cliché, I wasn't expecting that much.”

“Hey, you have to give me a chance. I'm new to this.”

“New to what, sweetheart? Wearing clothes?”

Nathan gave Stephen a friendly nudge and Byron hopped on his feet, “New to the whole gay thing, you know.”

But Byron wasn't sure Stephen did know. The guy didn't have any qualms showing people he was gay. And Nathan wasn't shy about it either, from what

he'd seen. It seemed to excite Stephen though, who jumped up and down at the news. "An initiation. How fantastic!"

"How new exactly are you?"

Byron scratch his chin. "Fresh out of the closet I'd say."

"But you've been in a gay bar before, right?"

"Are you kidding? No. No. That would have made me gay. Which it turned out I am, but I didn't want to be."

"Okay, now sweetheart, you're going to go back inside the dressing room and try on this and this. You need to feel sexy tonight. You should always feel sexy. Now get rid of those clothes and let me choose something totally for you.

Of the stuff he already had chosen, Stephen kept one of the black pants but took all the shirts and came back with a black button-down shirt.

The pants fit. Sort of. But the line of his boxers was more than visible. Stephen shook his head and came back with some briefs.

"That should do."

The briefs were aqua blue with black elastic. He figured the size would do, but they didn't look quite right to Byron but he had no idea how to say it. He took them to add to his purchases even though he didn't want to, and he thought he hadn't made a big deal out of it, but Stephen just shook his head even more.

"You don't like them, sweetheart? Because those boxers won't work, but I do have more models and colors."

"No, they're fine. It's just briefs anyway."

Plus, he wasn't really expecting anyone to see them.

Stephen brushed him off. "Yeah, and then surprise, you end up in bed with some guy who can't stop laughing long enough to suck you off because your underwear is ridiculous."

Nathan leaned against the dressing room door while Stephen led Byron to the underwear display. The briefs were of all colors and shapes, some were man thongs and others were tight boxer-type briefs, but the display next to that had all sorts of more feminine choices. Lace. Satin. Cotton. All colors too. And Byron surprised himself by looking at them carefully and reaching out his hand to touch.

“I see we’ve found your style.”

It was tempting. Byron had to admit that, but he didn’t know how to do it. This time he couldn’t pretend it was for his girlfriend; he had to admit he wanted them.

When they got back to the changing room, Byron was happy to see that Nathan had left and was now occupied in the shoe department. Stephen took his old clothes from the dressing room, and told him to get into the panties.

“It’ll be my treat.” Stephen said as he winked suggestively.

The panties were black, laced with a pink ribbon going through the stitching and forming a bow on the side. They felt wonderful on his thighs, better than the ones he’d bought. They were a good size, unlike the old ones, and his cock felt better inside them. He turned his upper body to get a good look at his ass. The black lace was covering half his cheeks and it was beautiful.

“I could, like, stay in them forever.”

It earned him a chuckle from Stephen. “They are made for comfort and sexiness. You won’t find that in any women’s store.”

Byron resisted the impulse to tell him to talk quieter and put the pants back on. This time there were no marks, or at least nothing visible.

He took a big breath and left the dressing room.

“Nathan! Come see this.”

Nathan turned around. He nodded and smiled. “Wow. He’ll take it.”

“Of course he will.”

Byron didn't think he could get away with not buying anything, but he hoped it wasn't as pricey as he thought it was. "Okay, so I'm just going to—"

He was reaching for his old clothes in Stephen's hands, but Stephen shook his head. "You're not getting those clothes back. Keep them in the car while you guys go out."

Stephen twisted his hand in the air, and Byron turned around. He was stopped with his back to Nathan and Stephen. Stephen snatched the ticket from the shirt and did the same with the pants. As he lingered, he leaned in to whisper, "You'll make some boy incredibly happy."

He winked, and Byron blushed.

Then Stephen was moving away from him, and they were heading to the front desk.

The air had cooled down outside, and the sun was setting. Byron felt pumped and happy, ready for the next part of the evening. Confidence was radiating from him.

"It's eight already, and I don't know about you, but I'm hungry. There's a great place down the road," Nathan said.

The place in question was a steak house and was packed. They were told there was a forty-five minute wait, but that they could wait at the bar.

They both got a beer, and sat at one of the stools. Because the place was also a restaurant, the music wasn't so loud that they couldn't hear themselves talk.

"Are all your exes like Stephen?"

"What do you mean?"

"You know. He's not—Damn. He's a—"

"A queen?"

"Yeah."

Byron couldn't have been more relieved to have Nathan help him out because none of the descriptions he could come up with to describe Stephen were nice, and he couldn't say them to describe Stephen. He'd been nothing but great, not even telling Nathan about the panties.

"A lot of them are, I guess." Nathan said.

"Well, it's no wonder Cobin thinks he's not your type."

"What?"

"Nothing. I was just saying it was your type."

"You wondered what my type was?"

Byron picked up on the rising tension. Nathan was too close to him to be casual. Despite the typical bar scents in the air, he could smell a lingering scent of oranges. He licked his lips unconsciously. "Maybe. But since I'm not your type..."

Nathan leaned even closer, the corner of his mouth close to Byron's. "Maybe you're more my type than you think."

Byron was close to moving his head sideways and kissing him, letting himself be transported by the moment. His heart beat in his chest like it wanted to run a marathon, but Byron needed to stop before he did something he'd regret tomorrow. He couldn't let his hormones get in the way of Cobin and Nathan's getting together.

"What about Cobin?"

Nathan stepped back, and Byron ignored the letdown flashing in his eyes, or his own feeling of longing.

"Yeah, you're definitely his type."

"No, I meant for you? Is he part of your type too?"

Nathan was amused now, and he held his laughter. "What makes you think there's something between us? He's just a friend."

"Or so he says, but the looks you give each other? They can't be missed."

“I think you drank too much.”

Byron moved his beer so Nathan wouldn't touch it and his other hand stopped Nathan as he leaned in. His hand felt right on Nathan's chest. They looked into each others' eyes—Nathan's were deep brown—with Byron's hand on his chest, he was close enough to kiss easily.

“Sorry to disturb you, sirs, but we have a table ready for you.”

Byron used the interruption to leave his stool and follow the girl.

With the table in between them, Byron hoped it would limit the touching and near kisses but it didn't stop Nathan from rubbing his foot on Byron's ankle.

As the drinks flowed, tongues loosened, and they chitchatted over the meal. Byron talked about his mother and his sister, both of whom he missed, and Nathan told him about his own family and how awful they'd been after he was forced out of the closet back home.

Byron also told Nathan about how, when he got to Rosetown, he refused to hide who he was anymore and then told him that no one knew he was gay at the university.

Nathan opened up about meeting Cobin after a bullet grazed his arm while stopping a robbery. How they'd ended up at Cobin's loft for the most awkward almost-sex possible and been friends ever since.

They had fun, mostly, and knowing more about Nathan's and Cobin's past together was both a torture and a good thing. He still believed they were made for each other. One attempt at a one-night stand three years ago didn't mean all hope was gone. Maybe they just needed a little push.

At that moment, his final plan took shape in his mind.

Byron and Nathan got to the club around eleven, and Byron used the time Nathan spent to get them beer to text Cobin. He wasn't expecting any answer until the end of his shift, but he was hoping Cobin would join them. What better way to unleash hormones than on an oversexed sweaty dance floor?

After sending the text, he enjoyed some flirtatious dancing with a short blond guy until Nathan came back. The guy understood the cues and left them.

Nathan nodded in the direction of the blond. “You won’t hit that?” he asked.

He picked up his beer and slid over to Nathan, moving his body closer than necessary. He put his arm around Nathan’s neck as he said in his ear, “I have everything I need right here.”

Nathan’s arms swept him off his feet, locking their chests together, and then Nathan kissed him.

Nathan’s lips were hot and plump and Byron opened up to him. Then some guy slid between them facing Byron, but he spoke to Nathan. “Hey cutie, want some of this ass?”

He ground his ass against Nathan’s front, but before Nathan could do anything, Byron was pushing him to the side.

“He’s with me, moron. Find your own guy, fucktard.”

Byron thought the guy was going to attack him, and Byron was ready to defend himself, but Nathan dragged him away. “He’s not worth getting arrested for.”

They went further into the club. Nathan turned him so they’d continue dancing. Byron stood on tiptoes and kissed him again. The kiss wasn’t sweet. It ignited passions in Byron and he moaned. The club didn’t have much appeal now that all he needed was a bed.

His phone vibrated in his back pocket, interrupting the kiss. Byron groaned. “It must be Cobin. I told him to come here after his shift.” He checked the text, which was Cobin asking if they still wanted him. Byron wanted to smile because Cobin had no idea how they wanted him. “I’m going to tell him to come.”

He ignored the disappointment in Nathan’s demeanor and after the text was sent, pulled Nathan into a kiss. He liked that he was the one reaching out,

making the first move, but it was so much better having Nathan take total control of the kiss.

They were dancing when Cobin appeared in the crowd. Byron grinned and waved. Byron got both arms around Cobin's neck and gave him a chaste kiss near his lips before backing up into Nathan. Byron reached for Cobin's hands and pulled him to them.

"Come dance with us."

"Is he drunk?" Cobin asked Nathan.

"He only had three beers, two of them when we ate."

"Maybe he's a lightweight."

Byron rolled his eyes. "I'm here, you know, and I'm not drunk. Maybe a little tipsy, but not drunk. Now dance with us."

Cobin sent him a pointed glare that went right to Byron's cock. He was so getting laid tonight.

He took Nathan's hand in his and reached for Cobin, and then he brought the two men against him. He put Nathan's hand on his waist and Cobin's against his neck. He liked feeling Nathan's pectorals against his back and the way he fit just perfectly in between the two men.

He brushed his lips against Cobin's and Nathan got closer, kissing his neck and rocking his hard cock against his ass. Cobin moved his arms, forcing Nathan to move his, and Byron closed his eyes. He let himself be rocked in a complex dance of possession between Cobin and Nathan until his cock was pushing against the panties and getting them all wet.

"What's the closest?" His voice shuddered from desire. He kissed Cobin, "Your loft?" and turned to Nathan to ask, "Or your house?"

They both looked confused.

"Do you need a drawing? The closest bed, where is it?"

They both agreed that the loft was the closest. Byron grabbed their hands and led them outside where he got a cab. He pushed both men into the cab and Cobin gave his address.

Byron snuggled up to Nathan, forcing him as close to Cobin as possible.

Byron couldn't wait to get to the apartment to see them together. "Kiss." Nathan leaned toward him, but Byron turned his cheek. "No. Him."

The internal lightbulb lit up in Cobin's eyes but Nathan commented, "Then you should have sat next to him."

"No, dummy, he means us." And then Cobin leaned toward Nathan and kissed him.

Byron watched Nathan relax into the kiss, submitting to it for a second, before taking control again. It was like their tongues fought, their passion igniting the car as they started groping each other like teenagers.

It was hot as hell, but it didn't stop the ping in his stomach, despite Nathan's hand lying on his thigh.

They stopped kissing when the driver coughed, and Nathan followed Byron outside while Cobin paid. Byron pulled him into a kiss, making sure they both knew he meant to be part of tonight. Thinking of tomorrow was not an option right now, as it threatened to ruin the mood.

When they entered the elevator, Byron watched their reactions as he slipped between them. Neither of them seemed to mind, so Byron moved his hands into each of their pockets.

Nathan pushed Byron against the door and kissed him.

Cobin *tsk-tsked*. "My turn."

Nathan stepped to the side, letting Cobin lean on Byron and kiss him. Byron opened his mouth, happy for Cobin's presence in front of him and of Nathan's hand in his.

Cobin unlocked the loft while Nathan was kissing Byron's neck, and then Cobin led the way to his bedroom.

Byron followed Cobin with Nathan at his back.

Byron hadn't had time to look into the bedroom before Nathan pushed him against the one-way mirror. Nathan devoured his neck while Byron was leaning on the wall looking toward the empty living room. He could see the image of his own faded reflection, his eyes lost in the moment.

Cobin whispered in Nathan's ear that he wanted to see him too, so Nathan backed up and Byron turned his back to the living room. Cobin grabbed Nathan's pants and pulled him backwards until they hit the bed and fell on it. Byron was waiting for something. *Anything.*

"Undress." Cobin's order made Byron shiver.

Yes. That. Exactly what he wanted. He reached for his zipper.

"The shirt first."

He did, and then he unbuttoned and unzipped his pants. The pink ribbon showed up and Byron realized he would have to show them the panties. He stopped a second, but by then he was too far gone. His heart was beating fast; his cock was about to explode. Nothing else really mattered.

He got his pants down to his knees and stepped out of them. Byron stood slightly shaking before them and he reached to get out of the panties too.

"Wait. Come here."

Weak on his legs, he followed orders. When he was in front of them, Cobin told him to come closer until he had Nathan's right leg and Cobin's left between his own.

Cobin gave him a kiss through the panties but it was nothing like the touch he was craving. Nathan did the same and then they each put two fingers into their side of the panties and slid them down his legs.

His cock bobbed free. Nathan licked his lips and glanced at Cobin. Cobin nodded and Nathan reached for Byron's cock. His hand was wrapped around it

and Byron arched his back to get more contact. Nathan stroked him. Byron closed his eyes for a second, his head leaning backward with the pleasure and, when he opened his eyes, Cobin had backed up on the bed and gotten lube and condoms from the nightstand.

The shivers that took over Byron could have been from the fresh air on his naked skin, or from excitement. He didn't know. Cobin came back to the edge of the bed on his knees and kissed Byron. Nathan took Byron by the waist and directed his body to the side. Cobin shifted to match Byron's movement. Byron placed his hand behind Cobin's neck, getting closer. When his cock was engulfed by Nathan's wet mouth, Byron started in surprise. Cobin smiled against his lips and went right back to kissing him.

Byron moaned and broke the kiss to watch Nathan deep-throating him. Their eyes locked together and Nathan stepped back. Nathan brought Byron's lips to his and Byron could taste himself.

While they were kissing, Byron heard a zipper opening, and with Nathan's hand on his neck and lower back, he knew that Cobin was the one undressing. When his kiss with Nathan ended, he turned slightly to watch Cobin. He was lying on the bed, completely naked. He was stroking himself. He was cut, long and thick, and his balls were as smooth as the rest of his body.

At his back, Nathan was kissing his neck and gently pushing him towards the bed. His knees buckled on the edge and he fell forward in between Cobin's legs. He crawled closer as Cobin stopped stroking himself. Cobin looked at him and Byron knew instinctively what he was meant to do in this instant. He licked Cobin's cock, appreciating the moans he got from him. Cobin's hand on his head was brushing his hair but wasn't forcing him down on his cock. After what the truck driver tried to do to him, he appreciated that. Once or twice, an involuntary movement from Cobin made his cock hit the back of Byron's throat but Nathan's hand on his back and ass was enough to relax him again.

Cobin pulled him up for a kiss and their cocks brushed together. At the same time, Nathan spread his cheeks and licked. Byron yelled out but leaned into the kiss. He'd never allowed anyone to do something so intimate but, *oh*

God, was it good. A finger joined the tongue and Byron thought he was going to come at that moment.

Cobin reached for the condoms and the lube. He rolled the condom on Byron's cock and put some lube on the condom and on his fingers. He then gave the bottle and another condom to Nathan.

Nathan moved and Byron knew he was undressing but he was all too captivated by Cobin's fingers going in and out of his own ass.

Byron moved closer to Cobin, leaning above him, and kissed him. Cobin grabbed his ass with his two hands and pulled him in. Cobin closed his eyes and moaned as Byron was entering him. Byron stroked slowly until he lost his rhythm when he felt Nathan's cock poking his own entrance.

He forced himself to relax, abandoning Cobin for a second, but Nathan didn't move forward.

"You bottomed before, right?"

Byron had a hard time thinking with his cock in Cobin, but he forced a "yeah" out of his mouth.

Nathan kissed his back and pushed his hips, but his cock didn't enter him. He did it a couple of times, getting Byron back into his tempo inside Cobin. Byron groaned, his breath harsh, and Nathan finally pushed into him, matching the tempo.

Byron dug his nose in Cobin's neck as the dual sensations became too much. He was so close to coming he couldn't think of anything else.

Then Cobin reached for Nathan's neck and kissed him, hard and perfect, with Byron only watching from the corner of his eyes. Nathan froze and came, and only then did Byron allow himself to come too. His balls tightened, the blood pulsed through him, and the orgasm was nothing like he had ever experienced before. Cobin followed right after them.

Nathan rolled to the left, and Byron did the same to the right, with Cobin in the middle. Their condoms were ditched into the garbage. Byron tried to get

his breathing under control. He turned his head to see Nathan and Cobin were still kissing.

Reality came back to him. He smiled sadly. He had no place here in this bed. They belonged together. He knew that when he'd called Cobin at the club. He sat on the edge of the bed, ready to clean Cobin's come coating his chest and leave the guys together. He put his hands on the side to push himself to stand when a hand touched his shoulder.

"Where you going?" Cobin asked; his touch and his after-sex voice sent shivers through Byron's body.

"To my bed."

"Stay."

It was an order Byron was happy to follow, and Cobin pulled him back between them.

Nathan and Cobin fell asleep rapidly but Byron couldn't. His eyes were burning as they darted around the bedroom. He slid away from their heated embrace. The alarm clock on the nightstand read that it was only six thirty, which was early considering they went to sleep around five. He grabbed his pants and T-shirt but he couldn't find his panties without opening the curtain and risking waking them up.

He put some water in Horace's bowl and some food into Percy's. Horace came purring, rubbing his leg, but when he bent to caress him, he ran. He grabbed the few things he had laying around the living room and put them in his backpack. Percy was sitting on the couch. Byron went over to him, kissing his muzzle. The dog licked his cheek and Byron let a strangled sound escape him.

He wrote a letter thanking Cobin for everything and Nathan for the friendship and for saving him. He wished them a good life together and for their romance to continue.

He gave the loft a once-over, picked up his bag, and left. In the hall, he leaned on the door and closed his eyes a minute. He took a deep breath and headed for the elevator.

The street was wet, but the sun was shining down on him. A rainbow crossed the blue sky. Grabbing the old pamphlet for the shelter from the front pocket of his bag, he checked the address. The building door opened and Byron turned by reflex.

Irvine was there with a garbage bag.

“You okay?”

Byron, from having seen himself in the large mirror in the loft, knew that he looked like shit. His eyes were red from tiredness and his stomach threatened to empty itself.

“The cast’s off so it’s time for me to go.”

“What about your complicated situation?”

“They’re together now. I’m not needed anymore.”

“The bastards!”

Byron laughed but not wholeheartedly. “It wasn’t meant to be.”

“Where are you going to go?”

“There’s a shelter close by. I don’t know. I’ll figure something out.”

There was no trace of flirtation when Irvine offered to let him stay at his apartment, but he still didn’t think he could do it. Not with Cobin and Nathan living in the same building.

“I’ve got a job lined up already, but thanks.”

On a whim, he hugged Irvine and wished him good luck with his training. Byron left the parking lot without looking back. It wasn’t an easy thing to do, on the contrary, his whole body was telling him to go back to the loft but he didn’t want to come between Cobin and Nathan.

Instead, he headed for downtown. His feet hurt by the time he found the shelter. The woman who welcomed him was nice and didn't push too much for information. She gave him rules and instructions about the place.

She told him that the breakfast would soon start, and that if he wanted, he could help distribute it or just mingle with the other homeless youth.

Byron ended up talking and eating with a sixteen-year-old trans guy whose parents kicked him out two months ago. They bonded over shared experiences, talking about family, but Byron avoided talking about his romantic entanglement all together.

And then his resolution not to think about Cobin or Nathan was shattered by Cobin appearing in front of them. Byron spit out his water.

They ended up talking outside where no one would hear them.

“You don't want me around while you're building som—”

“You don't get to tell me what I want, you know.”

“You're in love with Nathan. I don't want to get in the middle of that.”

“I have feelings for him, best friend feelings, but I'm not in love.”

“You are. You just can't admit it.”

Cobin rolled his eyes. “Fine. Maybe I am, but it doesn't mean I'm going to put you on the street.”

“It's not so bad, you know. It just needs some getting used to.”

Cobin's work cell phone rang and he checked the number. “It's Nathan.”

Byron's smile was sad when he told him to answer, and as he turned to leave, Cobin put a hand on his shoulder and forced him to face him again.

“I found him... Yes, at the one on Second... Yes, see you soon.”

“I really like both of you and I want you to be happy,” Byron said before Cobin could say a word, “but please, don't make me watch.”

“We wouldn't.”

The kiss was unexpected and Byron wished he had the will to push him away but instead he responded to the kiss.

“We talked about it and we do want you in the middle. Nathan will tell you. *We* want you to stay.”

“I—”

Byron’s “can’t” locked in his throat when Nathan got out of a taxi. Nathan launched himself at Byron, grabbed his shoulder, and gave him a bear hug.

Nathan released Byron from the strong embrace but kept his arms around him.

Cobin put an arm around Nathan. “I’m still trying to convince him.”

“You’ve got to stay,” was Nathan’s way of convincing him, that and cupping his face and kissing him hard.

An old man passing near them sneered and the three of them took a step back. Byron felt his face reddening. PDA in a straight part of town wasn’t the same as PDA in the gay neighborhood. He beat the shame in his gut with a bat and took it on himself to face the two men who already meant so much to him.

“I’ll stay, but only until my flight leaves. After that I’m gone for good. And I sleep on the couch.”

“Deal!”

EPILOGUE

Byron was thrown back into reality by an elbow in his rib. He jerked in his uncomfortable wooden chair and faced his professor who was standing next to him.

“I’m sorry, what was the question again?”

Professor Goldbarth sighed, disappointed, and repeated his question.

Daydreaming was nothing new for Byron. The first time he’d been in one of Goldbarth’s classes, he’d been fantasizing about reprimands and desk sex

with the gorgeous six-foot-six professor. The fantasy still visited him from time to time, but it was nothing compared to what would happen after graduation when he'd be able to see Cobin and Nathan again.

They talked on the phone and Skyped. They hadn't seen each other in person since spring break and Byron was itching to see them again. Only one week of exams to go and he would be done with his degree and back in Rosetown.

He already had a part-time job at the local gym—not the one at Cobin's loft since he sold that last year and was now living with Nathan in his house—and a conditional job at St. Rose High School's Sports Club.

He was ready. Ready to live his life without compromise to who he was. Ready to push his own boundaries. Ready to give a shot to his relationship with Cobin and Nathan because they were worth it. He was worth it. He knew, in his gut, in his heart, that he belonged with those men. He belonged *to* them. And he had just the thing for showing them.

Byron made the effort to concentrate on the class for the rest of the day, but his mind kept wandering to Cobin and Nathan.

At the end of class, he packed up his books and headed for the dorms. He had a small bedroom, with just enough space for a bed and a desk, but it was all he was able to afford for himself. Truman had told him he could stay, but he hadn't thought it was a good idea, and at the end it had been the right choice.

That way, they'd been able to stay civil toward each other, and they were now in a place where they could call each other friends without bitterness.

He had just enough time to take a shower before his meeting downtown.

Truman was nothing like Cobin or Nathan, and Byron knew that even if he had been able to admit to being gay when they met, he never would have been happy with Truman. They didn't have much in common outside of sex, and even then, their kinks weren't complementary.

They shook hands as Truman pulled Byron toward him, and they both slapped the other's back.

“So you're still doing this?”

Each artist had their own private stall and Truman brought him out back to his and showed him the stencil. “Still what you want?”

Byron nodded as he unbuttoned his jeans. Truman had seen plenty of his body, and Byron didn't think twice about it. That was, until Truman raised an eyebrow. He realized then that he was wearing his standard black-lace panties. He fought the blush that threatened to embarrass him.

“What?” Almost in defiance, he got rid of the panties and lay on the plastic-protected bench.

“Nothing.” Truman gathered his things. “I didn't judge when you got into something as complicated as a threesome. I'm not going to do it because you happen to cross-dress. Now be ready, I'm going to start.”

“Thanks man.”

It wasn't a particularly complex tattoo, so it wasn't as painful as he had thought it would be. Truman slapped his non-tattooed cheek and told him to get dressed. Truman gave him some privacy to check out the tattoo, but when Byron tried to pay him Truman refused for old time's sake.

Byron was packing up all of his possessions. The exams were over, and it was graduation night. The results of the last exams weren't out yet, so it was symbolic. Thinking that neither his mother, his father, nor Amber, would make it to the ceremony was gut-wrenching, but he shook it off by looking forward to seeing Cobin and Nathan again.

Byron was zipping his last bag when his cell phone vibrated.

“Here” was the only word on Nathan's text, and Byron grinned. Nathan's texts were legendarily short and cryptic.

Byron picked up his wallet and overnight bag. They tried to sleep on campus the first time they visited, but three grown men on a single bed? It just didn't work. The hotel would be just perfect.

Byron was so happy to see them that he didn't mind leaning up between the front seats to kiss both men. He was barely back in his seat when Cobin drove off.

As Byron tried to unlock the hotel room door, Nathan squeezed him up against it. Cobin followed calmly behind and, as Byron was walking into the room, he pulled Byron's T-shirt to his midsection before Cobin stopped Nathan.

"Not so fast, sweetheart. Don't undress him until he gets his surprise."

Byron turned on his heels. "I get a surprise?"

"A graduation gift of sorts. Yes."

"I thought you guys were my graduation gift."

Cobin's face softened before getting commanding. And, as always, it gave Byron the shivers.

"Sit on the bed and close your eyes."

Byron opened his mouth to complain but resigned himself to sitting on the bed.

After hearing someone digging through stuff for a while, he felt a hand on his thigh. Someone—Byron guessed Nathan because of his build—sat next to him, and a pair of hands—probably Cobin's, since Nathan was holding him—took off his shoes and socks. At the same time, Nathan's hand unbuttoned his pants. With his free hand around Byron's neck, Nathan turned Byron's face and kissed him. Oh yes, that was definitely Nathan's full lips against his.

Without ever opening his eyes, he raised his ass to let Cobin get rid of his pants. He left the panties in place. The kiss ended and Nathan finally got rid of Byron's shirt.

Naked, with nothing but his panties on, Byron was dying to look. Nathan's hand was playing with his nipple and he was kissing his neck. Cobin kissed the inside of his thigh, and then he felt his feet sliding into a pair of shoes.

“Open your eyes.”

Byron did, and saw them—silver, with pink and purple swirls, high heels, and fine silver leather straps. They sparkled on his feet. He liked them. They were beautiful, feminine, high heels. Unlike the secret underwear, they were visible for all to see. But here, in front of Cobin and Nathan, the outside world didn't matter.

He twisted his feet in front of him. Cobin stood and stepped back. Cobin held out a hand to help him but, never having worn high heels before, Byron was shaky on his feet.

He sat back into Nathan's arms and had his neck sucked.

“Are they the right size?”

“Yeah. I just never wore anything like that.”

Cobin didn't say anything; he just kneeled and opened Byron's legs. Nathan stepped to the side and joined Cobin on the ground.

Nathan moved aside the panties and Byron's cock appeared, hard and leaking already. Byron moaned when Nathan licked the length. He wanted to touch them so badly, but every time he reached to touch, Cobin would slap his hand away. He would have begged if he had thought it would have help get relief.

Then Cobin pulled Nathan away, and the begging “pleases” slipped out of Byron.

“Turn around, and get your knees on the ground.”

Byron did, his cock rubbing on the corner of the bed. His panties were pulled off and then nothing. No touching, no licking, nothing, and Byron realized what they saw—“*Property of Cobin and Nathan*” tattooed across his ass in black letters.

“I don’t want it to end,” he said, not sure if he meant the tattoo, the scene right now, or both.

Nathan pulled him up by the waist. Byron stood, despite the high heels, and accepted the kiss. Cobin joined them for a hug and kissed Byron too. “It’s not going to end.”

Nathan said the same thing. He even added that he would do anything to honor the tattoo.

It filled Byron with pride, joy, and arousal. “Are you going to fuck me now? I’m dying here.”

Cobin laughed wholeheartedly, and Nathan pushed him against the bed.

“Be careful with what you wish for, kid.”

“Cause you ain’t seen nothin’ yet.”

Byron’s eyes twinkled. “My body is yours to do what you want with it, old men, and you just talk, and talk, and talk.”

Then Cobin was on him, and when Cobin was on him, Nathan wasn’t far behind.

As he was swept into a world of love and desire, he thought that this moment in time was just the perfect beginning for his life.

THE END

Author Bio

MC Houle is a Canadian writer who fell in love with M/M fiction at fourteen and never looked back. Fluent in both English and French, her interests outside of writing include, but are not limited to: foreign culture and cooking, traveling, science, swimming, and digital art.

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