

LOVE Has NO Boundaries



Don't Read in the Closet Event 2013

ONE MORE DANCE

Nicole Dennis

Contents

Love Has No Boundaries 3

ONE MORE DANCE 6

Dedication..... 7

CHAPTER 1 8

CHAPTER 2..... 15

CHAPTER 3..... 21

CHAPTER 4..... 33

CHAPTER 5..... 41

Author Bio 43

Love Has No Boundaries

An M/M Romance series

ONE MORE DANCE

By Nicole Dennis

Introduction

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

What Is Love Has No Boundaries?

The *Goodreads M/M Romance Group* invited members to choose a photo and pen a letter asking for a short M/M romance story inspired by the image; authors from the group were encouraged to select a letter and write an original tale. The result was an outpouring of creativity that shone a spotlight on the special bond between M/M romance writers and the people who love what they do.

A written description of the image that inspired this story is provided along with the original request letter. If you'd like to view the photo, please feel free to join the [Goodreads M/M Romance Group](#) and visit the discussion section: *Love Has No Boundaries*.

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

Words of Caution

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

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

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ONE MORE DANCE

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Photo Description

Blond-haired man in a full side split, gazing off to the left.

Story Letter

Dear Author,

Dancing used to be this guy's only purpose in life and he wanted to keep it that way. So how does a certain someone make him crave more?

I'd prefer a longish story without D/s!

Sincerely,

Anni__

Story Info

Genre: contemporary

Tags: former military, hurt/comfort, men with pets, performing arts, reestablished lovers, PTSD

Word count: 12,043

Dedication

With my love and thanks to Anni___ for the wonderful prompt and picture. Also to Jaymi and Nancy for the hard part of editing my rather late entry. Thanks to the wonderful crew at the M/M Romance Group for putting together these wonderful events. Hugs!

ONE MORE DANCE

By Nicole Dennis

CHAPTER 1

The music soared through the theater, infusing the dancers with additional energy and the strength to push through the last act of the performance. The *premier danseur noble* of the company rushed out across the stage, meeting the other male dancer. In a slow spiral, they twirled, jumped, and tiptoed around each other as they moved in opposite directions around the circle.

Their eyes locked on each other, watching the grace, the rippling muscles, and the gleam of sweat on their bare chests as they moved—all the potential of a pair of large felines trapped within their muscles. At one point, they pirouetted in different directions, but ended with their chests together, their hands moving over each other, before the rest of the company swept in on either side of them. In choreographed motion, the company pulled and moved the pair of lovers apart, though they fought in the dance.

Across the stage, all of their bodies became instruments of profound drama. They were trained to deliver emotion through intricate, beautiful movements and choreography. Precision. Grace. Versatility. Power.

The prima ballerina circled the principal, taking him away from the other male, as she moved him and the audience on a journey into the heart and soul of their partnership. She curled an arm around him and he raised her into a soft, easy lift to begin their *pas de deux*, a combination of intricate ballet movements mixed in with the modern and lyrical steps the choreographer was using. Within the shadows of the stage, the other male watched behind a connected wall of other dancers.

Together, the prima ballerina and principal's complex steps, graceful lifts and spins covered most of the stage. Her sheer skirt flowed around her long legs as well as his arms and body, hiding him from the other male dancer. He wore a pair of skin-tight pants in a soft fawn color that ended below his knees.

His male partner wore the same pants, but in a darker tone, proclaiming him the darkness to the principal's light and airy personality throughout the performance.

As their *pas de deux* ended with the final lifts and spins, he ended by facing the other male—who rushed forward, through the barrier of bodies, and reached for him. They circled around each other again and engaged for the last riveting minutes of the dance. Arms locked around each other as they embraced, cuddled, and then shoved apart. They danced and twirled in opposite directions, the female rushed into the middle, and the dance ended with the males reaching for each other while the female curled around the principal dancer's back.

Bright lights and a flurry of music ended in endless silence as the stage went dark around their final positions. All of them breathed hard after two and half hours of dancing. The roar of the appreciative, loving crowd filled the theater with their applause, cries of *bravo* and *bellissimo* and other praise for the opening night of the new performance.

Once the curtains closed to prepare for the turns to take their bows, the dancers and extras filled the stage. Everyone hugged one another as they celebrated their passion, the dance.

Exhausted but energized at the same time, every muscle aching and protesting, Jerome Alexander broke away from the other dancers. His thirty-eight-year-old body groaned with the beginnings of arthritis in his joints as he moved. He wouldn't be able to do a performance a night every night for much longer. Still, he managed to get through this difficult dance and this was something to celebrate. A wide grin of pleasure stretched across his face as he met the gazes of his two partners. He hugged and kissed the lady, Veronika, on her cheek.

"You were beautiful, as always, my dear," he said.

Veronika laughed and wrapped her arms around his neck as he twirled her. "You... You were unbelievable. What got into you at the end?"

Jerome shrugged a shoulder after letting her down. He laughed when he was forced a step forward when their third partner, Marcelo, enclosed him in a big bear hug which lifted him off his feet as the man squished him. With Marcelo over six feet four inches, Jerome felt tiny even though he was five eleven.

“What got into you? I thought you were going to pounce and jump my bones,” Marcelo said when he let him down.

“You know me... Playing the part of a torn lover,” Jerome said with another careless shrug. He accepted a towel from one of the stagehands with a nod of thanks and wiped the sweat off his face, neck and chest. He then took the offered water bottle for a long sip of cold water.

The stagehand also held out a pair of pills to help his aching joints. With a grimace at another sign of his age, Jerome took them and swallowed them with more water. The young stagehand smiled.

“It was more intense than anything we rehearsed before,” Marcelo said.

There was a reason the dance was intense. Jerome knew he wasn't dancing for Marcelo, but someone else who'd been in his thoughts for the past few months. Especially at this point of time of his career when he began to wonder if he could continue to dance. Before Jerome could say anything, the stage manager clapped her hands once.

“Places everyone! Places for the curtain call!” she said and everyone fell in lines.

The stagehand raced around, gathered all the bottles and towels, and ran off into the wing as the curtain began to rise.

The trio of dancers who led the entire performance stood in the back, joined hands with Veronika in the middle. When the main lines moved to the sides and back, they stepped forward and bowed together to another raucous standing ovation. The men let Veronika take another step ahead of them, graceful with her curtsies. She turned and accepted a large bouquet of fresh deep red roses from the choreographer and her husband, Clinton. She gave him

a kiss, to everyone's delight. Then she stepped back and let the two males step forward.

The entire audience erupted into louder applause and shouts of praise. Marcelo took his bow first and waved to everyone. Then he stepped back and motioned to Jerome to move forward. Jerome waved as well, to more calls and shouts, before he bowed low. He then stepped back to Marcelo's side. They were given smaller bouquets of roses by the assistant artistic director, Cheryl, and she kissed their cheeks.

The curtains closed again as the company stepped back. All the dancers but the main three principals left the stage. The curtains opened once more to another ovation as the three dancers bowed one more time. The curtains closed the final time for opening night.

The company knew it was now time to party and enjoy after working feverishly the last twelve weeks. After accepting the other congratulations from various people, Jerome moved through the crowd to the backstage and his dressing room.

Even with the pain medication, his body was telling him to sit his ass down now!

Reaching his dressing room, Jerome slipped inside, tossed the flowers on the table, and dropped his lean body across the couch. His feet were aching inside the dance slippers, but he didn't bother to move further than to lay an arm across his face. He was getting too old to be dancing for over two hours. Still, dancing was his entire life. His only purpose in life since he was six years old and learned the first few positions at the *barre* set above his shoulder.

Since that very first lesson, he fell in love with ballet and all things which incorporated dance. He begged his mother, who raised him on her own, for more lessons in different classes as he advanced in leaps and bounds. His goal was to either attend the school at the American Ballet Company or the prestigious dance program in Juilliard. Before his twelfth birthday, he

auditioned for both, was accepted into both programs, and decided upon the ABC school. He hadn't looked back since.

Until a week ago, his main priority was always dance and the new company he joined upon graduating from the school. For some reason, he felt restless after leaving the rehearsal studios and didn't want to sit around his apartment. Since his bad bout of flu over the winter, Clinton and the head ballet master, Viktor, were worried he wouldn't recover. They already knew one of his knees was beginning to bother him. Still, he battled his way back to snag the lead position for this last season of performances.

Except, for this one night, he needed a change, a breather, from his rituals, programs, and strict lifestyle. It was more than looking for a quick fuck in the back of a club with a cute twink he met on the dance floor. This was something deeper inside him. He wanted more than a nameless fuck.

The one long-time romance he had to his credit was one that began over fifteen years ago, just after he joined this new company. He wanted the feeling he had in the romance with the gorgeous man again. He needed to have one person who loved him as Jeremy, not Jerome, there when he got home, there when he woke up, and put up with his moods.

"Everette," Jerome whispered to the empty room.

Even now, fifteen years after their first meeting, Jerome knew if he closed his eyes he could picture the powerful, strong male he had been instantly attracted to during a party the company threw for new patrons as well as current season ticket holders and financiers. Clad to perfection in an Armani tuxedo paired with a black and silver tie, David Everette Hastings III was literally head and shoulders above everyone else, even Marcelo. His dark hair was cut military-short and he had the unmistakable bearing of a military man.

After being introduced, he learned Everette was a Second Lieutenant in the Army and just returned from his second tour in Iraq. His face was lean and sharp, the deep blue eyes haunted by what he had seen and done, and he was considering the next move in his career. They were careful when leaving the party because DADT was still an issue.

That night after the party, oh, the passion was so hot between them. Jerome thought they would burn the sheets with the heat they generated. When the passion was finally released and sated, their bodies were covered in sweat, bite marks, hickeys, and those horrid wet spots of spent fluids. Still, they turned and looked at each other and laughed with abandon over what happened. They rolled their sore, aching bodies off the bed and into the shower. Even when they thought their cocks couldn't rise again, Everette wiggled the bottle of lube hiding behind the rest of the bottles and the heat flared.

Jerome wasn't sure if he could get up in the morning and drag his sorry body to the *barre* for his morning stretches, but damn it was hard. Still, when he looked back at the strong sleeping body stretched across his bed, he didn't regret a single moment. Luckily for them, the attraction remained strong and sparking through the entire time they spent together. That night started a three-year relationship, off and on depending on Everette's movements with the Army.

Things came to a grinding halt between them after the September 11 attacks. From their apartment window, Everette spotted the smoke rising from the North Tower while he drank his morning coffee and Jerome worked on his morning *barre* exercises. Alarmed, Everette turned on the television, and together they watched the horrible morning unveiling in front of them. They were in time to watch the second passenger airliner fly into the South Tower. Two hours later, when the towers began to fall, Jerome buried his face in Everette's chest and held on tight to him. They spent the rest of the morning in a daze, watching the television and discussing what happened.

Two weeks after the attacks, Jerome attended a mandatory meeting where the company announced that they would cease performance activity for a few months after the tragedy, but continue with rehearsals to keep everyone in shape. He came home to find Everette packing. Jerome didn't want him to leave, saying it was too dangerous, but Everette wouldn't hear of it. He was a soldier, with others who counted on his leadership. He slung the bags over his shoulder, stared at Jerome, and then left the apartment. Neither one offered to write the other because they didn't want Everette to be outted.

Twelve years later, and Jerome still thought about the man who stole his heart, a soldier who left for the war zone and whom he never heard from or saw again. Even with DADT repealed, Jerome didn't know how to begin looking for Second Lieutenant D. Everette Hastings III in the US Army. By then, he had moved with the company to Chicago from New York City, and knew it would be even harder to locate one soldier, so he didn't bother.

This last week, missing the man bothered him even more, until he couldn't stay home. He changed into club clothes, but didn't go to the usual places where everyone knew him as the principal danseur of his company. He craved a different setting and found it at the brand new Onyx Club. Catering to the GLBT lifestyle of Chicago, but with a higher quality and edge than other clubs, the Onyx was exactly what he needed. No one cried out his stage name or recognized his face. There, he could be Jeremy Armstrong, a quiet gay male from a small town in Kansas. A gay male who missed his soldier boy.

Unfortunately, nothing happened that night and he continued to feel restless, longing for his soldier, but he felt someone watching him closely the entire night he danced in a throng of gorgeous, sweaty males. He returned to the club two more nights, but never figured out who caused the feeling.

A banging on his door pulled him out of his memories.

"Jerome! Get dressed in your tux, we're heading over to the party. You're expected to make an appearance," Marcelo called through the door in his booming voice.

"I'll be there," Jerome called back and flipped his feet off the cushion. He cringed when his body protested the movement. All he wanted was to go home and sit in a tub of hot water and Epsom salts until the aches went away, so he could sleep. Instead, he headed to the private shower to cleanse off the dance stench and pretty himself for the financiers who wanted to grab and praise him for doing what he loved.

CHAPTER 2

Stepping from the stage area into the large front entrance hall, Jerome twitched his shirt cuffs into place under the black tuxedo jacket. A second later, Clinton pulled him to one side to be introduced to an old lady wearing too many feathers who must have bathed in horrible perfume. Still, as the principal male danseur, Jerome did his job and flirted charmingly when she twittered on about how he was her absolute favorite dancer and such a hottie. It only started the endless night of being paraded around as a jewel of the company.

Snatching a second glass of champagne from a circulating waiter, Jerome tilted half of the bubbly liquid into his throat after escaping the clutches of another lady. He found a quiet spot behind one of the large columns and leaned against it. He closed his eyes and wished he was anywhere but here.

“Well... Well... If it isn’t the gorgeous star of the Illusion Company, Jerome Alexander,” a male called in a warm, slow, teasing tone. “Or do I see the quiet side of Jeremy Armstrong?”

Okay, no one in the party knows my personal name. No one. Jerome lowered the glass and held still for a few moments, pulling his armor back into place. On the other hand, the voice was familiar to him, but different at the same time. Even though someone had found his hiding spot, he didn’t want to turn around—but if the director noticed that he was ignoring a guest, the man would climb up his ass and chew him out.

With another swallow of the expensive champagne, Jerome pushed off the column and turned to meet his latest admirer, hoping it wasn’t some old crone who wanted a boy toy. “Hello, sir. I don’t believe I know anyone here by the name of Jeremy. You must have me confused with someone else. Still, I would like to thank you for your...” Jerome stopped in practiced mid-speech as he gazed upon the person who found him. His fingers almost let go of the slender flute, but the other man stepped forward to take hold of the delicate stem and put it on a nearby table to be picked up by a waiter. “Holy shit...”

“Oh, I know Jeremy very well. Intimately in fact. Do I look that bad?” the man said with a wry smile that pulled only on the left side of his face. The right side, from his cheekbone down, was covered in the rippled scars of an attack by fire. The scars curled around his neck and disappeared into the snowy white shirt under the black Armani tuxedo. He lifted one hand, covered in a black pressure glove, to his face.

“Everette... What happened to you? Oh my god, I never expected to see you again.” Jerome stepped forward. He reached one hand and heard a low growl. He pulled his hand back and stared down, stunned when he saw a chocolate Labrador sitting attentively next to Everette’s right side. There was an orange vest around the dog’s body and a leash curled up into Everette’s hand. “Who is this?”

“Ssh, easy, Charlie,” Everette crooned to the dog while he stroked the soft ears. “Be at ease.”

The dog relaxed his attention and leaned his head against Everette’s leg. His tail wagged with happiness.

Everette tilted his head and looked at Jerome. “This is my new companion, Charlie, a gift from my brother to help me through my days. Charlie, this is Jeremy.”

Jeremy held out his fingers for Charlie to sniff. “He’s beautiful and very sweet.”

“He’s been a lifesaver for me in many ways. As for this,” he said and motioned to his face, “well, it will take longer than a few moments to explain. I was hoping we could step away somewhere and speak with each other?”

Jerome nodded, dumbfounded at the sight of Everette standing in front of him, looking far different than he did when they first met fifteen years ago in a similar party. He looked around and then motioned to his former lover with his hand. “There’s a small conference room down this hall.”

“Good. Charlie and I’ll follow you.” Everette clicked his tongue while he tugged on the leash to bring the Lab to his paws.

Jerome looked at both of them and then around them. He turned and led the way around the corner and down the hall. He checked one handle and it opened under his touch. He let Everette and the dog enter the room and closed the door after he followed them inside.

“Charlie, relax,” Everette said and dropped the leash. The Lab curled against one wall near the doorway, his eyes on his master. Everette moved toward the table, pulled out a chair, and settled down.

After watching his former lover move around, not as gracefully as he recalled, Jerome wondered what the hell happened to the man. He went to the small fridge and pulled out two bottles of water. He returned to the table, sat in a chair near Everette, and slid one bottle down the table. He cracked open the top of his bottle and took a few long pulls to counteract the champagne.

Everette nodded and used his left hand to open and hold the bottle. His right hand almost seemed useless. “I noticed you enjoyed going to Onyx last week.”

“Onyx?” About to take another sip, Jerome stopped and lowered the bottle. “You were there? Were you the one watching me?”

“I’m a partner in the club’s ownership and creation. My brother runs the day-to-day operations with a manager since I’m unable to be there all the time. Still, I was in the upper room and spotted you on the dance floor. You’re unmistakable when you dance.”

Jerome swallowed, glanced at the dog, and then to Everette. His eyes moved to the damaged side which didn’t take away from the man’s beauty. “You... What is going on here? I don’t understand.”

“I know. My appearance is a lot to take in.” Everette fiddled with the bottle. “Perhaps I should start from when I left you in the apartment?”

Jerome nodded.

“Okay. I was offered the chance to join a Special Ops team. I had the training and knowledge from my earlier missions and I accepted. I lost track of how long we were overseas, the stuff we went through, things we did. Most of

it I can't tell you since it's classified." Everette ran a hand over his face. "My team was transferred to a joint task force focused on gathering intelligence and taking down various members of al-Qaeda. The last op, I tracked a militant with a suicide vest to a supposed safe house. The bastard set off the vest and I took the brunt of the explosion."

"Oh my god. Shit. I had no idea of anything. I couldn't write, I couldn't even e-mail for fear of outing you." Jerome dropped his head on one hand, pale at the thought of Everette in such danger.

"I know. It wasn't your fault. There were so many times I wanted to tell you what was happening, but I was afraid it would only scare you."

"I only wanted to know you were still alive."

Leaning forward, Everette placed his hand over Jerome's hand and squeezed. "I'm alive. I survived. I'm sorry I caused so much worry for you."

"Such a horrible war, the fighting..." Jerome shook his head. "I saw those reports on the news."

"It's okay. It's okay. I'm alive." Everette tugged Jerome's chair closer and wrapped his arms around him. "I'm alive. I'm alive."

Jerome let the tears fall, unable to hold them back. He pressed his face to Everette's scarred neck, feeling the difference in the skin. He breathed in the familiar cologne he had smelled on a pillow so long ago, the same intoxicating richness. Still, he needed to know the rest of Everette's story. "Hmm. You have the Eternity cologne I brought you for our last anniversary together."

"It's my favorite stuff. A new bottle of course, but it's still my favorite."

"It fits you. After all this time, it still completes your style." Jerome nuzzled his neck and tried to pick up some of the cologne, which he purchased and kept in a drawer to bring out once in a while to smell and remember his soldier. "Okay. Tell me the rest." He pulled away from Everette and pushed his chair back to look at him. "Tell me."

"Are you sure?"

Jerome nodded. "I need to know what happened to you."

“After the attack, I woke up hours later to see a doctor looking down at me. He explained I had serious burns down my right side, my hand was damaged, and a few too many internal injuries. I couldn’t stay in the field hospital, so they transported me to the Medical Center at Ramstein until I was stable, and then to Walter Reed in DC for more surgeries and therapy. Eventually, I was discharged from the Army on a medical basis. Instead of going to my family in Chicago, I first went to your old apartment in New York, but...”

“The company left New York in 2004, and I moved with them.”

“I figured that out when I saw a woman living there, and found out the company was no longer based in New York City. I wasn’t sure where you were, so I headed back to Chicago, where my brother and his family lived. He helped me set up a home and find medical help, then surprised me by hooking me up with a special therapy dog from a company who trains them for returning soldiers. It’s how Charlie came into my life.” Everette glanced over at the Lab, who thumped his tail between the floor and wall when he heard his name. “He keeps me company, gives me a reason to wake up every day, and alerts me when my issues flare up.”

Jerome glanced over at the beautiful Lab and wondered what issues Everette meant. He moved his attention back to his damaged lover.

“My brother already owned a couple of clubs. He knew I was gay, and suggested creating a new, upscale club catering to the GLBT lifestyle. Within a few years, we built and started to operate Onyx. He also told me about your company and how it moved here.”

“Did you tell him about us?”

“He knew I was involved with a dancer until September eleventh. After I got involved with Onyx, I started to talk about you and Illusion. He found the website and you were named as one of the principals. I purchased tickets for various performances until I saw you dance. I learned then that you moved here with Illusion.”

“Why didn’t you come to me then? Why wait until now? Until after this performance?” Jerome banged a hand on the table, and the dog lifted his head and barked once. “Sorry, Charlie.”

Everette twisted the bottle on the table, his eyes focused on the swirling water. “I needed to wait until I was ready. Things aren’t the best at times for me. I have problems, issues that I deal with every single day. Leftovers from the accident and my years on the front.”

“So you waited.”

“I didn’t have a choice, Jeremy. I couldn’t return to you half a man, you didn’t deserve it, and neither did I.” Everette reached out his damaged gloved hand and placed it over Jerome’s fingers. “Nevertheless, I wanted to see you, talk to you, and damn, I wanted to hold you close to me again.”

“Things aren’t...”

“The same as when I left, yes, I know. I have one main question for you.”

“Which is?”

“Are you in another relationship? Do I have a chance?”

Jerome smiled at him and turned his hand to hold Everette’s hand. “No, I’m not in a relationship with anyone. I haven’t been for some time. Even after all this time, you still hold a major piece of my heart.”

“Then all is good and possible. I know we’re both older, I’m wounded in multiple ways, and our lives are different. All I want is a chance. Another chance to be with you.”

Jerome nibbled on his lower lip.

CHAPTER 3

A couple of hours later, Everette entered his home in Riverside, on the outskirts of Chicago. It was an upscale, elegant neighbourhood, and he'd found a smaller house to turn into the safe haven he needed. The windows were darkened, and extra soundproofing had been placed around the exterior of the home so outside noise wouldn't set off his various disabilities. He'd changed all the carpeting to simple bamboo floors so his sometimes shaky steps wouldn't trip or snag. He waved away his driver to let him know he was good to go and then closed the door.

At his side, Charlie stopped and looked at him. He whined and pawed Everette's leg.

"Sorry, buddy, I'm lost in thought about him. Do you like him?"

The Lab whined.

"You're hungry and want to go out. I know. Priorities of a dog." Everette chuckled and pulled off the tux jacket and tie. He released Charlie from his leash and vest. Then he opened the back door and waved to the dog.

Charlie rushed out into the darkness and began to sniff for the perfect spot. Everette leaned against the doorway and watched the Lab do his business. When Charlie was done, he returned to the house and led the way to the kitchen and his empty food bowl. He sat and waited for his human to fill it and his stomach. Everette dropped food into the bowl, refreshed the water bowl, and added a few treats to the top of the food. He stepped back, and Charlie dove into the meal.

With a chuckle, Everette shifted around the kitchen and put together a simple snack. He needed food in his belly before taking his evening round of meds. When he heard the cell phone ring from his pocket, he set the plate, glass, and container of meds on the table. After he pulled the phone, he sat down and answered the call.

“Hey, Evan, I’m fine and home,” Everette said to his younger brother, who had become his caretaker upon his arrival home. Evan and his family even lived at the other end of the same street.

“Yeah, I saw the car go past and wanted to give you time to take care of Charlie’s needs,” Evan said with a chuckle, knowing the familiar evening routine. “So... how was the performance?”

“Fabulous, I enjoyed everything and didn’t have an episode.”

“Good to hear. And how was your dancer?”

“Breathtaking whenever he dances. I can’t believe how good he is. He fills the stage all on his own.”

“What about the party?”

“I made it through for enough time to find him. We spoke in a separate room. I told him everything that happened. I didn’t give him a full briefing about all of my disabilities, but told him I had Charlie to watch over me.”

“Then you walked out?”

“Yeah, things kind of ended after I asked him for another chance. I left him to think about things at his request. I don’t blame him for not jumping at the chance to have my scarred bones,” Everette said, dragging his damaged hand through his hair.

“Don’t put yourself down. You know I hate it when you talk like that about yourself,” Evan said.

“Don’t start, Evan. I’m tired. It’s been a long night.”

“Hey, you did what you set out to do. Which is a lot for you in your condition and I’m proud of you. You watched the performance, went to a party, and managed to find your guy for a talk. You couldn’t ask for anything better.”

“I know.”

“Okay, bro. I’m gonna let you go. Call if you need anything,” Evan said.

“Thanks, little brother,” Everette said and hung up on the call. He set the phone down, patted the Lab’s soft head when it dropped on his lap for attention. “I know, bud. I know.” He made quick work out of the small meal and then swallowed the various meds. He rose, cleaned the kitchen efficiently, and retrieved the jacket and tie from where he had slung it over the sofa, heading to his bedroom in the back.

Once he stripped out of the stifling tuxedo, he yanked on a pair of sleep pants and a long-sleeved shirt to hide all the scars covering his body. He changed the black glove with fake fingers to a support glove which helped keep the scars smooth and supple around his hand. He watched Charlie get on the bed, do his circling, and settle down. “Do you think you’re gonna sleep up there with me?”

Charlie gave him a friendly woof and dropped his head on his paws.

“Yeah, I know. You’re a spoiled rotten dog, bud.” Everette gave the soft ears another good scratching. As he was about to slide in the bed and continue reading his book, he stopped when his doorbell rang with a soft chime. Charlie lifted his head, barked, and jumped down to the floor.

Turning away from the bed, Everette followed Charlie through the house. He peered through the glass, astounded at the late visitor. He unlocked everything and opened the door.

“Hey there,” Jeremy said.

“Jeremy, what are you doing here?”

“I know it’s late, but I needed to see you. Can I come in?” Jeremy leaned against the doorframe, one ankle crossed over the other, while he twirled keys on one finger. Everette noticed he had taken the time to change out of his tux, and now wore low-slung jeans and a tight silk shirt. His highlighted, short dark hair fell in a messy disarray that fit him perfectly.

“Umm, yeah, sure, come in. I’m a little surprised you’re here. I wasn’t expecting you or anyone else.” Everette hiked up the simple cotton pants and stepped out of the way.

“Went home to think about what you said. I changed out of the monkey suit and took a soak in some Epsom salts. My poor body isn’t as happy with all the dancing anymore. When I got out, I decided I didn’t want to stay there, so I got in my car and ended up here. It’s a nice place. I’m in an apartment downtown.” Jeremy dropped a hand to scratch Charlie behind his ears as he passed the dog. He turned and pressed a button on the small remote key fob. In the driveway, a Mini Cooper convertible in British racing green with black stripes flashed its lights in answer.

“That is one itty bitty little car,” Everette commented when he saw the car. “You didn’t have this in New York.”

Jeremy chuckled. “Has more room than you think, though...” He checked Everette out slow and steady from head to bare toes. “I don’t know if you’ll fit, even with the top down. Nah, I got this a few years ago on a whim.”

“I don’t think I’ll appreciate squeezing myself in there. Besides, where I go, Charlie goes.”

“Ahh, right, we need room for the dog. Well, the seats go down so Charlie could ride in the back.” Jeremy shrugged and closed the door behind him. He slid the key fob in his pocket. Then he stepped out of the loafers to reveal his own bare feet, worn and callused from years of dancing.

Charlie looked up at them, his tail wagging. He stared at the fresh set of bare feet and dropped his front down, his butt in the air.

“Why is your dog staring at my feet?” Jeremy stopped and stared at Charlie, who placed himself in front of him.

“He likes to lick toes.”

“Lick toes? He wants to lick my crappy, horrible, nasty toes. Does he know what these stinky things have been doing for the last few hours?” Jeremy looked down at the happy dog and shook a finger at him. “No licky these toes. No toes for you.”

The Lab whined and wagged his tail. He belly-crawled closer, his tongue hanging out.

“No toes!”

The dog barked and whined.

“Everette, help.”

“Charlie, away from the dancer’s feet.” Everette picked up a favorite tennis ball and bounced it toward the Lab, who bounced and raced after the ball.

“Thank you,” Jeremy said and raced after Everette.

“Come and sit down, you goofy dancer. Put your feet up and out of the way.” Everette motioned to living room that flowed into a dining room and kitchen area in an open floor plan. He moved over to the comfortable sofa and dropped down on one end. He patted a space near him that was covered by a blanket. “Would you like a drink or something?”

Charlie snatched his ball, tail up and happy, and trotted back to them. He leapt up and curled on his blanket, close to where Everette could reach out and stroke his ears.

“No, I don’t need anything.” Jeremy walked over, playfully growled at the dog, and found a space on the other side of Everette, away from the dog. He tucked his feet up to the side. “Ha ha. You can’t lick them.”

Charlie dropped his muzzle on Everette’s lap and whined, eyebrows moving over his soulful brown eyes.

Everette chuckled at the both of them. He moved his hand over the lab’s soft fur. “Sorry, buddy. You wouldn’t like dancer feet.”

“But you’re still a cute pup.” Jeremy reached out and scratched behind one of the ears. He got a grateful lick on his wrist by the Lab.

“So... You mentioned you thought about what I said. Do you have questions?”

Jeremy looked at Charlie and then back to him. “Why do you have a therapy dog? I could tell you weren’t telling me everything about your connection and need for him.”

Everette smiled in understanding. He knew they had to get around to this question at one point or other if Jeremy was to understand what happened to him.

Waiting for Everette, Jeremy placed an elbow on the back of the sofa and propped his head on his hand. He stayed curled in his corner and watched Everette with a calm gray gaze.

“I suffer from rather severe PTSD, like most combat veterans. Veteran therapy dogs are trained to help mitigate most symptoms of PTSD. Charlie, here, helps me with daily physical tasks, like picking things up and balancing on stairs, but more importantly, he is my constant companion. I was very prone to panic attacks, agoraphobia, flashbacks, and ‘gray outs’ where I would lose track of where I was or what I was doing.”

“Really? I didn’t understand everything, I mean, I’ve heard about soldiers with PTSD, but didn’t know how it affected everyday life.”

“It can affect and overpower every moment of every day without someone even realizing it’s happening. We’re so used to being constantly on alert, on guard, we need to completely change focus and our body’s reaction when we come home. Some of us can slip from one to the other with ease, others have more difficulty.”

“So you need Charlie to help you with those slips. What else does Charlie do?”

“Yeah, Charlie is there to stop those slips before they start. He helps to keep me in the moment and not let my mind slip into a flashback. He is trained to monitor my breathing and heart rate, so he can nudge me back to reality before a situation starts.” His mind began to circle back in time as he spoke about all of his challenges. His fingers tapped on his leg anxiously.

Charlie nudged Everette’s hand with his nose and whined. He moved his paw on Everette’s leg.

“Everette, are you okay?” Jeremy leaned forward, dropping his arm from the sofa, and placed his hands on Everette’s hands.

Everette slid a hand over his hair and then touched Charlie. “I was beginning to think about everything I went through and Charlie sensed my heart rate.”

Jeremy lifted Everette’s compression-gloved hand to his lips and kissed the fabric. He then kissed the scarred arm above the fabric. He looked at the hand and noticed the last two fingers were missing.

“I lost them due to the burns,” Everette said. “I had fake ones created for some of the day gloves I wear. I can’t use the hand without a compression glove of some type to support everything. The doctors said I was lucky to even keep this hand.”

“I don’t care what’s missing or what’s here. You’re sitting across from me. That’s all I care about right now.” Jeremy kissed the hand again. “Can you keep telling me what else you deal with?”

Everette glanced at Charlie, who rested his head on Everette’s lap again. “Yes. Let’s see. I was also prone to hypervigilance, something that—before—saved my life every minute of the day, but I don’t need it now. No one is waiting around the corner to kill me or my teammates. I can put my hand on Charlie and feel calmness returning to me.”

Jeremy lowered their hands into his lap as he kept his gaze upon Everette. “What happened before your brother helped you get Charlie?”

“I was horrible to live with, to the point where my brother moved me into a separate apartment because I was scaring him and his family. Then, I was too paranoid and withdrawn to leave my apartment. I lived like a hermit, cut off from everyone. Even with Evan visiting me, helping to bring in groceries, and making sure the bills were paid and that I was still alive. Suicide rates are high for veterans, more than any other group, and Evan feared the worst. It was then he began to look at other options for me. It’s when he found out about the dogs and helped me fill out an application for one. Two years ago, I got lucky and was paired with Charlie. He’s helped me reconnect with the world and gives me a purpose. We got this place last year as an accomplishment of what I’ve overcome.”

“Why didn’t you look for me then?”

“Before Charlie, I was emotionally numb. I couldn’t hug my nephews and niece. I couldn’t even shake my brother’s hand. I was severely depressed. With Charlie giving me endless love and utter devotion, I’m starting to come back from the darkness. I wanted to give myself time to become emotionally and mentally stable before taking the chance on a relationship. Neither one of us deserves the pain and struggle which comes with someone with PTSD. Even with Charlie, I’ll always suffer from PTSD. It’ll never go away. I’ll get better, but I’ll never be what I was before I left to join the Army.” Everette looked down at the dog and then at the man he had wanted back in his life for so long. “I’ll never be cured, Jeremy. I accept the treatment and Charlie’s care, but I’ll never be cured. Understand?”

Jeremy swallowed, linked his fingers together, and stared down at the floor. “You’re dealing with so much, Ev, so much I can barely begin to understand. I’ve never seen anything like what you went through every day while fighting. I’m a dancer who tries to bring emotions, hopefully good ones, to the audience. I hope to take them away from their daily lives and pain and give them a high.”

“And you’re wonderful at doing what you do. I always feel better when I go to a performance, with or without you dancing. It’s a highlight when I know a performance is coming up in my schedule. I look forward to it and I know everyone else who sits in those seats feels the same.”

“What could I possibly give you?” Jeremy looked at him. “You lived with me, well, on and off, for the better part of three years. You know how I can get. I’m selfish, just like any artist. I’m strict and diligent about my physique and diet maintenance. When I’m in the middle of rehearsal, I can be a total diva.”

“I adored and loved every moment I spent with you for those years. You were the best memories of those years with you. I couldn’t wait for each deployment to finish so I could run up to New York and see you. No matter how diva you get, you give me the light, love, and happiness I crave to have back in my life.”

Jeremy rose to his feet and paced. His body moved with the fluidity and grace built within him as a dancer. As the thoughts rolled through his head, he danced a few steps, rose on the balls of his feet, his hands and fingers moving with the rest of his body.

“Jeremy? You’re dancing.”

“Thinking...”

“You’re thinking while you’re dancing?”

Jeremy nodded. “The steps keep me focused.”

Charlie whined and nudged Everett’s hand. Everett glanced at the clock and noticed it was getting past his bedtime. Unfortunately, if he didn’t go to bed on schedule and get the rest he needed, he suffered more episodes the following day.

“What? What is wrong? Are you all right?” Jeremy stopped and faced Everett with a fluid spin. He took a few steps forward and dropped into a graceful crouch next to the sofa. He set his hands on Everett’s knees.

Everett placed his hands on Jeremy’s hands. He was surprised by Jeremy’s sudden concern for his well-being in time to Charlie’s response. “I’m fine. Charlie alerted me that it’s past my bedtime.”

“You’re not a child with a set bedtime.”

“No, I’m an adult with PTSD. It requires, at least for me, to have a set bedtime and require a certain number of hours of decent sleep. If I’m short or restless, my symptoms are worse.”

“Oh, I didn’t realize you need to be so disciplined with such a simple thing like sleep. I’m sorry. I should get—”

“Join me in bed and sleep on our discussion,” Everett interrupted.

Jeremy blinked and looked around. “Join you?”

“Please. I would like to hold you. Sleep like we used to do, only you’ll have to be on my good side.” Everett rose to his feet and glanced over Jeremy’s clothes. “You’re commando under those jeans, aren’t you?”

Jeremy nodded.

“Figures. You have never been one for underwear, not that I hate it. I’ll give you a pair of sleep pants.”

“What? You don’t want to keep me nekkid?” Jeremy sauntered toward him, tilting his hips in a suggestive way. He tugged on Everett’s shirt. “I want you nekkid. Why are you wearing this shirt?”

“Too many scars are hidden by my clothes. Not tonight, not with so many decisions between us. Let me hold you.” Everett stopped and looked to Jeremy. “I may have nightmares, though. I apologize if I hit you or scream. I don’t know...”

Jeremy walked toward him and placed a hand on Everett’s arm. “I’ll be okay. I understand the reason for them.”

“It could be disturbing if I didn’t tell you. You don’t have...”

“I’m not leaving. Take me to bed,” Jeremy said as he slid his hand down and linked his fingers with Everett’s good hand.

Everett smiled, leaned in and pressed a kiss to Jeremy’s forehead. “Thank you.” He turned and walked through the house with Jeremy. Charlie led the way, his tail wagging the entire time.

“You’re limping,” Jeremy said as they entered the room.

“Hmm. I get tired by the end of the day and lose some coordination. My hip and knee took some damage in the fall. My whole right side is a mess. When I get tired I usually have to rely on a cane and Charlie to keep me steady, but I try not to use it around the house.” Everett went to the dresser and pulled out another pair of cotton pants. He held them out to Jeremy. “I shrunk these a little so they should be good for you.”

“Are you trying to imply I’m a shrimp compared to you?” Jeremy glanced at the six-inch difference between them.

“Nah. I would never, and you’re the perfect height for me to cuddle against.” Everett let go of Jeremy’s hand and moved to the bed. He pulled

back the covers as Charlie jumped up, circled, and made himself comfortable at the end of the bed.

“The Lab better not hog the bed and covers.” Jeremy dropped the pants on the bed, tugged off his shirt, and moved his hands to his jeans.

Everette settled against his pillows and watched the show as a gorgeous dancer’s body was revealed to him. “Nah, I don’t think he will. I’m used to having him close in case anything happens during the night, and I’ve pretty much given up trying to get him to sleep on a dog bed.” He glanced at the dog and noticed he didn’t lift his head, as if he knew they were talking about him.

“Hmm. We’ll see when we wake up who is spread out and covered,” Jeremy said while he unbuttoned and slid down the zipper. “Should I dance for you?”

“As much as I want to see this long-overdue revealing of your gorgeous body, I do need sleep.”

“Take all the fun out of it.” Jeremy pushed down the low-cut jeans. He straightened as the jeans dropped and revealed his body in a simple fashion. He stepped out and kicked them away. Then he picked up and pulled on the pants. While he tied them, he moved to flip off the light switch, and then circled around the bed. Lit only by the soft moonlight, he found his way to slide under the sheets.

“Next time, you can strip-dance for me.” Everette held out his arm to let Jeremy snuggle against his side. He then wrapped his arm around Jeremy’s shoulders to help him rest his head on his shoulder. He kissed Jeremy’s temple as Jeremy wiggled and tugged the sheet and blanket over them.

“Hmm. I missed your scent,” Jeremy whispered after nuzzling him. “My favorite pillow is back.”

Everette chuckled and closed his eyes to sleep. He heard Jeremy slow his breathing to match his while they slid towards sleep. He knew his dancer was exhausted from the performance.

Soon only the doggie snores filled the bedroom, causing both men to chuckle and nudge the Lab, before they shifted and fell deeper into sleep.

CHAPTER 4

They spent the next two weeks together, talking, cuddling, and enjoying time spent in each other's company with nothing on the agenda except whatever came up. Jeremy learned about Everett's various disabilities and issues with his PTSD, and how to balance what he needed on a daily basis. Instead of the problems irritating him, he went full forward in learning how to help and assist. After watching a couple of physical therapy sessions, Jeremy insisted on taking over them, bringing equipment from his home. He helped Everett with his stretching and strength training, adding in his beloved yoga and Pilates along with the standard methods of stretching.

Going a step further, he researched various therapies online to help rehab Everett's hand and arm. Multiple pages talked about the benefits of art therapy and how soldiers worked their muscles in a different fashion sculpting in clay. He immediately went to the local art and craft store. He went through the aisles and found various types of modelling and professional clay, a silly smock, several tool sets and molds, books, and supplies. With all of his surprises, he headed back to Everett's home, and found him gone to a doctor's appointment. He gleefully set everything in the backroom, which opened onto a covered lanai.

When Everett returned home with Charlie, Jeremy fed him so he could take his meds, and then led him by the hand to his surprise. A little stunned and taken aback, Everett settled at the table, flipped through the books, and fiddled with a hunk of clay. Soon he was spending a few hours a day at the table, his hands working the clay into different forms, figures, and models. Sometimes, Jeremy worked next to him, enjoying the time to do something creative.

Throughout the time they spent together, Jeremy didn't do much dancing. The rest of the weekly performances were danced by Marcelo and another newcomer to the company, Luciano. At the request of Clinton, Jeremy danced the sold-out weekend evenings. Each time, he found his body creaking and protesting. It was funny how Everett was filling his larger Jacuzzi tub with Epsom salts to take care of Jeremy's aches instead of his own scarred body.

The rest of the week, Jeremy found himself remaining behind at Everette's house and being satisfied with the change. He didn't need to be at the theater every night or at the studio every day for practice. He concentrated on simple yoga routines with Everette to keep his muscles limber.

Curled on the sofa, leaning against Everette's shoulder, a movie on the television, Jeremy flipped the phone around in his hands after he finished the conversation with Clinton. He saw Everette's hand reach out and cover his restless fingers.

"Well? What's your decision? How did Clinton take it?" Everette asked in a soft tone after he picked up the remote and lowered the volume.

"I'm going to retire in six months, after a final dance. The dance will be centered around me as I say good-bye to the stage. A one night performance," Jeremy said. "I can't keep doing three hour performances every night. My body can't handle the pressure. My feet can't deal with the steps."

"And until the last night? What will you do?"

"I'll have a spot, something simple and light, in the next two performances over the summer. My last dance will be the first of the fall performances."

"And after that?"

"I'll stay behind scenes at the studio. I will become the new artist-in-residence and assist the dance managers in teaching the up and comers in the company. I'll help the new *premiers* with their motions."

"Will this change satisfy you?"

"I've had a long, wonderful career as a dancer on stage for almost twenty years. I lasted longer than I probably should, but the doctor told me I was getting arthritis in my lower body and would need a knee replacement within the next five years if I danced anymore on it." Jeremy shrugged. "With you in my life, I'll have everything I need."

"Are you sure about this decision?"

Jeremy set the phone down and turned to face his scarred lover. He placed his hands on both sides of Everette's face. "Yes, my decision is final."

Everette shifted a little and then lifted his fist between them. “Then will you do me the honor of becoming my husband? I was thinking of a simple summer ceremony.”

Jeremy sat back on his heels and watched Everette opening his hand to reveal two white gold rings on his palm. He noticed they were exquisitely engraved. He touched a finger to one.

“Jeremy?”

Jeremy looked up and met Everette’s gaze, noticed the touch of worry in his eyes at his silence. He touched Everette’s face. “Oh, yes, I would love to become your husband. I believe summer would be wonderful for a ceremony. We can’t do this in Illinois yet.”

“No, but we can have the ceremony in either Minnesota or Iowa. We can buy a second home in either Minneapolis or Des Moines and become legal citizens there to get our license. I know you would prefer to live near a big city, perhaps even change to a different company or build your own studio.”

“My own studio?”

“You love teaching others how to dance. You would be wonderful at it. I know you have friends who are retiring from the stage and are looking for more opportunities.”

“I never thought about teaching. I would hate to leave Illusions, but for the chance to live openly as a married couple...”

“I would change anything I could to make our dreams possible,” Everette said.

“There’s another option to think about and wonder if we could make it work. We have so much for us to figure out.”

“First thing is to make our engagement official,” Everette said as he took a smaller ring and pushed it onto Jeremy’s finger.

With a smile, Jeremy took the second ring, then lifted Everette’s hand, and pushed it on the fourth finger.

“Good thing I didn’t hurt my left hand,” Everette said wiggling his good fingers.

Jeremy laughed. “We would have been unconventional and worn our rings on our right hands. I would do the same as you.”

“You would?”

Jeremy nodded. “Anything for you, my soldier boy.”

“Silly dancer boy.”

They laughed together before they closed the distance with a passionate kiss. Jeremy moved until he straddled Everette’s hips and placed his hands on Everette’s chest. He leaned back and looked at his beloved soldier. For the last two weeks, they had abstained from sex. Neither one wanted to push the connection between them. Everette was still uncertain about his appearance.

“Everette, please, make love to me. I’m not upset by the scars, they’re a part of you—like my nasty feet are of me,” Jeremy said, nuzzling his mouth against Everette’s soft lips.

“Okay. In our bed,” Everette said.

Jeremy smiled—the house had become more *their* home than just Everette’s. He had moved more and more of his stuff from his apartment to Everette’s warm house within the last two weeks. He had even set up a practice *barre* in the clay room. His clothes and things mixed in with Everette’s, and it was perfect. Pushing away from his beloved and the sofa, he got to his feet, bare in spite of the canine toe-licker, and held his hands out to help Everette.

“What about the canine?” Jeremy glanced down at the Lab, who lifted his head and thumped his tail.

“Charlie, stay here,” Everette said, adding a hand motion as he rose. The Lab whined, but put his muzzle back on his paws. “Good boy,” Everette said and looked at Jeremy. “Can you go get one of the new chewies out of the closet for him to enjoy?”

“Sure.” Jeremy rushed off to the pantry and opened the fresh box, returning to wave the big rawhide chew bone in front of the Lab. Charlie lifted his muzzle, sniffed the air, and his tail thumped. “You want this, good boy? Huh? You want this?” Charlie barked as his tail wagged harder. “Here you go. Good boy. Good Charlie-boy,” Jeremy said as he dropped the bone and scratched Charlie’s ears.

The dog attacked the bone with full gusto, holding it between his paws, and chomped galore on it with his teeth.

Jeremy then returned to Everett’s side, wrapped an arm around his soldier’s waist, and they walked to the bedroom. When Everett reached out for the switch, Jeremy stopped him. “It’s okay. I want to see you. All of you,” Jeremy said, reassuring him.

Everett blew out a long, steady breath and nodded.

“Hey, it’s me. Your dancer boy. I’m not critiquing you in any fashion.” Jeremy helped Everett back up until they reached the large bed. He lifted his hands to Everett’s shirt and began to undo the buttons. He slid them open one by one to reveal both smooth skin and the puckered, ribbed, thicker scarred skin. He let his fingers drift down both sides of Everett’s chest. He pressed a series of kisses down Everett’s throat and across the chest.

Everett tilted his head back, and his hands moved to Jeremy’s shoulders. “Jeremy, please...”

“I have you, I promise. I won’t let you go.” Jeremy finished unbuttoning the shirt and helped to slide it over Everett’s shoulders and down his arms. His thumbs brushed along the skin as it was revealed to him.

“I’m a horrible mess.” Everett stared down at the webbing of scars across his right side, some deeper from the fragments that had dug into his skin during the explosion.

“No. You’re an honorable soldier who served his country. You should wear your scars with pride in your service. You’re a brave man, who has seen unspeakable horrors and dangers. Never doubt your honor and beauty.”

Jeremy tugged his own shirt over his head and tossed it aside with Everett's. "Now, let's get rid of these clothes."

"Hmm. I would like to see you nekkid," Everett said with a wiggle of his eyebrows.

Jeremy laughed, kissed him, and went a little faster with removing his jeans and Everett's slacks and jockeys. He got Everett to sit on the edge and crouched to pull off the loafers and socks his soldier wore around the house. He knew his man needed them for support.

He gently pushed Everett's knees apart and moved between them. He stroked his fingers down the flat belly, tangled in the trimmed hair. "You have grays down here."

"Hey. You're not supposed to point that out," Everett said with a chuckle. "And they're silver, like in my hair."

Jeremy chuckled as he brushed his fingers through the hair, gently tugged a few curls to Everett's delight as he moaned. His cock thickened and lengthened. It began to curl and lift toward him, and Jeremy wrapped his fingers around Everett's cock and stroked it from base to ridge. He gave it a strong, slow tug and twist, changing the pressure and movements before he wrapped his lips around the head and sucked.

"Oh, Jeremy, oh..." Everett tried to say and ended with moans as Jeremy worked him. "No. No. Stop..."

Jeremy lifted his mouth from the crown, licked the drops of fluid that emerged, and grinned. "What?"

"I want to come inside of you."

"You are."

"Jeremy..."

Jeremy chuckled and nodded. He sat back. "Okay. Go lay back against the pillows. I'll do the work. I'm clean."

“So am I,” Everette said as he pushed and pulled his body across the bed. He piled several pillows behind his back. Then he reached out to the nightstand and pulled out a new bottle of lube. He wiggled the box of condoms and glanced at Jeremy. “Guess we don’t need these, then?”

“Nope. I want to feel every inch of you,” Jeremy said as he crawled across the bed and straddled Everette’s thighs. He snatched the box and tossed it across the room. Then he took the bottle and squeezed a generous amount on his fingers. He moved his hand behind him and worked his fingers in his opening. It’d been a while for him, only using a couple of vibros, so he took a few extra minutes to stretch himself.

“Damn, that’s so sexy to watch.” Everette picked up the bottle. He squeezed out more lube and covered his cock.

Once he felt prepared, Jeremy took hold of Everette’s cock in one hand and placed himself in position. He felt the larger head push through and enter him. He closed his eyes and moaned at the delicious stretched feeling, the beginning of the pressure which would fill him. He raised and lowered his ass a little to work himself.

“Come on, babe, give us more,” Everette said, his jaw clenched at the feeling.

Jeremy sank down the rest of the way on Everette’s cock. He moaned loud when his prostate was nudged by the thick head. He shifted his hips, nudged and worked his ass over Everette. He got into a rhythm, raising and lowering over Everette’s cock.

“Need more,” Everette said and pulled Jeremy toward him. He rolled them over until he was on top. He pushed Jeremy’s legs back and open and began to thrust deeper inside his lover.

“Oh... Oh shit... Yes...”

They moved together, longer, deeper, harder, until their bodies were covered in sweat. With every hit and nudge on his sweet spot, Jeremy climbed higher. Finally, he exploded with his release and called out Everette’s name.

His cum spilled out of his cock and across their bellies. He barely heard Everette crying out as he released deep inside him.

It took a few more minutes, but Everette slowly pulled out. Then he turned until their exhausted, sated bodies were spooned. He nuzzled against Jeremy's neck.

"Hmm. Best part of the moment," Jeremy said.

"There will be lots more of this for us."

"Oh, hell yes, soldier boy. Love you."

"Love you, dancer boy."

CHAPTER 5

Six Months Later

The music lifted higher and higher into a crescendo. On stage, the single male dancer spun, twisted, leapt, and twirled through the intricate steps that expressed the remaining part of the dance of a male coming to the end of his life. The company raced out from different directions, swirled around him in a quick movement, him reaching for them, before they all broke away and disappeared. The dancer spun towards the front center of the stage, until he came to a stop, shoved his fist into the sky, and dropped into a split, hands reaching out across the stage toward the audience, and lay there as the music finished and the stage darkened.

The *premier danseur noble* of the Illusion Company had danced his final principal position of his professional career. As of this night, Jerome Alexander would say good-bye to the stage, but not to dancing or dancers. No, he would still be around behind the scenes, teaching the younger generation, and attending various functions.

Thunderous applause rose from the audience to celebrate his last performance as the curtain closed in front of him. Pressing a cheek to the cool wood, Jerome concentrated on his breathing and not on his aching joints.

“Can you move? You have one helluva ovation out there. I suspect several curtain calls too,” Marcelo teased as he walked over and crouched next to him.

“Ugh,” Jerome said and pushed himself up off the stage. He twisted to the side and with care closed the split. “Ahh... Damn Clinton for insisting on ending with that move.”

“He knew it would be spectacular and it was one hell of a dance to watch. I’m honored at the chance to fill your slippers,” Marcelo said as he held out his hand and lifted the other dancer to his feet. “Now smile and wave. Your husband is worried.”

Jerome slid away and became Jeremy Armstrong-Hastings, husband for three months to his beloved solider. He shifted to the side, smiled, and waved

with a kiss to his husband and canine companion waiting in the wing. His soldier waved back while the Lab's tail wagged his entire butt.

"Curtain... Time for curtain," a stage manager hissed.

Marcelo squeezed Jerome's hand and then slipped away. All the curtain calls would be solo, focused only on the dancer's last dance. Bets behind the scenes went on about how many calls Jerome would go through.

It took a grand total of ten calls before Jerome and the audience finally finished saying good-bye. He gave them a final kiss and wave with his last bow. Then he walked offstage for the last time and went right to his husband. He changed back to Jeremy, his life offstage, and wrapped his arms around his husband.

"Oooh, sweaty dancer stink," Everette teased as he wrapped his arms around Jeremy. The Lab rubbed his head against both of their legs.

"Last time for post-performance dancer stink," Jeremy said as he reached up and kissed his husband.

"Umm. Yeah. Gross," the prima ballerina, Veronika, said with a laugh. She came over and kissed Jeremy's cheek when the husbands parted. "You were gorgeous, as always. I'll miss having you lift me high."

"I'll miss you too, but I'm not going away completely," he reminded her.

"Come on, dancer boy, it's time to party," she said and went to Clinton.

"Can you handle a party?" Jeremy touched his husband's scarred cheek.

"I'm good for another hour or so and then it'll be too much," Everette said, giving him the truth as always about his condition.

"Okay. Come with me so I can change and close out my dressing room."

"Are you gonna jump me one last time in your dressing room?"

Jeremy wiggled his eyebrows as he led them away to begin their new life together offstage and together.

THE END

Author Bio

Ever the quiet one growing up, Nicole Dennis often slid away from reality and curled up with a book to slip into the worlds of her favorite authors. Over the years, she's created a personal library full of novels filled with dragons, fairies, vampires, shapeshifters of all kinds, and romance. Always she returned to romance. Still, there were these characters in her head, worlds wanting to be built on paper, and stories wanting to be told and she began writing them down whether during or after class. She continues to this day. Only recently has it begun to become fruitful, spreading out to let others read and enter her worlds, meet her characters, and see what she sees. No matter what she writes, her stories of romance with their twists of paranormal, fantasy, and erotica will always have their Happily Ever Afters.

She currently works in a quiet office in Central Florida, where she also makes her home, and enjoys the down time to slip into her characters and worlds to escape reality from time to time. At home, she becomes human slave to a semi-demonic tortie calico.

She loves to hear from readers and fans, so don't be shy. Find her on the 'net or send an email.

Contact Info

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