

A shirtless muscular man with tattoos on his arms and chest stands behind a dark-colored car. The background is filled with a bright, glowing energy field or plasma, with blue and orange particles and streaks of light. The title "Mr Jaguar" is overlaid in large, white, 3D-style letters that appear to be part of the energy field.

Mr Jaguar

K.A. MERIKAN

MR. JAGUAR

— One day you'll be pumping my gas —

Mike Miller's life has gone to shit. The formerly popular high school quarterback now works at a gas station in the middle of nowhere. The last thing he needs is meeting the guy he used to bully at school and seeing him all sorts of polished up. James is now the proud owner of an amazing silver Jaguar and a self-made millionaire. It seems that the day couldn't get any worse for Mike, but James 'Lovelace' Austin might just turn out to be his golden ticket out of the job he hates.

When James Austin meets Mike Miller, his high school crush and tormentor all in one, working at an old, dirty gas station, it feels as if the stars have finally aligned in his favor. He wants to finally get his revenge on the guy, but when Mike turns out to be gay, the whole afternoon takes a turn for the surreal. Instead of just humiliating Mike at his workplace, James decides to hire him for a weekend at a conference he's attending. A hot guy by his side is the only accessory James needs to rub his success in the faces of his frenemies.

Only problem is, a gay Mike Miller might be too much of a blast from the past than James ever expected. If James wants his nerdy heart safe from the hunky jock, he needs to keep Mike at arm's length. The task would be a lot easier if Mike wasn't unashamedly hitting on James. Or is it just James's money Mike is after?

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Love's Landscapes

An M/M Romance series

MR. JAGUAR

By K.A. Merikan

Introduction

The story you are about to read celebrates love, sex and romance between men. It is a product of the *Love's Landscapes* promotion sponsored by the *Goodreads M/M Romance Group* and is published as a gift to you.

What Is Love's Landscapes?

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 these authors 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's Landscapes*.

No matter if you are a long-time devotee to M/M Romance, just new to the genre or fall somewhere in between, 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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MR. JAGUAR

By K.A. Merikan

Photo Description

Two men lie on a bed locked in a passionate embrace. Completely naked, oblivious to the world around them, they share something special, a bond they couldn't possibly have with anyone else.

Story Letter

Dear Author,

I feel there is so much emotion on the bottom's face in this photo. I want to know what the story is behind these two guys. The author can write anything they would like, as long as the story includes the following:

1) I love enemies-to-lovers and best friends-to-lovers stories. I don't care which route you go, I'd just like it to be a story from one of those genres.

2) I love angst! Angst would be very much appreciated.

3) It has to have an HEA. I'll leave the rest up to you. Tell me who they are, why they are so in love, how they got to this point, and where they are going from here.

4) No gratuitous sex or PWP, but like the picture shows, I'd like this one to have some seriously hot smexin'.

5) Would prefer this one not to have any BDSM.

Sincerely,

Stacey Jo

Story Info

Genre: contemporary

Tags: enemies to lovers, cinderfella, reunited, geeks/nerds, blue collar, businessman, bullying, escort, first time, high school crush

Word Count: 34,2736

MR. JAGUAR
By K.A. Merikan

Chapter 1

The heat made Mike boil in his uniform, so even though his boss had told him not to, he pushed the top of his coveralls down to his hips. Mike was pretty sure the old pig was just jealous his employee looked so much hotter than him. Not to mention both Vega's wife and their daughter, Vanessa, were making eyes at Mike, which couldn't be going down all that well with the guy. Vega probably only kept Mike on because he couldn't find anyone else who'd do the job for the slave wages he was willing to offer and live in the ancient motel by the gas station as well.

Mike carried a crate of beer into the small convenience store where Vega sat behind the counter, sweating, farting, watching TV and fanning himself with a newspaper. Without a word, Mike made his way toward the fridge to stack it full of beer. When he left home three years ago, he never thought he'd end up working at a shabby gas station in the desert, in a dead-end job, and with no one to fuck. No, when he came out and his family showed him the door, he was sure what awaited him would be a gay paradise, a never-ending parade of hot, tight asses and eager throats. Instead, he was stuck in this dump, barely scraping a living, not able to save up for anything, not able to afford a car, even though he kept fixing other people's.

Life just wasn't fair for Mike Miller. Wasn't a hot mechanic every gay guy's dream? Thanks to the free gym Vanessa let him use at the motel, he never got out of shape after high school, unlike some of his former teammates, but that wasn't helping his chances when he didn't have a quarter to his soul and never met anyone. Hell, if things kept up the pace they had slogged at for the last twenty-seven years of his life, maybe he should knock up Vanessa and become the proud heir to Vega Gas & Motel?

There wasn't much traffic at the moment, but Vega wouldn't let him have a moment's peace, so he pulled out a rag and started pretending to clean the fridge door of the ever-present dust. He could kill for a cold beer right now. His throat was slowly turning into sandpaper while his skin couldn't have been more wet without getting into a shower stall.

From outside, he heard the low hum of a car, but when it came to an abrupt stop, he knew they had a customer. Mike groaned but just kept stacking the beer in the fridge and enjoying the cool breeze coming from between its cold walls. It was like standing in the door to Narnia. He crossed his fingers for the

customer pumping his own gas, paying Vega, and disappearing from sight. But no, the hoarse, cigarette-infused screech grabbed the back of Mike's neck to haul him back to the door like a disobedient puppy.

"Hey, you! There's Mr. Jaguar waiting for his lady friend. Chop, chop!"

Mike rolled his eyes and put a cold beer against his forehead for a sec before closing the fridge. "I'm going, I'm going. Can't he pump his own gas? Rich asshole." He walked along the shelves, but just as he was about to put his sunglasses on, he saw the Jaguar in all its glory. Sleek and designed for speed like the animal it was named after, the convertible almost blinded him with sunlight reflecting off its silver body. Mike's eyes already strayed to a slim figure leaning against its side. Mr. Jaguar didn't look like someone who belonged in a beat-up place such as this. Dressed in a pair of well-fitted, cream-colored slacks and a white shirt, he was the male version of the bombshell blonde customer even Vega would rush out to pump gas for. The presence of such a woman here was as elusive as the possibility of a meteorite striking Vega through the roof. Mike would take the meteorite, hands down. Or Mr. Jaguar, who combed his dark hair with his fingers and looked at Mike through a pair of pitch-black shades.

Mike was drawn out of the convenience store as if the guy were that cold beer he dreamt of. He'd rub him all over his body, not just the forehead. He put his sunglasses on as well, not really even dreaming the guy would be gay anyway. But stare he could, even at a straight guy.

"What can I do you for?" Mike asked, walking up to the car and shamelessly running his fingers along the side of the Jag's door. He'd sell his soul for a machine like that. The customer's mouth opened slightly, as if Mike's invisible finger pressed on the middle of that plump lower lip. There was just a shadow of dark stubble on his cheeks, which only accentuated the customer's angular cheekbones. *Sharp as razor blades*, thought Mike, but it did nothing to stifle his excitement. It wasn't often that he met a man this hot in person. Slim, but the rolled-up sleeves revealed toned forearms covered by a dusting of black hair. The customer stared at him in silence, eyebrows gathered into a deep frown over the sunglasses.

"I ain't got all day, you know?" Mike pouted and put his hands on his hips. He wasn't going to take shit from Mr. Jaguar, no matter how hot he was. And he was *so* hot. Mike imagined himself grabbing the guy and fucking him on the hood of the car. He'd get to bury his dick in a piece of hot meat and caress the body of the car as well.

"You seem familiar." Slowly, the customer raised his hands and took off the sunglasses, revealing a pair of narrow, expressive eyes. They were as blue as the sky above them.

Mike gave him another once-over, from the stylish leather shoes, to the catalog-trimmed hair. "I've never left the county, so I doubt it," he said, but stood a bit closer, hoping Vega wouldn't see it from his farting chair. What if the guy actually *was* gay? Maybe being 'familiar' was meant as a pickup line? Why was he so bad at this kind of stuff?

"I used to live around here," said Mr. Jaguar, giving Mike a long look. "Didn't you go to Alberta High School?"

Mike frowned and took a step back. "Yeah, why?" He pulled his sunglasses off and combed his fingers through his brown hair. Fuck. He should have combed it that morning. Was this the moment he should say something like, *I'd remember someone as hot as you from school* and they would both laugh before going round the back for a quick blowjob? Mr. Jaguar did have nice lips that now broadened in a smile.

"Mike Miller, am I right? The quarterback."

Mike gave him a crooked smile. *Mike Miller, the quarterback.* That did sound nice. Too bad it wasn't high school anymore, and you couldn't live off being a mediocre football player. He'd been good in school, just not good enough for a scholarship.

But Mike had to focus on the problem at hand. He couldn't link those blue eyes to a name at all. "Yeah, long time ago," he said and held out his hand to the guy, hoping Mr. Jaguar would save him from his misery and introduce himself. He didn't even take the hand Mike offered.

"Do you know who I am?" he asked with a small smile.

Mike crooked his head to the side and rubbed his hand against his sweaty stomach as if he'd never held it out. This was getting truly annoying. "Not really, no." He shrugged, trying to keep his cool even though goosebumps of shame were crawling up his back. A motherfucker he was supposed to know from school pulled up in a Jag, and he had no choice but to pump his gas. Perfect. Another perfect day in the life of Mike Miller.

The customer sighed and gave a shallow nod. "I will help your memory. I'm the guy you cornered in a shower stall. You switched on the icy cold water for a good laugh with your teammates," he said, forcing his lips into a smile.

Any hint of a grin dripped from Mike's face like sweat. This couldn't be happening to him. There they were, the school's resident gay nerd and him, about to pump his gas. This had to be the guy's dream come true. A prophecy written in the stars. It could have only been worse if Mike were fat by now. He didn't even remember Mr. Jaguar's name all that well. Only the nickname he got after an unwanted outing during a slideshow presentation.

"Lovelace." Like the actress in *Deep Throat*. Mike groaned and took another step back. His life had reached a new low.

"It's James. And certainly not 'Lovelace,'" whispered... James, who looked nothing like the thin, shapeless teen with longish hair Mike remembered from school. "But I am happy that I was entertaining enough to be remembered."

As angry as Mike was with this meeting, he couldn't help but have his skin throb at the knowledge that this guy was in fact gay. Mike put his hands in the pockets of his low-hanging coveralls and swallowed. James was the first real gay guy Mike had ever known, and he had been trying to hook up with him even when James had been an ugly duckling. None of his attempts ever worked out the way he wanted though. Being in the closet didn't help either. Like that shower stunt. That was an epic fail. Mike had this fantasy that it would all work out like in a porno. He'd get James wet, have him undress and... stuff would happen. Instead, the whole fucking football team came into the locker room and wrecked the mood.

"Yeah, whatever. You'll always be Lovelace to me." Mike summoned a grin. Okay, so maybe he was as poor as dirt, but at least he could still have some satisfaction over this guy. Mr. Look-at-me-I've-got-a-Jag.

James put the sunglasses over his eyes and frowned. "I'll get some coffee. Wash the car," he said and started walking toward the store.

Mike spread his arms to the sides. "You've got to be shitting me!"

"The key's inside," said James, showing off his tight ass, or at least that was how it seemed to Mike. Those pants fit James perfectly.

Mike looked back to the Jag. For a split second, he imagined jumping in, showing Vega the finger and driving off never to return. With the added bonus of leaving James without a car. Mike knew he wouldn't do it though. He wasn't a criminal, even if it would make his life so much easier.

Mike took a deep breath and stroked the side of the door again. The car was so pretty, no matter whom it belonged to. It actually took Mike a while to get

into the driver's seat, shyly as if he were courting a virgin. The upholstery was soft, cream-colored leather, and the seat was a dream to sit in. He'd never had the chance to actually drive a vehicle so polished, new, and classy. Yes, that was the word. There was no fish tank in the back, no television set, or big speakers, but everything inside was of highest quality. And it smelled of a cologne that very much spiked Mike's senses.

He carefully drove the car into the garage where he washed the cars. At least there was shade here. Even the short drive was as smooth as spreading soft butter all over toast. Mike scrutinized the car when he got out, and in fact, it wasn't half as shiny as it had seemed to him at first glance. Like the hot guy who then turns out to be all too familiar.

That was his life. He either met no gay guys, or tempting gay guys who'd never suck him off. Grumbling under his breath, he prepared the necessary supplies and started working the soapy sponge over the beautiful exterior. It was only when he glanced toward the open doors that he noticed the already-familiar silhouette of James. God knew how long he had been standing there and ogling Mike with his gay eyes!

"You don't have to supervise me. I know what I'm doing." Mike rinsed the soapy sponge in a bucket of clear water and then dipped it in the soapy water again.

"I know," said James as he sipped some coffee out of a paper cup. It gave Mike some satisfaction to know that the coffee powder in the store's vending machine was past its due date. "I'm just enjoying the view."

Mike actually stopped moving and looked back at James while polishing the wet metal. He could feel his stomach muscles move with a deeper breath. Good thing he was tanned because heat rose to his face at that comment. "I bet you had a crush on me in school, didn't you?" Mike tempted his luck. "How's being gay working out for you?" he asked, but rinsed the section he just washed with a hose, as if the encounter didn't affect him at all.

"You were one of the guys I was jerking off to, yeah." James slurped his coffee and leaned against the wall. "Being gay is lots of fun. How is being straight working out for *you*?"

Mike frowned, words stuck in his throat. When did Lovelace get all this confidence? Then again, it probably came with the same money that got him the gorgeous Jag and designer sunglasses. Imagining this grown-up James jerking off made Mike stall with his answer even longer as he dropped to one

knee with a brush to scrub the wheel. "Good," he finally choked out. God, he was such a loser. "With these abs, I get pussy all the time."

"Yeah, I can imagine. They are quite the dream, especially with sweat beading all over you." James smiled and stepped closer, resting his hand on a wooden chair.

Mike felt a sudden need to pull on the other half of his coveralls, instantly countered by the urge to get naked altogether. "It's a car wash, not a peep show." Mike gave him a glare and scrubbed so hard that it got his muscles aching.

James put the cup on the seat and pulled out his wallet. A green note rustled in his hand, and he started playing with it in his fingers. "You could strip for me."

Mike's stomach twisted, and he almost dropped the brush to the floor as he stared at the hundred dollar note. Was it beneath him? Probably not. He was in a position where he washed his clothes with Vanessa's to save up on going to the Laundromat. "More," he spat in the end and looked around the empty garage and to the wavy air over the asphalt far off on the road.

James snorted. "For a strip? You're already half naked."

Mike swallowed and rinsed the wheel with the hose. "I bet you really wanna see my wet-dream cock though," he said with a lot more confidence than he actually had right now. James's shoulders had such a nice shape to them. He couldn't get over how much Lovelace had grown.

"I don't know. Maybe you're advertising something not worthy of my attention?" teased James. He picked up the cup and kept on drinking.

Mike turned off the water and stepped closer, with his heart going up to his throat. James terrified and excited him at the same time. "Okay, a hundred for a strip, a thousand for a naked car wash?" He knew he was pressing his luck (and humiliating himself in the process), but no one would have to know it ever happened, and Mike could actually save some money for once. That was of course if he didn't become an alcoholic after this traumatic experience.

James slowly sat down on the chair and crossed his legs. The smile never once left his face. He was enjoying himself like a cat playing with a tormented mouse. "I can give you two hundred for a jerk-off."

Mike swallowed, painfully aware of every drop falling from the hose to the floor. Sure, he'd want to touch James. He'd do it for free or even pay for it if he

had any money, but when James put a price on it, it felt a lot more dirty than the Jag he was tending to. Was this really all he was worth? He looked at the concrete ground and nodded. It wasn't like he'd hate it. It wasn't like he was being asked to eat pussy or even blow the guy.

"I'll close the door," he muttered breathlessly, shame and arousal mixing in him like a badly made Jägerbomb.

James nodded, relaxing in the chair. "You know, the one reason I was always sorry I didn't do sports at school was that I was missing out on ogling cocks in the shower."

Mike pulled down the garage door, painfully aware of the coveralls sliding down his hips. For a moment, they were surrounded by darkness, but when he switched on the light, everything became painfully real. After a quick wash of his hands in the small sink, Mike rubbed his nape and slowly approached James, unsure how to go round the deed with James sitting. "You should have said you wanted to suck off the whole team."

James drew in a sharp breath, which sounded very prominent in the silent garage. He cleared his throat. "Yeah, right. All the straight players getting off on a *fag*."

"Maybe there were some gay ones." Mike shrugged and walked up to James. Without further ado, he bowed down, put his hand on the back of the chair, over James's shoulder, and reached for his fly with the other. Sink or swim. He hadn't been with a guy in three years, and he was not letting this handsome birdie out of his grasp.

But it certainly wanted to fly. James gasped and scrambled out of the embrace, stumbling to the wall. The cup fell to the floor, having left a brown trail down the leg of his pants. "What was that?" whispered James, his throat squeezed so tight, it sounded like a wheeze.

Mike frowned and straightened up. "You wanted a handjob. You thought I wouldn't do it? If this is some fucking joke to you, then it's not funny." He clenched his hands into fists.

"No!" It sounded as if James was spitting the word out in distaste. "I wanted *you* to jerk off. Christ!" he uttered breathlessly.

Oh. So Mike wasn't even good enough to touch Mr. Jaguar, only worth ogling. He chewed on this thought for a while as it left a bitter aftertaste in his mouth. He took a deep breath and stepped back, feeling like an idiot. "Okay, whatever, I can do that," he groaned.

James swallowed, but stayed by the wall, crossing his arms on his chest. "Okay." He looked too hot for his own good.

Mike swallowed, trying to fight feeling like dirt under James's designer shoes and backed off, sitting his ass on the hood of the Jag. "How does it feel to have your dream come true, Lovelace?"

Even in the dark corner James hid in, there was no mistaking the way his Adam's apple bobbed at the comment. "I didn't get anything yet."

Mike groaned, but he supposed it was time to show off the goods. He pulled the zipper of his uniform down in one quick move. On hot days like this one, he didn't wear anything underneath, so that was it. His cock was right there, on show in the bright lights, already filling. He looked up to James, imagining how it would be to have those plump lips around it.

Mike was big—they both knew he used to easily push James around—he was hot, and his cock was pretty damn good, and yet, it felt so strange to be undressed under someone's scrutiny, for their sole enjoyment. He would get his pleasure, but it was obvious his orgasm would not be truly *his*. There was complete silence as he revealed himself, the wet metal warming up under his buttocks. James made no comment, no move, nothing. He was just staring at him like a living camera.

Mike tried to seem casual as he slid his hand down to his dick, slowly coaxing it to life. Was two hundred bucks worth losing his dignity like this? He wasn't all that sure anymore. But then again, hadn't he lost all self-respect last week when he had to clean up Vega's vomit from the floor in the convenience store? Oh God, he shouldn't be thinking about Vega and vomiting right now. Instead, he focused on James again. On his angular cheekbones, blue eyes, on the veins on his toned arms...

Mike spat into his hand and started pumping his dick with a groan. James exhaled and took one step closer, which was just enough for the light to reach his face. His lips were half open in contrast to the eyelids, which were lowered over the eyes, giving James a dazed look.

Mike took a deep breath, quickening his strokes. He supposed it was all the power he had left over James. Not much in comparison to a Jag and a full wallet. He looked down to his own cockhead with a groan before darting his gaze back up at James. Mike's stomach muscles danced with every deep breath and grunt. His body tingled with intermingling sensations of shame, powerlessness, and excitement. This was a real gay guy watching him, being excited, coming closer... what?

James was slowly stepping up to Mike, his hands firmly clasped at the back of his neck, but with the front of his pants tenting, there was no doubt about what James thought of the ordeal.

"It's an extra five hundred if you wanna suck me off," Mike rasped, hoping James would actually take him up on the offer. His gaze wandered down to the front of James's pants again, and he sped up the jerk-off. But James stepped back, all the way into the semi-darkness and watched Mike's illuminated body in complete and utter silence.

Mike was losing momentum, too ashamed of what he'd offered, and even more ashamed that it got rejected. Rich fuck. He looked down to his dick and started pumping it with a new ferociousness, trying to forget James was there. He liked watching his own cock anyway. The way the cockhead kept popping out of his fist. Mike imagined doing it to another guy, and the visuals always helped. It didn't take long for him to come with a grunt, spurting all over the concrete and panting for air. He rubbed the hood of the Jag with satisfaction, imagining it belonged to him.

Slowly, he looked up, to the ceiling with tubes and cables dangling around because there was no one who bothered with bringing order, or even doing some dusting. There was still nothing coming from James's safe corner.

Mike let himself catch some air before standing back up. He stretched, trying to seem all chilled and casual. He looked up at James and zipped up his coveralls. "Happy?"

"Yeah, it was quite entertaining," said James, stretching out his hand, with two bank notes that Mike had earned with ten minutes of work.

He had to walk up to James to pull them out of his hand, which was the pinnacle of this experience. "Did you pull up here just for this?" he groaned and pushed the money into his pocket.

"No, I still want my car washed," said James, putting his hands into his pockets, on both sides of the bulge in his pants. He smelled of arousal, and all of a sudden, gaydar-less Mike could tell.

"Sure, why not. Why not watch how badly I did, huh?" Mike walked back to the buckets, trying to ignore the burning shame. "'Look at me, I used to be the school loser and now I've got a Jag,'" he muttered and dipped the large sponge in the soapy water.

James sighed. "You must really hate it, don't you?"

Mike's pulse sped up, and he could feel the vein bulging out on his neck. Even the orgasm he'd just had couldn't soothe his nerves when James rubbed his success into Mike's wounded pride. What else was James gonna make him do? Polish his fucking shoes? The worst thing was, for enough money, Mike would do it. He could deny it to himself as he washed the hood of the car, but he'd do a lot to get out of this dump.

"You must hate lustng after me this much," Mike caught on to the only leverage he hoped he had.

James snorted, all nervousness gone from his voice. "You're just one hot fish in a sea of plenty."

Mike didn't dare look up at him, afraid his cheeks were so red by now that it would show. "You're a dick," he muttered and squatted to wash the car door. The vehicle wasn't filthy, more covered in dry dust than anything else, so the wash was going smoothly.

"Then we have a lot in common," said James.

"You don't know shit about me." Mike rubbed the silver surface with rising anger. What right did this bastard have to strut in here like this, boss him around, make him feel like dirt, and stand there like a Popsicle Mike couldn't lick?

"Maybe I should."

"Oh yeah?" Mike groaned. "Why?"

James started walking along the wall, past the car. Mike didn't raise his head, but he watched James's torso through the windows. No chance of seeing the face though.

"Plain old curiosity. I always liked gathering new information."

Mike's blood boiled, and he stood up, unable to take it anymore. He squeezed the sponge in his hand and looked into James's eyes. "Of course you do. Once a nerd, always a nerd. I'm stuck in a shit job with nowhere to go, and I'm not some asshole, I'm an okay guy. I just needed someone to give me a chance, but no one will." He took a deep breath, shocked at how much it shook him to spurt it all out. "And I am that gay player who just wanted a blowjob from the only gay guy he'd ever known. Fuck this shit!" He threw the sponge into the bucket and went for the door. He was so done. Even he had some limits. He kicked a broom on his way.

“What was that?” James’s voice was loud and clear, just as his footsteps on the concrete behind Mike.

Mike groaned and rolled his eyes. “You heard me, so now fuck off.”

“You’re gay?” James grasped Mike’s shoulder, pulling him back.

Mike took a deep breath and forced himself to turn around but pushed the hand off. “Yeah, I’m fucking gay.”

James watched him, wide-eyed. “Why didn’t you say anything?” he uttered, crossing his arms on his chest.

Mike pouted and mirrored the gesture. “Why? So you can mock my sad life even more?”

James blinked and slowly swayed his head from side to side. “Well, for one, I might have sucked you off. I’m not having a straight guy touch me. That would be gross.”

“You would?” Mike’s brain blocked out all the other information.

James shrugged, looking away. “Yeah, why not?”

“I don’t know, ’cause I’m now some loser you don’t want to have anything to do with? Oh, and ’cause you hate my guts?”

“I don’t think I hate you as much as you hate your job,” said James, suddenly looking up into Mike’s eyes. It seemed that he’d even gained an inch in height.

Mike pulled out the two hundred bucks. “Well, now at least I have some cash to drown my sorrows in. It’s not so easy to get out of here. What did you do to get all of this?” he pointed in the general direction of both James and the car.

James frowned. “If you’d like to join me for the weekend, you can hear all about it. Would two thousand be enough for your time?”

Mike swallowed, looking into those gorgeous blue eyes. “I—Is this some crazy sex thing?” he asked, losing more ground with every passing minute.

James rolled his eyes. “Of course it’s not. You want a chance? Here it is. I want to go within the next twenty minutes, so make up your mind,” he said with a grim expression.

Mike’s heart was pounding so fast he was sure he’d get arrhythmia and die soon. “And what am I supposed to do for you?”

James swallowed hard but kept his gaze level. “Pretend to be my date during a conference I’m attending.”

A few rusty cogs slowly turned in Mike’s mind. Ha. So there *was* something missing in Lovelace’s life. “Two thousand and a ticket to Vegas.”

James snorted. “Why, you want to start out as a professional stripper?”

Mike glared at him. “No. I just always wanted to go. It seems like a good place for a new start. I could be a bartender or some shit.”

“‘Some shit’ sounds more like it,” said James, but spread his arms with a sigh. “Deal.”

“Stop trash-talking your date then. Fuck,” Mike growled and pulled up the garage door, still hardly understanding the deal he’d just made.

“Wash the soap off before you go?” James nodded to his car, but his eyes had a different glint to them. Something had changed, but Mike couldn’t put his finger on it.

Chapter 2

This had the potential to turn out to be the worst decision in James's life.

He kept pressing the button on his MP3 player, in search of that one song that would calm him down or give him an energy boost, but it just wasn't coming. What was he thinking? He was way too old to enter the same river twice. The guy was a bully, and James could still remember being afraid of going to school because of him. Why would he even consider offering Mike Miller money for a date that was to last three days? *Three days too long*. The arrangement didn't even include sex because James was uneasy about the idea of paying someone for this kind of thing. He might have grown up, he might have polished himself, but some things just refused to change.

But God, Mike was still hot and tempting like a deep-fried Mars bar. James dared to think that maturity looked good on his high school crush. Watching him masturbate was to James like a visit to the Large Hadron Collider for a scientist. It made James feel privileged, even though he knew there was nothing special about what happened in the garage. Other than Mike turning out to be gay.

And there Mike was, that big hunk of beef, with his chest covered with a white tank top that still exposed every ridge. With orange shades, low-hanging jeans, and a big duffel bag thrown over his shoulder, he looked like the wet dream he'd always been to James. Even more so now, all grown-up, chunky and wide-shouldered. He'd probably had a quick shower as well, because his brown hair was damp and sticking to his face. Mike looked so happy with himself, James could hardly believe it. It seemed the guy didn't need much. He threw the duffel bag into the Jaguar's trunk in passing.

James wanted to make a snarky comment, but his lips were sealed. His gaze followed Mike into the convenience store. Through the large window, he watched him make his way to the counter, to the gray-haired man with a permanent scowl.

James saw Mike slam a bill on the counter, and the old man gave him some in return. Mike put all of them in his wallet and when he pointed outside, James felt their eyes on him. He froze, unsure whether he should smile or start the car and flee.

Mike's boss got to his feet and slammed his fist against the counter, his face becoming a mask of anger. James suspected Mike would not get any references

after that stunt. But then it got worse. James's eyes went wide when Mike started shouting something in the store and showed his boss his middle finger. All hell broke loose, the older man aggressively reached over the counter, and Mike backed off into a stack of toilet paper, sending all the rolls to the ground. James could hardly believe his eyes when Mike started picking them up just to send them flying at his screaming boss.

The only sensible thing that came into his mind was to break the fight apart by asking Mike to get into his car. So he pressed the horn. Mike turned to him and barely managed to duck when his boss threw a TV remote at him. He grabbed a few more toilet rolls and ran out of the convenience store. James was wrong. Mike hadn't grown up one bit.

He just stared at the scene. Was there a hidden camera somewhere? Was this all an elaborate plot to make James seem like a joke? He called out Mike's name, desperate to flee. His stomach was cramping with nerves already.

"I'm coming! Just gonna show this motherfucker what I think!" Mike yelled, running toward the car. But he wasn't the only one who rushed through the door. His boss was right on his heels.

"You better fucking come back and fix that or I'll call the cops!" the man screamed, shaking a cell phone in his clenched fist. He moved like a chimpanzee, hopping from side to side on his short legs as he ran through the parking lot.

James inhaled a huge gulp of air and started the car. Was this the moment where he got accidentally killed by a phone thrown at someone else?

"Fuck that!" Mike screamed and sent a roll at the man's head. It was perfectly aimed at his forehead and bounced off, leaving a long trail of paper on the ground. "Fix your own shit, old bastard!"

Any thoughts of death by phone dispersed like a childish whimsy when the station owner pulled out a gun. Mike jumped into the passenger seat of the Jag, not even bothering to open the door.

"What the fuck did you say, Miller?" the man screeched at them, waving the gun in the air.

James stepped on the gas and drove forward at full speed. He was hypnotized by the asphalt in front of him. His insides were one big mess of twisted anxieties, as he expected a bullet to shatter his rearview mirror any second.

Mike kneeled on the passenger seat and threw roll after roll until he ran out of ammo. “Fuck you, Vega! And by the way, I fucked Vanessa!”

The station owner exploded with gurgling screams, and James accelerated the speed. In the last moment, he realized he didn’t know whether they could safely exit the station, but the road was empty.

“Wh-what was that?” he uttered, overwhelmed by the heat that descended on him along with relief.

Mike sat back in the passenger seat with a self-satisfied grin, and crossed his arms on his chest. “Nah, I never fucked his daughter, just messin’ with him.”

James slowed down, trying to bring his heart rate back to normal. “I just... why did you have to make him so angry?”

“I slaved there for three years. You have no idea what a dick he is.” Mike exhaled and started looking around James’s car as if it was his own. At least the speeding air provided much needed coolness to James’s head.

“Yes, but... how is that helpful? It’s never a good idea to burn your bridges.” James sighed, leaning back against the soft backrest. This whole thing was a terrible idea. Terrible.

Mike shrugged. “What do I care? I’m going to Vegas.”

James frowned and looked back to the road. Now he had some idea how Mike ended up like this. There was no chance whatsoever that a person of such unpredictable character would ever get promoted. Anywhere.

“If you say so.”

“So yeah, what’s this conference? I’m actually looking forward to it now. I’m all pumped and stuff.” Mike grinned at him from behind his shades.

This was so far outside of James’s comfort zone that he didn’t know how to react to Mike’s behavior. “Well, it’s about drugs and supplies for doctors,” he eventually said, hoping it would be clear enough for Mike.

“Cool. So what do you want me to do? Call you ‘sweet cheeks’ and ‘honey bun’, and shit?” Mike put his hand out the car door, not even looking to James.

“Don’t be ridiculous. Who does that?” James sighed. “You must know how people in relationships behave.”

“I suppose, but do you want us to be more like the Obamas, or more like the Kardashians?” Mike pulled his top off, not bothered by anything. That sudden

flash of skin was distracting enough that James had to force his gaze off the tanned torso.

“Christ, definitely *not* like the Kardashians,” growled James, feeling his temples pulsate. “I don’t know... Obamas but less official, I guess?” He wanted to smash his head against the steering wheel.

“I can be the perfect boyfriend, don’t worry.” Mike waved his hand dismissively. “Could we stop at the Walmart in Alberta? I wanna get something to drink. There will be no other stores for a while.”

James counted to ten, desperate to calm down his galloping heart. “I won’t believe it until you prove it to me,” he muttered. After what he’d seen at the station, they definitely needed some trials before he could show Mike to the public.

“Starting now, my sweets?” Mike opened the glove box and started rummaging through it.

“Try harder. I need you to be classy. Like the wife of a wealthy plastic surgeon,” said James, though he already knew he bet on the wrong horse.

“Oh, so I’m a trophy boyfriend. Do I have a job or do I just sip martinis and fuck on demand?” Mike took out a pack of chewing gum and passed some to James, as if it was his to give.

“Don’t say that. I said classy. Do you even know what that means?” growled James, frustrated.

Mike went quiet and frowned, though his eyes weren’t visible behind the shades. “Yeah, yeah,” he muttered. “No fucking, only ‘making love’.”

“And that, you don’t talk about things like that with my business partners. Be supportive, nice, and tender,” said James, lowering his voice at the last word. What had he brought upon himself? This couldn’t possibly succeed.

Mike sighed. “Still as boring as ever, Lovelace.”

Heat rose in James’s chest. He had enough of this. “This is the addendum to our agreement. Each time you call me ‘Lovelace’ from now on, I will subtract a hundred dollars from your honorarium.”

Mike punched his arm. “This is so unfair!”

James tensed at the violation of his personal space, but he did feel a creeping satisfaction at Mike’s displeasure. This time, it was James who held

all the cards, and he wouldn't hesitate to play them. "I will not tolerate you insulting me."

"I wasn't. I was just..." Mike didn't seem to know how to end his sentence so he just gestured in the air. James had no idea how people like him survived. "You're getting off on this, aren't you?"

"On what?" asked James, even though he knew well what Mike meant. But he would not back down from the ban on 'Lovelace'. This nickname was a token of the past he wanted to bury under a shopping mall so huge that no one would ever dig it out.

He'd earned it after one of the pictures from his teenage porn stash somehow ended up replacing the picture of a microscope in a presentation James delivered during class. It was of a guy deep-throating a monster cock and since then, Mike would not let it rest. Now James was starting to get the idea why that was. So, instead of protecting a fellow gay man, Mike called James with the nickname derived from *Deep Throat*. Not to mention the number of jokes about cocksucking James had had to bear. It had been a nightmare.

"On having luck in life. You want me around just to feel all high and mighty. That's fine. I can deal with that." Mike pouted and ran his fingers through his hair.

James frowned at the road ahead. He couldn't deny the truth in Mike's words, but he wouldn't be explicit about enjoying it either. "Let's just rehearse. Try behaving like my boyfriend."

"Sure. But... can you behave like *my* boyfriend for a minute?" Mike asked as they turned into the side road, leading to Walmart. It was on the outskirts of their hometown, and James hadn't been here in ages, so he didn't mind.

"That's the idea. We both pretend."

"Good." Mike shifted in his seat as they drove into the parking lot. "See that guard? Park next to him," he said and pulled out his wallet.

James shrugged and drove up to the empty places close to where a middle-aged security guard was making his rounds. James knew something was up the moment the man frowned at them. He was buff, but with a slight beer belly protruding over the waistband of his pants.

"Hi, Dad," Mike spoke and leaned over James to look at the guard. "How's it going? We'd be glad if you paid extra attention to our car. It won't take long."

James felt a rush of heat to his face. *What?* What was this? He looked between Mike and the stern face of the guard. Was this really Mike's father? What was going on?

"What the hell is this, Mike?" The guard spoke with a frown as deep as the Grand Canyon.

"I just thought I'd come over and let you meet my boyfriend. We're going to Vegas later on, so I won't be around." Before James knew what was happening, Mike leaned down and kissed him. Hard. Mike's lips were slightly dry, but oh so hot and soft. He tasted of minty chewing gum and beer. James heard a ringing in his ears, and for a moment, he was somewhere else altogether, looking into a sky full of shooting stars.

When the kiss ended, he found himself clutching Mike's belt, and quickly pulled the hand back, gasping for air. Mike left him so lightheaded. James didn't know whether he should drive away or stay here.

"Get out," Mike's dad said in a cool voice. "You're a disgrace."

"What?" Mike cocked his head to the side, chewing that minty gum loudly. "I need to park my Jag somewhere, you know," he said and unbuckled James's seat belt. This was madness.

"Mike, don't provoke him. What if he damages the car?" whispered James as he opened the door on his side. What was wrong with this guy? Why was he making enemies at every corner?

"He won't, there's cameras."

James frowned but didn't comment on it. "If you just wanted a drink, we could have grabbed something at a gas station."

"I want something special." Mike got out of the car and paced over to James's side to... open the door for him, with his father still looking on. Now it was getting surreal.

"Er—thanks," uttered James, praying he wouldn't stumble or hit his head on the way out. His chest was so tight he had to fight for air. It felt nice to have someone be so gallant toward him.

"You wanna get something too?" Mike asked and put his thick, firm arm over James's shoulders. It was unbelievable that Mike Miller would be doing this in his home town. James had definitely missed some memo.

The arm was draped over him like a heavy cloak that made him more handsome, more desirable. His gaze darted lower, to Mike's bare torso, and he

took a shivery breath. It had been too fucking long since a man did that to him. That was why he was getting all fidgety like some teenage virgin. But Mike's smell was now so intense, so close, evaporating in the sun and clinging to James's skin.

"Maybe."

"Cool." Mike led them inside, completely ignoring the frown on his father's face. James went cold when Mike slipped a note into the man's chest pocket, but nothing happened.

"Hey Donna, how's it going?" Mike asked a woman who put her hands over her daughter's eyes as soon as she saw them.

"What are you doing?" asked James, trying not to look around too much. The stares he could feel on his skin were making him too self-conscious. Like when his secret passion had been revealed in the dark classroom all those years ago.

"Chill out. You're so hot. Everyone's just fuckin' jealous. I'm giving this town one last 'fuck you,'" Mike said as they got to the liquor aisle.

"Just... relax. Please, don't throw anything at anybody. I can't be arrested tonight." James inhaled and slowly raised his hand to touch the palm resting on his shoulder. That was what he used to do with his first boyfriend back in college. He loved playing with thick, manly fingers.

"I'm cool, sweetie. No throwing stuff, got it." Mike leaned down and kissed him again. James was thanking all deities ever conceived that the place wasn't packed. He only heard some people gasp from the side, like a choir of bigotry.

"The fuck are you doing?" hissed someone, and James's head jerked up like a bobble-headed dog's. His eyes darted straight to a blond man in the store uniform. His chest was moving the crate of wine he was holding. Oh, no. Was this another person Mike wanted to show the middle finger to?

"I'm celebrating an anniversary with my boyfriend, show me your most expensive wine," Mike commanded as if he were the king of Walmart.

"You're so messed up, Mike," the blond groaned and put down the crate. His fingers squeezed into fists.

James swallowed hard. He could play this game too. "Red, if you please," he said, for once looking straight into the guy's eyes. If he chose to attack James, Mike would surely come to the rescue, like a good pretend-boyfriend.

Now the man sneered at James as well.

"You heard my fiancé." Mike gestured at the guy. "Chop, chop."

The blond shook his head, but did actually reach to a top shelf. "Did you rob the food stamp bank or something?"

"I can't see how this is your business," said James, leaning into the warmth of Mike's body. He missed being close to someone else like that.

"Exactly." Mike nodded and hugged James tightly. "But if you want to know, I'm paying cash." He pulled out his wallet and waved it at the man. "Just like I did for my new Jaguar."

James chuckled and covered his mouth not to sound too loud. He didn't know whether it was the stress of being a part of this scheme, or whether it really was that funny. "You sound like you're trading in drugs."

"What the hell is going on with you? Not enough to be a fag, now you gotta be a drug dealer as well?" The guy passed Mike three bottles of red wine, his face only one shade lighter than the alcohol.

"My boyfriend's just kidding." Mike gently poked James with a bottle. "He's such a funny guy. And has a great ass as well. Has your wife ever agreed to anal? You should try it."

James felt his knees go soft, all his senses telling him it was high time to turn around, get into the Jag and drive cross-country to never ever meet any of the people who could possibly hear this. He pinched Mike's finger. Hard. *Classy, my ass... wait, that didn't come out right. Fuck.* James looked at the floor and followed the directions of his therapist. He was on a sunny beach, and all he could hear was the breeze and seagull screams.

"Shut your fucking face or I'll tell our dad all about this, and you'll be sorry," the guy said.

"You think I care? The old man can go fuck himself." Mike hugged both the bottles and James closer. "I'm going to Vegas."

"Good. Just where a freak show like you belongs," the man snarled.

Even with the wine in hand, Mike managed to show his brother the middle finger. "Enjoy your life without anal, Kevin." Mike turned around and pulled James along to the registers.

No seagull would be enough to protect James's mind from that. He let out a shuddery breath. "If you use this word in public ever again, I am going to kill you. I'm gonna tell my birds to chop you to pieces."

Mike looked to him and pushed his sunglasses up to his forehead. “Which one? ‘Fuck’?”

James stared at him, for a moment unable to voice his thoughts. “‘Anal’, you idiot. I don’t want anyone to think about my ass that way... I mean... not straight people,” he added after a moment of hesitation.

“You don’t like anal?” Mike frowned. “That’s too bad.”

“I do, but that’s not the point!” hissed James, simmering in his own shame. “I don’t want you to talk about it to... people.”

“I’ll be like a Disney princess, talking about your ass only to animals.” Mike grinned as they approached the registers. “Can I do you later?”

James drowned in the thick mixture of embarrassment and excitement. It rushed through his body like a river after breaking the floodgates. He didn’t know what to say. He had no idea what he was even thinking. His life was spiraling into madness.

“I bought you wine after all.” Mike winked at him and put the bottles in front of the cashier. He let go of James, who wasn’t even sure if Mike was serious anymore. Should he just play along? He wasn’t all that sure if he could keep up with that filthy mouth. He stepped past the registers and looked through the window, to his car, which was now shinier than ever. He had to admit Mike did a good job.

As soon as Mike had spent almost all of the money he’d earned jerking off, he put that big, hot hand on James’s hip and gently nudged him to the door. James wasn’t the type of guy who hooked up with random hot guys, but the gesture still made him feel all melty inside. Would they actually do *it*? He wasn’t sure it was a good idea. What if Mike just wanted him for the money? He did seem awfully happy to show off and spend it all.

“Whoa, that’s some chill I’m getting,” Mike muttered and pulled his hand away when they got to the car.

“What?” James blinked and looked at him, stuffing his hands down his pockets. Within a single hour, he’d fallen into an alternative universe. That was the only plausible explanation for what was happening to him. At least Mike’s dad was nowhere to be seen.

“I don’t even deserve an answer, just a sneer?” Mike sighed and got into the passenger seat as soon as James opened the car.

"What are you talking about?" James sat down next to him. "It's you who was talking about my ass in public." He looked the other way.

"But then I asked you when we were alone again."

James clasped his hands together, his whole body stiffening, but the skin of his buttocks seemed a lot more sensitive than usual. What sorcery was this? "I... thought you were joking."

"I haven't done anal since senior year when I did Tiffany Jordan, of course I wasn't joking."

James groaned. He did *not* want that mental image. His mind suddenly went numb, and he raised his head to look at Mike. Could that mean he, James the sex-deprived nerd was far more experienced than Mike the hot mechanic? "What?"

"You're really making me work for it, aren't you? Let's go." Mike sighed and put his top back on.

"I just... don't get it. You seem so eager... what do you mean that was the last time?"

Mike went silent for once and just watched James as he started the car. From the corner of his eye, James saw Mike giving the finger to the man in the uniform, who just had to be his dad. He chose to ignore it.

"You're all hot and gay. Why wouldn't I be eager? I'm your boyfriend after all," Mike muttered with less energy than before.

James drove toward the highway on the other side of the retail park. He would never trust GPS again. Then again, it was thanks to GPS that he met his date for the conference, so maybe the weekend wouldn't be all that bad. He hoped so.

"But... you're hot and gay, too. No boyfriends?" He glanced at Mike's handsome profile.

Mike shrugged. "Where? At Vega's Gas & Motel? I went to a gay bar in Austin once. I got a blowjob."

James had to force his jaw shut. This was *not* happening. No way in the hell. "No... hookups? Nothing?" he asked, unable to control his shock. This was so... sad.

"I only came out three years ago." Mike opened one of the wine bottles. "You know our town. Not much opportunity there. You know that gay radar thing? Mine must be defective."

"Internet?" whispered James and quickly took the turn. He'd almost missed their exit.

"Man, stop nagging me. I don't even have a car," Mike grumbled and took a swig of wine, straight from the bottle.

"Sorry, it's just... you're so hot," whispered James, intent on reaching the hotel as quickly as possible, though it would still take at least an hour.

"I'm just one hot fish in a sea of plenty," Mike repeated the words James had said to him earlier that day. He leaned against the door and took his shades off, and looked everywhere but at James.

Chapter 3

The ride passed mostly in awkward silence, with James talking about random stuff once in a while. At least he explained how he'd become a proud owner of a high-class sports car. Mike didn't understand all the technical details but it turned out that James, who now was an engineer, was the inventor of a portable laboratory machine. It was small, relatively cheap, and was gaining popularity in medical centers in small communities. Mike *was* impressed, but the strange atmosphere didn't disperse even as they pulled into a parking lot by a shopping mall only ten minutes away from their destination. James's comments on how weird it was that Mike didn't have hookups made Mike all sorts of uncomfortable. So he didn't. So what? It didn't mean he didn't want to. It just never worked out for him. Now, he not only felt like a failure at being straight, but a failure at being gay as well. Not to mention he was kinda queasy about giving blowjobs, even in his imagination, which probably made him an epic failure at being gay. He bet super-gay James gave mean head, that he knew how to deep-throat and shit.

James cleared his throat. "I thought you'd like to dress for the occasion. What do you think?"

Mike frowned at him. Why would Lovelace care what he thought? "I'm yours for the weekend. Dress me in what you want."

James frowned and looked at the steering wheel. "I want you to be comfortable. This way you'll feel more at ease in your role. I'm sure we can compromise."

"I don't like suits all that much. But they're probably the shit in your fancy air-conned hotel?" Was this supposed to be his *Pretty Woman* moment or something?

James sighed, unbuckling his seat belt. "You don't have to be dressed up like you're attending the Oscars, you know."

"I don't know." Mike got out of the car, no longer sure what pretending to be James's boyfriend entailed. "I'd prefer to wear a shirt without a jacket. Oh, and those rimmed glasses." Maybe James would be more willing to fuck if Mike looked smart?

"That would be great. And we could get some jeans and casual stuff as well if you're up for it." James gave him a broad smile. He raised his head and froze,

but eventually put his hand on Mike's nape. "So... shall we train while we're at it?"

"Y-yeah, sure." Mike slid his arm around James's waist. It had a nice firmness to it. He always thought it would be amazing to have a rich boyfriend who'd just give him stuff, but in this situation, he wasn't all that sure anymore how he felt about it.

James's eyes darkened, but he looked away with a low chuckle. "I keep forgetting how long your arms are."

Mike frowned. "What is that supposed to mean? Is this some abstract flirting? Because I don't get it."

"No... it's just that I haven't dated for a while. You're getting scratched by the rust on my love joint—God that didn't come out right either," moaned James. He pinched the bridge of his nose as his cheeks burst with redness. That fair skin was one of the qualities that had made teasing him so easy.

"Well, it's not really a date, so you can chill out and tell me what you want. Unless you want me to oil your 'love joint', or some shit." Mike led him toward the door to the mall. It felt weird being gay in public, like every single pair of eyes around them was on him. The Walmart act had been a great stunt, but now it was all becoming a lot more real.

James sighed. "Okay, lesson one: never say stuff like that outside of our hotel room." He walked up to the mall plan and narrowed his eyes, apparently looking for something specific.

"You said 'love joint,'" Mike muttered. He didn't know what James wanted anymore.

"Yeah, that was terrible. Let's just forget it and move on to some classy dating." James looked up from the plan, and his hand closed around Mike's. "Do some shopping, and then we could have coffee."

"Classy." Mike laughed nervously, feeling his hand sweat. All his mind could think of was that he was holding a guy's hand in public, and it wasn't for a crazy, adrenaline-infused stunt.

James's hand was smaller than his, less meaty but oh-so-warm. He couldn't remember ever holding a guy like this. Even the air conditioning in the mall would not stop the warmth spreading through his body. He was stared at. He was judged. It was all happening now. *He* knew it was an act, but no one else did.

"So, imagine that I am playing cards with some of the people from the conference. I win. What do you do?" asked James. "Show me."

Mike took a deep breath and forced a smile. "Good job!" He patted James on the back. "Err... Get 'em, tiger?"

James blinked. "Try again."

Mike let out a guttural rasp and lowered his voice. "That was great, I'm gonna fuck you *so hard* tonight if you win more cash." He leaned closer and nuzzled James's ear.

James pressed his mouth shut and looked at the floor. It took him a good thirty seconds to compose himself and speak again. "I am being serious. You can't say things like that in public."

"I'm just trying to be an encouraging boyfriend. You like to be fucked, I provide that service." Mike chuckled, imagining they were all alone, not surrounded by prying eyes. He was surprised no one actually said anything. At least there weren't that many people around.

"That's not what I want from you. I want you to be my date. Kiss my cheek and tell me I'm doing great, or something," he grumbled.

Mike swallowed. It wasn't his fault he didn't know how to handle a guy. "Give me another example. And let's move somewhere."

"We're going to the department store." James nodded toward a large entrance at the end of the corridor, and it looked like an expensive place. "Another example? What situations are you worried about most?"

"I-I don't wanna embarrass you when your conference friends come," he choked out, following James's lead. When did someone like Lovelace get so bossy, anyway? "Like, what kind of people are your friends there? Are they chilled out, very serious, or should I be joking around with them, fraternizing?"

James led him into the store and down the alley leading through the ladies apparel department with beautiful mannequins in the newest brand collections. He sighed. "They're not my friends, and that's the whole point. I'm openly gay, and not all of them approve of that. That is where you come in. I need you to be this dream guy who they can all see is a catch, even if they're straight."

Mike nodded slowly and squeezed James's hand tighter. "For them to imagine that if they were gay, I'd be the trophy boyfriend?"

"Yeah, but better than some of their dumb wives," muttered James. He raised his head to look at Mike with a small smile. "I just don't want it to be too explicit. You know, Obamas."

Mike smiled back. "Gay Obamas, promise."

James bit his lip and nodded. He'd become so handsome over the years that it was not straightforward, but Mike could see the resemblance to James's teenage self. Even as an ugly duckling, James had great bone structure, high cheekbones and a straight nose. And then there were the plump lips that held the promise of a great blowjob.

"So what are we getting?" Mike asked and started browsing through the shirts featured at the front of the men's department. "Oh, and why are these guys not your friends?"

James snorted as he picked one garment out before putting it back on a round rack. "We just share certain interests and pretend to be friends. I don't think I fit in with them, but it's hard to explain."

Mike couldn't believe James actually had frenemies. "That sounds surprisingly similar to high school. But aren't those your nerdy friends or something?"

James stopped, staring at a tall mannequin in a grey suit. His brows gathered together, and he nodded. "Now that I think about it, yeah. I guess I'm still the nerdy gay guy." He cleared his throat. "I'd say you need one white shirt, and at least one of a different color."

"I look good in gray." Mike looked up at the mannequin. He wouldn't wear something like that on a daily basis, but he was curious how he would look in a suit this fine. "And you're not a nerdy gay guy." Mike looked James up and down. The guy was so sleek looking. "You work out, don't you?" Mike wiggled his eyebrows and poked James's stomach with his fist.

James stiffened, but it only lasted a moment. "Yeah, every other day. There's a twenty-four hour gym in my apartment building. Choose the shirts you like, and we'll just try them on."

"'We'll try them'? Are you gonna help me put them on?" Mike said, grinning at the prospect. "I like you so big and firm. I wanna see *you* try stuff on."

James chuckled. "We're sharing a hotel room, so you'll get your chance to see it all in the flesh. Now pick whatever you like, and we'll go from there."

Mike just stood there for a moment, shamelessly imagining James naked. Would he have a dusting of hair on his chest as he did on his arms? Mike had no idea what it would be like to touch a firm chest instead of a soft one, but he couldn't wait to find out. He picked up four different shirts, afraid to even look at the price tags, and they made their way to the fitting rooms.

"Hey, what about the rest? Pants? T-shirts? Underwear? Take your pick. I want to be proud of my date," chuckled James, following him.

"How much can I choose though?" Mike looked into those gorgeous blue eyes framed by black lashes, and his heart skipped a beat. He'd die if he shared a hotel room with James and didn't fuck him tonight.

James shrugged. "Just pick what you like and later we'll decide what looks good on you."

"How rich are you exactly?" Mike eyed him, piling more clothes over his arm. He'd be lying if he claimed not to be jealous. James seemed to have everything Mike could possibly wish for. He was smart, rich, handsome, and drove a Jag on top of it all.

James snorted. "'Rich' enough. Now tell me how you would ask me to give you salt at the table."

Mike looked to the clothes in his hand, feeling heat creep up his neck. "Are you trying to mock me? You must think I'm an idiot."

James frowned. "Just tell me what you'd say."

So this was the price Mike would have to pay for the clothes. "Jamie, could you pass the salt please?" He felt like a trained monkey.

James stopped, glancing at him with slightly widened eyes. "That... yes, that was really nice." He scratched his nape and went on toward the denim section.

Mike followed, watching the shape of James's wide shoulders, nicely pronounced by the slim fit shirt. He wasn't as big as Mike, but almost as tall and with nice, narrow hips. Mike could only imagine how glorious that ass had to look. He'd bury his face in it and sleep there. He frowned at the thought, unsure if that was weird or not. It was another man's ass after all.

"Surprise me," said James, glancing toward a wall of shoes. "Come up from behind me and surprise me."

Mike frowned. That wouldn't be much of a surprise, would it? Yet, he put the clothes down on a shelf for a moment and took quiet steps toward James,

trying to imagine they were a couple on their honeymoon. He slid his arms under James's and hugged him from behind. "You like any of the shoes, Jamie?"

James leaned back into him with a soft sigh. "Yes. You should get some to match your new clothes."

"Choose some for me then." Mike nuzzled James's ear. "You have such excellent taste."

James sighed and slowly turned in his arms. He had a confident smile, but the redness on his face spoke volumes. "After we decide which clothes to take, all right?"

"Sure, anything you want. I don't mind." Mike smiled at him even though he could feel someone's gaze stabbing him in the back. James would not be thinking Mike couldn't do his job properly. The fuck was up with that? Asking for salt. Did James really assume Mike didn't watch television, or something? Okay, so maybe Mike wasn't Mr. Proper, but he could pretend to be if he wanted to. Hell! He could be the boyfriend of the year if he wanted to. All pliant and adoring. Whatever.

"Who do we have here? Isn't that our resident genius?" asked a deep, masculine voice, and the expression of bliss melted off James's face like a pile of snow under a radiator. He turned around to look at a tall man in a sharp gray suit, much like the one they'd seen on a mannequin minutes earlier. Tanned, blue-eyed, with teeth like expensive porcelain (which they probably were), and tiny wrinkles in the corners of his eyes. Come to think of it, the guy looked a bit like a mannequin himself. He smiled at them like a television host. "I see you have company this year."

James's arms turned into wood under Mike's touch, but his voice didn't betray tension. "Oh, hi, Richard. Picking something up last minute?"

"Oh, Savannah wanted to buy some new shoes before the conference," he said and gestured to a young blonde girl in the shoe section. In her high heels, she was as tall as Mike, but probably one third of his weight. "And you don't have to call me Richard, just call me Rich." He kept up the ridiculously wide smile and held his hand out to Mike. "And you are?"

"Mike." He shook Richard's hand, still unsure what tactic to go with, but he never took his arm away from James's waist. "I came straight from L.A. so I need some new clothes for the weekend."

Richard gave him a long once-over, which only made Mike more aware of the crappy fabrics he was wearing.

"So, you've known each other long?" he asked, and James cleared his throat.

"We met shortly after the last conference."

"But it was love at first sight." Mike grinned and gave James's cheek a peck. If it was the boyfriend experience James wanted, that was what he would get.

Richard gave a slow nod, looking back to his wife. "Yeah, Tabitha Miles brought her husband last year, but the organizers hadn't predicted there would be men in the partners' activities. The poor guy ended up getting a facial."

James leaned back, just enough that Mike could actually feel it. "Her husband is a lovely man."

Mike grinned. "That's what's so great about being gay. I can go with James to all the activities planned for the men." Maybe James knew how to be nasty, but Mike was not gonna let him down now that they were on the same team.

Richard chuckled. "Isn't that a bit sexist?"

"He's very enthusiastic about my work," said James.

Mike shrugged. "I don't know if it's sexist, it wasn't me who planned all the activities for the attendee's partners with ladies in mind. I just came here to support Jamie in anything he wants." He petted James's nape and gave him another kiss. "I enjoy it as a short break from my work."

"And what is it that you do?" asked Richard, stepping closer. He looked a bit like a Ken doll Mike's cousin always placed at the bottom of the pile of Barbies.

"I'm a personal trainer. How do you think Jamie got into such amazing shape?" Mike laughed and pinched James's waist.

Richard snorted. "So, is he a finished project now?"

James straightened his back, tensing again, but before he could answer, Mike grabbed at the bottom of James's shirt and pulled it up to expose the stomach. "Are you kidding me?" Mike stroked the firm, flat muscle that tightened under his touch. He wouldn't come up with a better excuse to do it if he tried. "This is rock solid. It's just maintenance now."

Richard gave them a wide grin that didn't even get near his eyes. "Maybe you won't get your ass kicked at paintball this time then."

James sighed. "I don't care much for paintball anyway, but we'll see."

Mike's eyes went wider, and he gave Rich a vicious grin. "Paintball? Bring it! Jamie, why didn't you tell me there's gonna be paintball? So cool."

Savannah paced over with two pairs of shoes in her hands. Her legs were so long she really did seem like a gazelle on the savannah. "My, my!" She grinned at them with a set of teeth as white as Richard's.

James cleared his throat and pushed down the shirt, covering Mike's hands. "Nice to see you again. Are you enjoying yourself?"

Savannah hugged her husband's arm. "It's going to be insanely boring, but he knows how to convince me to come with him."

"I heard the hotel has a spa and sauna," Mike said even though he had no idea if it did.

"I know, right?" Savannah chuckled. "We could go together."

"I just need to buy some swimming shorts for the pool. Unless you wanna go skinny dipping." Mike grinned at her and stepped a bit closer.

Richard pulled his wife back by the arm. "You can go skinny dipping with me. We could go now."

Savannah giggled and hugged him. "Let's go, but first, you pay for my shoes, sweetie." She kissed his cheek.

Mike exhaled. For a moment he'd thought Richard wanted to go skinny dipping with him.

"See you later," said James and squeezed Mike's hands where they were placed over his rock hard stomach.

Richard sighed and stepped back. "Enjoy your shopping trip."

"See you, Rich," Mike said with a grin.

James bristled up. "See who I have to deal with?" he hissed as soon as the couple got out of hearing range.

Mike pulled his hands away and picked up the clothes. "Yeah, he seems like an ass, but now you have an extremely cool boyfriend, so nothing to stress out about."

James sighed and turned back to him, stuffing his shirt back into his pants.
“Yeah. You don’t need much training, do you?”

Mike smirked, straightening up with pride. “Told you I could do it. I can even do a British accent actually.”

James frowned, his plump lips moving like a dream whenever he said something. “You can?”

Mike cleared his throat for effect before changing his accent. “Yep, I love James Bond. I’ve seen all the movies, some of them a lot more than once.” He looked at James to see if it had an effect. And as stoic as James tried to be, his eyes became very dark.

“You’ve changed,” said James eventually.

“Huh?” Mike wasn’t sure what to say to that. It wasn’t what he expected. “What do you mean?”

James shrugged. “You’re far more... socialized than I expected.”

Mike switched to the English accent again. “What you mean, dear James, is that you expected a savage, yet you got the perfect gentleman.”

James rolled his eyes. “Pushing your luck there.”

Mike sighed and turned away toward the fitting rooms. Always fucking shot down. “Yeah, I’m probably still drunk with that expensive wine.”

“You seem pretty sober to me.” James shrugged. “Good job with this asshole by the way.”

“I’m not gonna let him make you feel like shit for no reason,” Mike said as they walked into the fitting rooms. “What’s his problem, anyway?”

James followed him over the polished floor. “Bullies thrive out of high school too?”

Was that a dig at Mike? “I don’t get it.”

James snorted. “Just look at him. The popular kid twenty years later. Still picking on the geek.”

Mike walked into one of the large cubicles, closed the door behind them, and took his top off. “I don’t get you. You’re hot and rich, why would you care? Even if you are a fag or weird.”

James blinked. “Look who’s talking.”

Mike bit the inside of his cheek not to spit out curse words. Heat crawled up his spine. He turned around, pretending he was choosing the shirt to try on first, but really he didn't want to look at James all that much. Talking seemed like a minefield. Mike was just trying to keep it real. "Whatever, be the victim then."

"I'm not a victim, and I won't be called a 'fag,'" growled James, pacing behind Mike's back.

Mike took a deep breath and counted to ten in his mind. "Sure, sorry, baby." He pulled on the expensive shirt. It felt smooth and soft against his skin, even though it smelled of nothing.

"There are more people like him out there, so we need to be wary during the conference." James cleared his throat, and Mike saw him behind himself in the mirror. He sat down in a chair in the corner, his gaze running up and down Mike's body. It was embarrassing and exciting at the same time.

"We'll be fine. This was a good test drive." Mike quickly buttoned up his shirt and turned around, spreading his arms. "This all right?"

James bit his lip and brushed his chin with a finger. "It's all right," he said, but with his eyes shining as they were, it was clear to Mike that the audience enjoyed the spectacle.

Mike unbuckled his belt in front of James, just to check out his reaction. He pushed his shoes off and unzipped his jeans. A part of him already fantasized about getting a blowjob here and now. He did good with Richy Rich after all.

James looked down at his wristwatch, all flustered. He then pulled out his smartphone and started browsing through it.

Mike huffed with frustration and put on the pair of smart brown pants which would go with the white shirt. A nice semi-casual style he'd never choose on his own. Maybe he should be more out there with his advances? If James was so socially inept, maybe he didn't notice the signs? The fucker paid to watch Mike jerk off but wouldn't look at him now?

"Are the pants good, baby?" Mike tried, playing along with the boyfriend experience.

James's thumb stopped on the touchscreen, and he slowly, very slowly, looked up. There was slight tension around his eyes, but he smiled. "Maybe a bit too tight around the crotch? We should ask for a different size."

Mike took a step closer, so his hips were just inches away from James's face. He put his hands on the wall, over James's head. "Or maybe I'm just packing too much?" he whispered.

James drew back fast, and he looked up, into Mike's face. "Don't. We're here to buy clothes."

Mike took a deep breath and backed away. "Okay, okay. So fucking boring. I just thought it'd be entertaining to have a quickie here," he moaned and started undressing.

"Public places aren't ideal for having sex," uttered James, clutching the phone in his hands.

"So, why don't you have a boyfriend? I bet guys hit on you all the time now." Mike changed into the other pants he'd brought.

James shrugged. "I'm busy. And you never know what people are after once you change your lifestyle to fit your earnings."

"What do you mean?" Mike put on a tie he took into the fitting room just for kicks. The last time he'd worn one was a good four or five years ago, for a job interview at Walmart. It had been nothing as classy as the silk one he now held in his hands.

James leaned back, turning the phone in his fingers. "I don't want someone who is interested in my bank account, or just in how I look."

"I think that's why we fell in love so quickly after we met, Jamie. We started talking, and there was just no way for me not to fall for your personality. You're so kind and giving. Makes me horny." Mike smirked to himself in the mirror. So maybe he wasn't classy, but this suit certainly was.

Chapter 4

Mike couldn't believe it when they left the department store with several bags full of clothes, shoes, underwear, and accessories that he couldn't have afforded in a million years. After James's declaration of what they needed to buy, Mike did not expect him to pay for everything that fit Mike, including a few very casual bits of clothing. James then took an overwhelmed Mike out for dinner, and had no qualms about paying for expensive food, so Mike had lobster, caviar (which turned out to taste shitty), venison, and downed it all with champagne. James took care of it with a platinum credit card. Mike found that over good food, even conversations with a weirdo like James weren't a chore. They easily slipped to the topic of cars, and James confessed he only got the Jag because the Mini Cooper he was driving last year had not been appreciated as much as he had wished. Which translated to James being discreetly mocked for his car choice. He learned to love the Jag, but that was no surprise, it was a fucking *Jaguar*.

The hotel was a far cry from the seedy motel Mike had left only hours before. With marble floors and elegant leather chairs in the lobby, it was like something out of a movie. There were even artworks on the walls. Not posters. Actual paintings. In his new suit, Mike felt like he could own the place. The tired old duffel bag he'd brought didn't suit him anymore, so he got the bellboy to take it to their room. All he needed was a martini, and he could be James Bond himself. A gay James Bond. He liked that.

The bellboy opened the door for them, and James pulled Mike into a large living room decorated in creamy colors. A set of leather furniture stood next to large, floor-length windows. Between two armchairs was a small table with a vase of fresh flowers, and Mike also spotted a modern painting hanging over a bar. There was even a large flat-screen television.

Everything was of such overwhelmingly good quality that Mike could hardly believe he was here. He walked up to the window and put his hands on the glass. For a while he just stood there, looking down at the bright lights of the city at night. *Suck this, Vega.* Mike didn't even know when instead of looking through the glass, his gaze started following James's reflection. Like a spy for the CIA, watching his target in secret.

James pressed a bill into the bellboy's hand, and the man left them alone in the gorgeous apartment. This wasn't even all of it. Mike's eyes followed

phantom-James until he disappeared into the adjoining room with just his small suitcase.

Mike smiled to himself and turned around to follow him. If this wasn't the time to get all hot and bothered, Mike didn't know when that time would come. He bet a place like this had a Jacuzzi in the bathroom. He posed himself by the door frame and smirked at James. He knew he looked better than ever, and felt like a million dollars in his leather shoes. "Hey there."

James smiled at him, meticulously putting pairs of folded underwear and socks into a drawer that faced a single king-sized bed. "You look great. I can't wait to see their faces tomorrow."

Mike supposed it was a good start, so he walked into the room nonchalantly, with his hands in his pockets. Champagne was still bubbling in his head. "Wanna check out the Jacuzzi, baby?" The huge bed with a leather-covered headboard looked almost equally tempting.

James blinked. "You can go if you want to relax."

Mike loosened his tie. "I'd rather spend some quality time with my boyfriend instead," he said and walked up closer to James. Did he really need to spell it out to James? 'S-E-X'. 'A-N-A-L'.

The drawer slammed shut, and James glanced at him, narrowing his eyes. "Mike, we seem to have a misunderstanding here. Sex is *not* part of the deal, you don't have to pretend anymore, and you're free to have a good time while no one sees us."

Mike bit the inside of his cheek, unsure what to say. James had this way of making everyone uncomfortable. "Why do you have to treat me like trash, huh?" Mike growled in the end and took off the suit jacket, which all of a sudden felt fake. Like he was playing dress-up.

James crooked his head. "I don't understand. I asked you to be my date for the conference. That doesn't include sex. I'm not having sex with random guys."

"Something wrong with me? You wanted to watch me jerk off, but you don't wanna touch me? I don't get it." Mike spread his arms with growing aggravation.

James took a step back, but his face remained stoic. "That doesn't mean I want to do anything else. I don't understand why you keep suggesting we need to have sex. I don't know you as anyone but a guy who kept putting me down back at school."

Mike hardly believed what he was hearing. “That was years ago! Who cares? You were hot for me then, you’re hot for me now, so it only made sense to me that we’d have sex. Look at me. What kind of fa—homosexual are you?” Mike pointed to his body.

James’s Adam’s apple bobbed, and he looked away from Mike. “It matters to me. Just... go use the Jacuzzi if you want.”

Mike pulled off the silk tie and threw it on to the bed. “You think you invented some fancy-shmancy machine, and you’re so much better than me?” He could feel that tingle of anger simmering in his veins.

James snorted and shook his head with a dismissive gesture. “Really? Well, it was me who invented it. All those people who came here for the conference, all they can do is market it. That’s it. Is that not good enough for you?”

“I’m not the one avoiding sex, so I suppose it’s good enough for me. The Jag helps as well.” He gave James a crooked smile, but the moment he said that, James’s eyes turned icy.

“Why would *you* be good enough for me then? What have you achieved in your life?”

Mike was so shocked by the attack, that he actually took a step back and stalled. He wanted to say something about being hot, but it got stuck in his throat when he remembered James had already told him Mike was just one of many pretty faces. “I—I can do shit,” he uttered.

“You can fix cars, probably.” James shook his head. “But you couldn’t secure a related job that would actually pay reasonable money. I worked my ass off after high school to get where I am. What did you do?”

Mike swallowed the bile rising in his throat. This was beyond unfair. “I wanted to do stuff,” he hissed. “You have no idea what I’ve been through! And I *can* fix cars. And other stuff as well.”

James took a step closer and spread his arms wide. “‘Stuff’? I wanted to do stuff too, but I had too much work to party all the time.”

“Oh, I bet you had no time to party at the university your parents paid for. You live in a fantasy world. It wasn’t like that for guys like me!” Mike took big breaths, feeling attacked in the most personal of ways. In a way someone like Vega could never reach him.

James wrapped his hands on his nape with a low chuckle. “I did not, and if I hadn’t made it, I would still be indebted. It’s all my work. What did you do?

You're not an idiot, so why aren't you in a supervisory position somewhere? You're what, twenty-seven?"

Mike felt the heat on his face and nervously played with a button on his new shirt. "I couldn't do what I wanted. My family washed their hands of me the moment I came out. Nothing like yours! You have no idea what I've been through!" He raised his voice even though he hadn't intended to. "I was homeless, I had no money, and nowhere to go. You must be so fucking happy with yourself. You get to pay Mike Miller to be ordered around all weekend. Fuck you."

James frowned. "That's right. For once, Mike Miller's doing as I say, not the other way around. And I am enjoying myself."

Mike clenched his fists in anger, but they had nowhere to go if he wanted to get his money on Sunday. He could feel the fingernails bite into his palms. "Here I am then," he rasped out, trying not to scream and punch. "Your fucking entertainment. The idiot who made nothing of himself in life."

James swallowed, keeping his eyes level. "We're both tired. Let's go to sleep."

Mike curled his lip into a snarl. "You do what the fuck you want. I'll go take a bath." He turned around before his eyes started stinging too much. He'd never felt so humiliated in his life. The only thing still keeping him here was the promise of a sum of money that could help him start a new life. James was such a privileged fucker. None of Mike's dreams ever had any chance to be fulfilled. It didn't matter what he'd wanted to do after high school, he never had the money to try.

He walked into the bathroom as fast as possible and didn't even turn the light on at first, looking into the mirror in the darkness that was only broken by a bit of light coming through a small window. He was taking deep, long breaths as the other Mike Miller gritted his teeth, fighting the stinging heat rising in his head and chest. It was only after several minutes that he hit the light switch, illuminating the walls covered by a golden mosaic. The bathroom was huge, with a bowl-like sink on the counter, a spacious shower stall, and behind it, a large bathtub in the corner.

Now that he was in here, he wished he'd taken the wine from his duffel bag. Then again, would drinking make him even more of a loser in James's eyes? He took deep breaths as he opened the faucet. He wasn't even sure what was worse, this day, or the day his brother found gay porn on his computer, and

Mike decided to come clean about who he was. Bad fucking decision. He had thought it was a good time to come out, even when his father created a shitstorm and threw him out. Mike was too busy imagining all the gay sex he'd have in defiance of his family. But nothing like it ever happened. He never met anyone. He was never able to recognize who was gay and who wasn't. Not to mention how badly it freaked him out that he might hit on a straight guy and end up being mocked to the end of his life. The anxiety was such a mood killer he couldn't bear it. Before Mike knew it, he'd ended up at Vega's gas station to make ends meet, and that was the death of his sex life. He sure as hell fantasized about things that he could do, things that could happen, but with no money, no car, not even a cell phone, fantasies were all he had.

Fantasies of 'what if'. What if he'd gotten to fuck that ugly duckling gay boy at school? What if they'd managed to have a secret arrangement?

When the water filled the tub, he took off the clothes that didn't suit him anyway, and folded them neatly before slipping into the water. The immersion got him all breathing hard again and trying not to cry. He wasn't scum. It just never worked out for him in life. He should have stayed in the closet. It would have been so much better if he had just stayed a bachelor who flirted with girls in public but never married one.

He never had much luck, but this 'chance' James graciously offered him was turning out to be a mere power trip, a way a grown man could get back at a guy who teased him at school. How ridiculous was that? First, James offered Mike all those nice things, clothes that made him look good, and then it turned out it wasn't enough to make Mike even remotely attractive to him. Maybe the fucker had planned this all along, who knew? What Mike despised the most was the way James looked at him when he was telling him what kind of scum Mike really was in his eyes. That gaze had been so cold but filled with satisfaction, as if James had just achieved something he had been waiting for his entire life. Mike could bet the sonofabitch would sleep like a baby tonight, and all that after Mike had gone beyond himself to prove how much he was worth.

He called him 'baby' and 'Jamie' all day. Gave James compliments, most of them real, and was as polite as he could get. It sickened Mike to think that James had probably been laughing at him all day. Mike took another deep breath and put his head under the hot water. A tiny part of him was embarrassed to have imagined being someone James could fall for. What a stupid fucking idea. They probably wouldn't get along anyway, but when he'd seen James,

standing by that Jag, in those shades and the white shirt, in the middle of nowhere, Mike had thought he'd seen a mirage, that was how much he was attracted to James. He was almost as tall as Mike, had that masculine figure, with wide shoulders and narrow hips... Mike wanted to touch him so bad, yet hated him so much at the same time. The shame of being gay never really left him, no matter how confident he claimed to be. It was all a wall he put up not to get hurt by the homophobic comments. When he thought about James's body, about the strong stomach he'd touched, or about kissing his stubbly cheeks, the shame never left, but it did become easier to bear with the prize being so delicious.

He pulled his head from under the water with a gasp. He needed to finish off this weekend on a good note, find himself a boyfriend in Las Vegas so they could fuck like bunnies. He was so done with living like a monk.

He only left the tub when the water was turning cold, but he did all he could to stay in the bathroom a little bit longer. Looking into James's eyes again was among the last things he wanted to do. On top of being mocked, getting sexually rejected as well was no fun at all.

He eventually wrapped the fluffy hotel towel around his hips and pressed on the door handle. He was surprised to see darkness in the bedroom, even more so when the ray of light from behind him fell on James's legs that almost reached the edge of the bed. Mike leaned out of the bathroom and switched off the light, burying the bedroom in semi-darkness. Now that his eyes were getting used to it, he stepped closer to the bed where James was lying on his side, curled underneath the bedspread, as if he fell asleep waiting for his own bath time. Thank God he'd left the other half of the bed empty because Mike would rather not sleep on the floor.

He was dubious about wearing the CK pajama pants James had gotten him, but he still pulled them on because otherwise he'd have to sleep naked or just in his briefs. Mike gave one last long look to the bright lights behind the window and slipped into bed with his back turned to James.

Only two days left.

Chapter 5

The light coming through the window was like a dusting of flour all over Mike's face. James stared at him, unable to move, his body still rigid after a sudden awakening. He didn't want to fall asleep last night. With every minute of Mike's absence, his anger was giving out to a blob of guilt that was growing inside his stomach and making him gag. He had been such an asshole. What was wrong with him? He had never been a bully, so what had changed? Was it enough that now he had the upper hand over Mike? He didn't want to be this kind of person, and every time he remembered Mike's eyes growing wider, his paling cheeks, the way he seemed to have lost his usual ease of speaking, James's stomach clenched with cold guilt.

Slowly, he slid one leg from under the bedspread and pushed himself closer to the edge of the mattress. The last thing he wanted was to wake up Mike. He wasn't ready to face him yet. He needed to take a bath and come up with a strategy. He needed to apologize, there was no doubt about that, but how was he supposed to do it when Mike refused to apologize for all the shit he had done? With his stomach in his throat, James managed to put one foot down on the wooden floor, and then used it as leverage to slide the rest of his body off the mattress. His breathing became shallow just from the stress of watching Mike asleep so close to him. Was the guy only wearing underwear under the comforter? His chest was bare, his meaty pectoral muscles exposed by the covers. Even with guilt pulling him away, James imagined himself resting his head on the fleshy pillow on Mike's chest.

James couldn't help himself and peeked under the comforter, face flushing with heat. Mike was wearing the Calvin Klein pajama pants James had gotten him yesterday. Gray plaid and that thick elastic band over the hips, just low enough to reveal a tiny bit of ass. James quickly let go of the comforter and tiptoed to the bathroom, pulling off his shirt on the way. He closed the door and took a deep breath, hugging the warm fabric to his chest. A faint floral smell was thick in the air, making the situation even more alien. James hated flowers, except for cacti, and he would never have his own apartment smell like that. He briefly wondered whether Mike liked it, and slowly smelled his shirt. Revolting. Of course, being so nervous and angry, he had sweated like a pig and the evening's argument hadn't made that any better. He tossed the shirt to the floor and slowly climbed into the shower stall that could easily fit three average-sized men if they were desperate to save water.

He braced himself for the shock of cold water, and it came all too soon. He so deserved it. A whole day of enjoying the little kisses, touches, and pet names. *Jamie*. Only his mother called him that. Even his long-term boyfriend had insisted on using James's full name, and yet it sounded so sweet coming from Mike. Every time, his warm voice trickled down James's neck, back, chest, and dribbled off his cock, like the rivulets of water that were now cascading down the arch of James's limp dick and into the drain at his feet.

It had been so hard when those sweet words and gestures pulled on both his dick and his heart, and he had to resist. There was no way he would get involved with someone like Mike Miller, who would probably trample all over him once he got what he wanted, just like back in high school. People didn't change, and James was the proof of that. He might have improved his shell, but inside, he was still the same awkward guy whose body froze whenever Mike Miller growled at him. Unfortunately, he also still got flustered and hot every time Mike Miller was close. He was enveloped in a bizarre, never-ending *déjà vu*. He needed to keep things the way they were. Mike would get his money, and James would tell himself that he got over both his fear and lust for the man. It would be officially over.

James took his time washing every nook and cranny of his body. Despite all the time spent ruminating about Mike, and the rollercoaster of yesterday, his head remained empty even as he pressed the door handle and left the bathroom.

Seeing Mike in just a pair of white boxer briefs with a background of glorious sunshine wasn't helping him think either. It was as if the sun was there just to welcome Mike in the morning and caress his muscular body. James had no idea what Mike had to be thinking of him now. The moment James came out though, Mike turned his head to him for a split second before continuing to dress without a word. He put on the light-brown slacks they chose yesterday so that Mike could impress James's nemesis.

James cleared his throat and quickly rushed to the closet. "Hi," he uttered, and as soon as his back started tingling, he knew Mike had to be looking back. He exhaled and looked at the clothes he came with. And to think he had been so sure of himself when he packed them. Now it didn't seem like it was good enough.

"Which shirt do you want me to wear?" Mike asked as if he thought James believed he wasn't good enough to have an opinion. "The tea-colored one or the white one?"

It was all James's doing. He swallowed hard, unsuccessfully trying to cover himself with a sharp blue shirt. "Take the one you like."

All the reply James got was silence and a rustle of fabric. He took a peek at Mike in the mirror and saw him in the white, soft cotton shirt with rolled up sleeves. Mike was tying the slim brown tie and looking like a million dollars. It was as if the shirt had been made for him. Or maybe it fell in love with Mike's shape, from the wide shoulders and bulky arms to the defined stomach, and decided to hug him.

James swallowed and walked over to him. He wanted to give him some advice on the tie, but his breath caught in his throat the moment he touched the soft brown silk.

Mike looked right into his eyes in a way that felt very much like a punch, but didn't say a thing, pulling his hands away and letting James do the tie.

James gritted his teeth and finished the tying, before slipping the end of the tie between two buttons over Mike's breastbone, so that it wouldn't loosely hang out. "Looks good on you," he whispered.

"Like the trophy boyfriend of a millionaire should." Mike gave James a crooked smile.

James cleared his throat and quickly made his way back to the closet. "I'm good-looking enough to not call my boyfriend a trophy. Not like that fucker Richard. I bet Savannah's bored to death when she's not out shopping with his credit card," he growled, slipping on the shirt.

Mike put his hands in his pockets and leaned against the doorframe. "She seems to like fake teeth."

"Too big for her mouth, right?" James swallowed. "Last year, she told me she had them done in L.A. in the same clinic as her favorite celebrity."

"Anne Hathaway? That girl has a lot of teeth."

"No idea," said James but couldn't hold back a smile. He buttoned up the shirt and reached for the boxer briefs, suddenly stopping with the underwear in the air. Was he supposed to slip it on under the towel as if he were on a beach, or just let the towel fall down and show Mike the ass he worked for at the gym?

Mike saved him the trouble. "I'll just wait in the lounge."

"Sure," said James with fake confidence. "You can order something to drink on me. And your key card is on the shelf by the door."

"Nah, I won't drink. I wanna be sharp," Mike said, already walking out.

James opened his mouth but decided not to encourage him to at least get coffee. He dressed in a fitted gray suit with a pink and blue tie. He used to be dubious about being flashy but since he hired a stylist to help him shop, more people were checking him out. Men and women alike, and he appreciated that. He didn't want to be old and boring like some of the salesmen at the conference.

He stuffed the few things he needed into his pockets and made his way to the elevator, already hating the idea of breakfast.

"Hey there, James!" he heard from behind him. He would always recognize the loathsome voice of Rich Carrington. "I was just telling the guys about your husband."

James stopped mid-stride and turned around to look at three men in sharp suits walking straight at him like a pack of hungry wolves. He prayed not to sweat, that would betray him completely. "Ah, he's my boyfriend. I don't like making rash decisions," he said with a smile, knowing Rich could read this as a poke against his hasty marriage.

Instead, he saw a tiny wrinkle on Richard's forehead that would probably be a frown if his face weren't infused with Botox. "Oh God, how insensitive of me. I forgot you still can't marry in Texas."

He saw the guys next to Richard smirk as if they were evil twins. They always followed Richard, like pilot fish, waiting for what scraps the shark would leave them.

"Give it a few years," said James, trying not to sound as if it came through clenched teeth, even though it did. He wondered what excuse could be plausible enough to get away without making himself look like a coward. He couldn't think of one.

Instead of stopping for the chat though, Richard walked up to James and embraced him with one arm, which felt more like getting strangled. "You should have breakfast with us, that'll cheer you up."

"Exactly, James. You'll be able to give us all the insight into the new features of your invention," said one of the other guys. James didn't remember his name, but he could swear it was something like 'Darby', or 'Harold'. He wondered whether they had been born with those names.

"I will be giving a presentation on it tomorrow. There is no reason for me to bore you guys with technical details first thing in the morning," he said, forcing a smile.

"Nonsense, there's nothing like coffee and engineering to wake a man up," said one of Richard's disciples. James actually wondered if they needed to reach a level-up by brown nosing to get teeth as paper-white as Richard's.

"Alister is right," Richard patted his friend on the back. "We want to be ahead of our game, James," he said as they walked to the elevator. "What time is your presentation tomorrow?"

James straightened his back. He wouldn't act as if he were in a cage with three sharks. Even though he was. He, a defenseless diver among the wildlife. "Noon in the main conference room," he said, keeping pride out of his voice. It was the best slot of the day.

Alister whistled as the door of the elevator closed. The sound was piercing in the confined space. "Well done! If the upgrade of your car is anything to go by, it is going to be great."

James closed his mouth. What was a smart answer to that? "It's a great car."

"Yeah, though I think you could do better. I can show you my new baby. Just got her last month," said Alister with a smug smile.

"True, true, I can vouch for it. Gotta keep up with the times, James." Richard chuckled with that fake laugh of his, and James had never been as happy that the elevator door opened as he was now.

"I don't see a reason to buy something just because it's new," he said, bristling.

"Ah, that didn't come out right," said Alister, raising his hands in the fakest apologetic gesture in the history of mankind. It reminded James of a time in high school, when he publicly called Mike out on being homophobic, and all he heard was that 'Lovelace' was just a joke, harmless. And just as he thought of Mike, there he was, in the lounge, chatting to a group of women, and looking nothing like the hot and sweaty mechanic James was faced with yesterday. Okay, so there was still a hint of that in Mike's rugged features, in his big hands and veiny forearms, but he looked more like a model who accidentally crossed paths with James.

"Anyway, I promised my boyfriend I'd eat with him, so I guess we could talk after breakfast."

"Go on, go on." Richard laughed. "I suppose you have to plan your tactic for paintball. Or is *he* your tactic?"

James had to press his nails into the flesh of his hand not to punch that tanned sonofabitch in the face. He knew the perfect comeback would eventually come, but it was not this minute. "So, is your wife playing this year?"

Mike noticed them and excused himself from the conversation at the table with a smile. James's stomach tensed even more. He could only hope Mike wouldn't find too much common ground with the sharks.

"Savannah? Gods, no! She's too gentle for that. She's more of a homey type, ready to soothe my battle wounds."

Alister gently nudged Richard with his elbow. "And tend to all your needs, huh?"

"I prefer getting hurt together and licking our wounds together," said James.

All he got from Alister was a deep frown, but Rich picked up for his fellow predator. "So you both lick out each other's wounds? Or do you only lick Mike's?"

James felt his feet freeze to the floor, while his mind went into complete chaos. Fuck. Why couldn't he think of anything to say? But there it was, Mike's strong arm wrapping around his waist.

"What's all this licking I hear of? I hope it's not about pussy, because that's kinda gross." Mike grinned and gave James a kiss on the cheek.

James melted into his fake boyfriend and looked up at him with a smile that came straight from his heart. "No. I wouldn't do that to you."

And for once, it was Richard without a snappy comeback.

Mike smiled back at James, but then looked to Richard. "Savannah was asking if you could bring her some jam for the pancakes. She told me you always make sure she has everything she needs. So sweet." He gently nudged Richard's arm with his fist and turned around, leading James away with him. Something James couldn't manage on his own, simply walking away, achieved so easily.

Tension left James like yolk dripping from a soft-boiled egg. He looked up at Mike and squeezed his hand. "Thanks. I didn't know how to break free there."

"Yeah, you looked like you were under siege." Mike snorted and led James along to the restaurant where all the delegates were having their breakfast. "Is there anyone you want to sit with?"

James let out a shaky breath. He did! But he didn't have the courage to approach the president of the biggest pharmaceutical company in this hemisphere. And there was the man, at a table by the window, chatting with two colleagues over pancakes in a stylish breakfast room. "The guy in the corner, but I'm not sure if he'd want to be disturbed."

"Let's go find out." Mike pulled James along without a hint of shyness. James forced himself to calm down and let out a long shaky breath, walking along. He couldn't help but glance to the handsome face of his fake boyfriend. Why were those things so easy for Mike when James struggled with every move in such company? His thoughts were cut short when they reached the table, and all the men sitting by it raised their heads to look at them. Within less than a single minute, Mike had introduced James to everyone and they were enthusiastically invited to sit. Mike was smooth like that. And once they started their breakfast, James realized not all popular people at the convention were sharks.

Chapter 6

James hardly contained a shriek when red paint sprayed all over him the moment a bullet hit the side of the tree he was hiding behind. The yellow team was cornered behind a slope of terrain but fought on like they were in a trench, and this was the moment that would allow them to come home alive. Lying in the dirt, with the gun clutched to his chest, James was overwhelmed by the chaos around him. Everyone was shouting, both on their and the enemy's side, bullets were bursting all too close. He was uncomfortable in the protective armor and rough coveralls, and he hated it all with a passion. The only thing keeping him in the game was the will to prove himself to the sharks, who were fighting behind enemy lines. At least he didn't have to cooperate with them.

What he couldn't quite understand was that Mike had been by his side at all times, as if yesterday's argument had never happened. He was in his element, taking down quite a few guys from the red team. There was a silly sense of pride in James that it was his boyfriend who turned out to be the best shooter on the team, even if he was his just for the weekend.

Mike pulled at James's arm and saved him from yet another red bullet, hugging him close to the plastic armor on his chest. "Keep looking around," he huffed with that focused voice as if it was really life and death at stake.

James closed his eyes for a moment, melting into his warmth like a lump of butter tossed into a hot pan. It felt good to have someone at his back at all times, looking out for the things James was shit at, even if they were forced to crawl in dirt.

"It's just... so much is going on," he uttered, even though all he wanted to say was: *Don't you want to go home?*

"Hell, yeah." Mike didn't even look to James, breathing hard under his helmet. "Eyes around the head, like a spider."

James cringed. "Thanks for the mental image."

"Hey, guys," hissed someone from the bush next door. "They ceased fire. Let's go!"

"Do we even have a plan?" muttered James. They should take the enemy from both sides, not creep away in a group like a flock of sheep.

"The plan is, shoot the motherfuckers!" Mike yelled, followed by some enthusiastic cheers. God only knew when he got a chance to fraternize with all

those people. Mike let go of James and ran first, looking like a character from Gears of War in his black plastic armor.

James realized he'd be left alone if he didn't move so he pulled himself up and ran after the rest of his team, with the fogged up goggles taking at least a third of his vision. He bent in half and ran as fast as he could, eyes focused on Mike's ass two yards ahead of him. His head was pulsing with heat and stress. He'd already scored a minor wound, and it hurt like fuck.

Suddenly, more red bullets exploded on the trees and on the ground around James, making him stumble. A choir of aggressive yells from behind them betrayed all. They'd been ambushed from behind by a small group of soldiers from the red team. It was the same tactic James had wanted to go with. Why did no one ever listen to him? He smashed right into Mike and fell into the dry dirt, with a cloud of brown dust blowing up around him. The enemy was approaching fast.

James fumbled with the gun and before he expected it to, a yellow bullet shot out of his weapon and burst on the hip of one of the attackers. The guy fell with a growl, but it didn't stop any of the others. For some reason, James kept shooting everywhere but where he should. The one time he scored was apparently just a lucky coincidence. His body went more rigid and hot with every second as the soldiers in goggles came closer and closer. This was war. He would 'die'.

James shut his eyes. There was a shot, a groan... but not his. Someone pushed him down, and when he opened his eyes, the first thing he saw was Mike, scowling underneath a big red splatter on his helmet.

"Fuck," Mike groaned, falling to his knees.

Members of the other team were already rushing to squash what was left of Team Yellow.

James scrambled to his feet, fueled by rage that threatened to explode and burst a hole in his chest. He sent a series of bullets straight at the approaching group, which was enough to stop their progress, but his blood ran cold when the gun made a blunt sound, and James realized he was out of ammo.

"Fucking fuck."

"Duck! To the ground!" Mike yelled at him as he himself fell.

"Shut up, man! You're dead!" screamed one of the enemies from behind a tree.

James pressed his lips shut and ducked for a triangular shape on the ground. He picked up the stone and in one sharp movement pulled it across his neck in the gesture of throat slitting. He then dropped to his knees and fell to the ground like a sack of potatoes, gurgling like his own blood was choking him. If one didn't count the stones and other shit under his back, this was way more fun than shooting and trying not to get shot. He reached out to Mike's helmet and gathered some paint, only to smear it all over his own armor. There. He was so done.

He rolled his head to the side and met Mike's wide open eyes. "Why would you kill yourself?" Mike gasped and pulled up his red-stained goggles.

James stared at him, ignoring Team Red's soldiers who ran past them in pursuit of remaining members of the yellow team. He swallowed. "Can't live without my boyfriend?"

Mike stalled, but only for a second. "Pretty dramatic I suppose. Let's get out of here if we're done."

James got to his feet first. "You're not hurt, right?" he asked just in case. After all, Mike had given his fake life for him, and James still couldn't quite get his head around it.

"Nah." Mike rubbed his forehead as he got up. "Nothing to hurt inside there, right?" He snorted and knocked on his head.

James swallowed and picked up his gun. "Thanks for saving me, but aren't you disappointed? You seemed to be having fun."

Mike shrugged and led him along at a steady, slow jog. "I'd rather win, but it was an impulse. Not gonna regret it. What's done is done."

James sighed, following him without question. This day stirred all kinds of emotions in him. Had Mike Miller really changed? As promised, Mike had always been beside him throughout the day, helping him make friends and always ready for little tender gestures. This last move really wasn't like something the guy James knew from school would do. He didn't know what to do with the fact that he started feeling oddly at ease whenever they were together. He cleared his throat.

"Maybe we could wait in that hideout close to the base?"

"Lead the way then." Mike walked by him, playing with his plastic gun. The paintball armor only made him look bigger and more impressive, which reminded James of the times when he used to go sit on the bleachers by the

school's football field. He loved watching the players in their huge gear and tight pants, especially Mike, who didn't need anything to look impressive.

"Do you still play?"

"Nah, I only work out." Mike shrugged, his expression completely unreadable.

James swallowed hard. "You seemed to love it so much, that's all..."

"So what? Was never good enough at it. Always fucking mediocre. Nevermind, really, you said it yourself, we don't need to act when we're alone." Mike rubbed his forehead with a groan and they could already see the little wooden shack in the middle of a flat, grassy field.

James's mouth screwed shut, and he stuffed his hands down into his pockets, glancing at the dry ground beneath his feet. Of course Mike still remembered yesterday. Who wouldn't? The more James thought about what he'd said last night, the more he felt like crap.

They got to the small wooden hut accompanied only by the rustle of ground under their shoes and birds chirping in the trees. Mike never looked at James once. The guy was a terrific actor if he was able to perform the way he did throughout the day, fooling everyone that he was deeply in love with James. It was so convincing that even James was on the verge of believing.

"Is anyone there?" shouted James as he approached the low door to the shack.

"Oh, come on, it's empty." Mike kicked the door for emphasis, and it swung open with a creak. Mike walked in without a second thought, but had to turn and bow his head to fit in the tiny door.

James followed him with a sigh. There were some empty bottles and trash in the corner, but otherwise, the shack was completely theirs, so he got to his knees and started getting the uncomfortable gear off. The air had a stuffy quality to it but wasn't unpleasant. At least they were in the shade and didn't have to run around.

Mike sat on the floor and took off his goggles and helmet. "How long is this supposed to go on for?"

James shrugged. "No idea. I died within the first fifteen minutes last time."

Mike looked to the ceiling, to the floor, to the wall, to his boots, anywhere but at James, like he meant even less than back at school when Mike thought it was fun to bully him.

James cleared his throat and sat cross-legged a few feet away, forcing himself to face Mike. This couldn't go on. He needed to apologize, but if Mike wouldn't accept, then he had every right not to.

Mike's gaze finally fell on him. "Are we gonna be singing "Kumbaya" or something?"

"I'm sorry." James let out a shaky breath and tangled his fingers together. "I should have never said what I said. It was inexcusable."

The frown on Mike's face deepened. "What? What are you on about?"

"You know what I'm talking about," said James, looking him straight in the eyes, and it was like walking through a hot field to the only source of shade within miles. "I had no right to judge you. I was an asshole."

Mike crossed his arms on his chest. "Whatever. You're rich and shit. You can do whatever you want."

James squeezed his hands on his thighs. It was so hard to stand the raw accusation in Mike's eyes. "No, I can't. I never wanted to be this kind of person, and I'm not this kind of person. You don't have to forgive me, but I am really sorry. I did work a lot, but I have also been lucky."

"Well, I didn't have such luck. It doesn't mean I'm never going to do shit. I was in a bad place." Mike sucked in his bottom lip and sat there, as tense as he used to be before important football games.

James sighed, leaning forward and resting his elbows on his thighs. In the cool light inside the shack, Mike looked thoughtful and serene. "What happened?"

Mike groaned and picked at a loose thread on his knee. "I had some plans, but never had enough money to do what I wanted after high school, so I went to work and tried to save up."

James bit his lip, relieved that Mike chose to talk to him after all. "What did you want to do?"

Mike shrugged. "Does it matter? After I came out, my family threw me out, and my brother stole all my savings, so I ended up at that fucking gas station. Doesn't mean I'm useless."

James stared at him, empty headed. "Your *brother* stole your money?" It was beyond James. His own family hadn't been thrilled about his sexuality at first but they came round. No wonder Mike was so intent on showing off to his father and brother.

"Hate the motherfucker. Thinks he's all that just because he puts his dick in a pussy," Mike growled and clenched his fists.

"That's hardly an achievement," muttered James, anger bubbling up in him. "Was it the money you were making when you were at school? In Choco Panda?"

"Yeah, and at Walmart after that. I wasn't earning a lot, but I saved up a good chunk throughout the years. I didn't, like, hate you at school or anything. I was just... I didn't know how to approach you. I'm still shit at all this gay stuff." He sighed and put his face in his hands.

James blinked, leaning back with air tiredly sliding through his windpipe as if it were blocked. "What does that mean? You and your friends did your best to turn my life into hell. I was this fucking close to leaving school because of you!" he growled, showing Mike his pinched fingers.

Mike's gaze finally focused on him. "Huh? Because of a little teasing? Come on... I kept trying to get you alone." He actually laughed. "This sounds so pathetic."

James frowned. "It wasn't 'teasing', okay? I didn't care about being called names, but when guys like you actually approached me, I had no idea what you were gonna do. I've had my stuff taken, I've been knocked to the ground, I've been thrown into the trash, I've been kicked, and crowded." He took a long breath when he ran out of air. It was all still there, buried deep in his mind but always ready to creep back into consciousness in the worst moment. Cold fear paralyzing his legs, nausea, and all the hate he felt when he hadn't been able to do anything. "You don't know how it is for a guy like me."

Mike slowly reached out to him and hooked his finger on James's. "I don't. I'm sorry."

The gesture was so surprising that James zeroed his eyes on their intertwined hands. Gradually, his heart was changing its pace to a gallop when the warmth from Mike's single finger spread all over James's bloodstream. "You made me feel like shit so many times."

"I kinda... we did that to each other with the guys on the team, you know? It was normal." Mike swallowed. "I think it just escalated for you because of that presentation. You were the only gay guy I knew, and I was so horny all the time. I didn't even mind your hair, the glasses... I didn't care."

Something squeezed around James's chest like a giant fist. "So you just wanted to fuck anyone, and you thought that I would do?"

Mike sighed and inched closer on his ass. “No, I thought that you’d want me. Don’t judge me. I was seventeen, all I could think of was cocks, and asses, and fucking. I would have done a lot to get your plump lips around my dick.” Mike pouted and squeezed James’s hand as if it was a romantic compliment he was making.

James exhaled, surprised that in the weirdest way, it did make him feel better. “I can’t believe I’m saying this but that’s actually... quite sweet,” he whispered, watching Mike’s big, veiny hand over his. After a year of extensive training, James’s wasn’t all that slim either. He wasn’t that nerdy kid anymore, but in his mind Mike would always be that big jock who had enough strength to take him down.

“I’m sorry for the nickname. It was kinda douchey,” Mike admitted and sat closer, so their thighs touched.

James nodded. “It was. That photo was never supposed to get into that stupid presentation.” He did his best to keep his breath even but to this day, he checked every single thing he showed in a slideshow or sent to someone else, at least three times. He re-read his e-mails after pressing ‘send’ out of fear that something incriminating somehow found its way in. He would never forget the roar of laughter and booing when his class saw that obscene photo on the screen. His feet were screwed to the floor. So much so that it was the teacher who closed the presentation for him.

Mike bowed his head and whispered into James’s ear. “I got so hard in class when I saw it...”

James inhaled a bit of air. Mike’s breath was like the desert air, circling around his ear like a viper. He turned his head, brushing his nose over Mike’s stubbly cheek. Shame was the only thing that kept him from tracing the tiny needles with his tongue.

“I think that was why I came up with that nickname. I was obsessed with the idea.” Mike sighed and slid his hand to the back of James’s neck.

Was this really happening? James closed his eyes, breathing in the smell of dried leaves, paint, and fresh sweat that stuck to their coveralls. “And now you’re calling me Jamie.”

“I’m not seventeen anymore. This weekend was actually the first time I’ve ever been out in public. I thought I was gonna have a stroke or something.” Mike laughed and... licked the side of James’s face. A deep shudder went all

the way from the tip of James's head to his toes, and he leaned closer, clutching his hands on the fabric at Mike's back. It was as if his skin came alive, waiting for any and all sensations it could get a hold of.

"Was it? You chose not to come out in public because of the plans you had?"

"No, I just... I'm not that comfortable with the whole gay idea." Mike didn't hesitate to trace James's cheek with his lips though. "Vega wouldn't have employed me if he'd known, either."

"But you *are* gay," whispered James, hugging him even closer.

"Well, yeah. I'm a mess though. I've never had a boyfriend or anything. Pretending to be yours is actually quite funny. I get to say all sorts of shit I'd be nervous about otherwise."

"That *is* funny because the guy you pretend to be is the best boyfriend I've had," whispered James, sliding his hands to Mike's shoulders, and then down his chest. There, he said it.

Mike petted James's ear with his fingers. "It got me thinking that if I'm to be out in Vegas, I'm gonna be super-gay. No apologies to anyone."

"I know. I wouldn't ever want to change, even with all the bad stuff that happened after I outed myself." James sighed, enjoying the shape of Mike's pecs beneath his hands. They were so warm, even through the fabric.

"So what was your last boyfriend like?" Mike tensed, but never moved away.

James chuckled, moving even closer. "Very serious, very... proper." James didn't really miss him. He'd never really missed him.

"Oh yeah? A surgeon or some shit?" Mike petted James's hair and kissed the side of his face, but then slowly pushed James down to the dusty wooden floor.

There was no trace of resistance in James as he lay back and looked up at Mike's gorgeous chest, arms, face, all towering over him. "No, a physicist. He... didn't like it much when I started doing much better than him."

Mike grinned at him, but the smile didn't reach his eyes. "Ah, so that's why you picked up a piece of trash at a gas station." He didn't have any qualms against taking off the plastic vest and crawling on top of James with his whole

weight. It took James right to the edge between safety and threat. Hair bristled at the back of his neck when he looked into Mike's eyes.

He shook his head. "No! I took you with me because you are hotter than any of their wives," he whispered breathlessly. There had been the pleasure of having Mike Miller under his heel, but it wasn't even close to being the main reason.

"So I'm not just 'a hot fish' after all?" Mike put his hands next to James's face, then slowly ground into his body.

James opened his eyes wide and shook his head. He spread his thighs wider to accommodate Mike. This confidence, this strength, the intensity in those green eyes was something he never got over. There would never be another Mike Miller for him. "Would you kiss me?" he whispered.

Mike's smile widened. "Would I ever..." He went for the kiss like there was no tomorrow, spreading James's lips with his tongue and grinding his erection against James's cock. The kiss pushed James's head to the ground and left him breathless as Mike's tongue explored every last inch of his mouth, forcing it open any time James wanted to close it. The experience only got him imagining if it would be the same to have Mike's cock thrust in.

He clutched at Mike's shoulders and wrapped his ankles over the small of his back. The molten lava that spread all over his body made him forget he needed air, but eventually he had to break the kiss. "Oh, wow..."

Mike groaned, steadily rubbing himself against James's ass. It was the sweetest massage in James's life. "I've wanted to fuck you so bad since the moment I laid eyes on you. I wanna be naked with you, see you come."

The declaration fueled a wave of lust in James, which he expressed with a deep moan he didn't even know he was holding back. It was as if he couldn't recognize his own body anymore. He nodded, clutching his hands in Mike's hair.

"Yeah? Can I do you here?" Mike rasped, staring into James's eyes like he was on fire.

That was a wakeup call if James ever heard one. He shook his head. "N-no lube," he whispered, moving his hands to Mike's cheeks. He still wanted to lick them.

"Fuck my life," Mike groaned. "Do you have some at the hotel?"

James shook his head. His hands were moving over Mike's face and neck like he was petting an animal.

"Well, we need to get some then. I want my *anal*." Mike whispered the last word with a silly grin.

James chuckled as his face heated up. "You're so filthy."

"And you seem to love it. Then again, I'm not the filthy scum bag who pays guys to watch them jerk off." He grabbed James's bottom lip with his teeth and pulled on it.

James whined and tightened his thighs around Mike. "I've waited ages to see that cock. How can you blame me?"

"I can't really. If I were you, I'd want to see my cock too." Mike sucked on James's lip. Pleasure turned into shock when Mike's teeth bit into James's flesh at the sound of a gunshot.

The heavy body above him tensed up. "Motherfucker!" Mike uttered and looked back, still arched over James. The moment James followed his gaze, he also noticed Richard's face in the window, rifle resting on the windowsill.

"You outta your fuckin' head?" Mike screamed and got to his feet, presenting James two massive red splodges on his back. "We were already dead!"

"Looked a bit too alive to me." Richard chuckled.

"Very funny," growled James, scrambling to his feet. He would not be embarrassed at a time like this. "He doesn't have the armor on."

He barely finished saying that when Mike was already climbing through the window to reach Richard. "You so tough, son of a bitch? Let me see how tough you are when I send all that porcelain in your mouth flying!"

"Mike!" hissed James, grabbing him around the waist and pulling him back. "He's not worth it!"

"It's just a game!" Richard yelled, already pacing away. "Chill out!"

Mike huffed and stayed put. "I'll let him go, but I don't care when this game ends. Let's get some lube."

"Why, you want to turn your aggression somewhere else?" asked James, molding himself to Mike's body, which he was still hugging at the waist.

Mike turned in his embrace all of a sudden, as if he were burnt. “Yeah, yeah, all fucking night,” he said and kissed James’s aching lip.

James snorted and quickly gathered his equipment. He was horny and excited, but underlying all that was a growing tumor of anxiety. Things were moving so fast that he was about to lose an arm to the rollercoaster.

Chapter 7

Mike acted like a horny teenager on Viagra. He kept touching James on their way to the hotel, and telling James about all sorts of filth he wanted to do. Knowing that it was him, James Austin, who fueled those urges in Mike Miller, made all the workouts worth it. When they were changing into normal clothes, James noticed two massive bruises on Mike's back. He'd smack Richard himself for those. They stopped at a gas station to get the necessary supplies, and it felt like the distance couldn't get any longer, even though James was still on the fence whether he should be doing this or not. The moment he stopped the car in the hotel parking lot, it was a race to their room, and James prayed this night wouldn't be something he would regret to the end of his life.

He went in first, immediately kicking off his shoes. As usual, he pulled out his wallet and cell phone, and placed them on the shelf by the door, along with the keys. He was so nervous that each and every inch of his body was starting to ache with the tension in his muscles.

He hadn't yet decided on what he wanted to say when Mike grabbed the front of his shirt and pulled him toward the bathroom. "I'll show you what you missed out on at school," he said in a low, raspy voice.

All thought left James's head at that tone, and with the tightening of the collar around his neck, he felt a pull at his cock as well. He could sense every bit of fabric rubbing against his skin.

A strange chill went down his spine when Mike pushed him into the shower stall, triggering a wave of memories so ingrained in James's mind that he couldn't help the fear mixing with arousal.

"You probably think I was just taunting you, don't you?" Mike said with his chest heaving.

James gave him a slow nod, too choked up to speak. He couldn't tear his eyes away from the gorgeous man in front of him, and he didn't want to. Mike was the only truly bright thing he'd experienced throughout the past two days.

"What I wanted was to turn the water on." The cold stream hit James's head, but it couldn't possibly cool the fire rushing through his veins. "And get you undressed." Mike took off James's tie and started unbuttoning his shirt.

James stared at him, hypnotized, even though the constant movement of big hands against his chest only fueled the deep lust gathering in his stomach. Would they do it here, in the stream of water that by now had turned warm?

"I dreamed of touching a man's body, so different from a girl's. Firm and hairy," Mike whispered as he pushed the wet shirt and jacket to the tiles, and trailed both his palms down James's chest. The sensation of rough fingertips rubbing against his skin, and Mike's smell were so striking it made James's knees weak.

"Yes," whispered James, touching Mike's biceps, which were still mostly dry as he was staying away from the warm stream that already had James completely drenched, with fabric sticking to his skin like warm, caressing palms.

"I imagined you all naked and helpless, just dying to suck my cock as soon as you were naked. I wanted to see your dick so much." Mike moved closer and unbuckled James's belt. "I bet it's gorgeous. Cut or uncut?" Mike's face was all flushed, and his fingers trembling.

That comment stirred something deep and primitive inside of James's brain, and he suppressed a moan. To think that Mike had been fantasizing about his cock was like a dream come true. "Cut," he whispered, glancing lower, to the hands that were roughly unwrapping Mike's prize. "I wanted to suck your cock back at the gas station."

"You could have." All of Mike's focus was on the pants he was unbuckling, and he gasped when James's clothes finally dropped to the tiles. He stepped into the stream of water and wrapped his arm around James's waist as his fingers found the cock he said he wanted to touch so badly. Mike bowed and left a sloppy kiss on James's neck with a groan.

James closed his eyes when his head fell back, and the water showered his face, completing the weightless pleasure Mike bestowed on him. "I wouldn't pay for permission to do this," he gasped, clutching to the warm, solid body next to his.

"How about now, for free?" The rough hand petted James's back, but quickly slid lower, as Mike clearly enjoyed exploring every inch of James's cock. Mike was panting. He squeezed the whole length of it with his fingers and swirled the thumb around the head, making James tremble.

James kissed Mike's chin and lapped at it, shivering when the stubble scratched his tongue. "Is this what you would have liked me to do back at

school?" he whispered, unzipping Mike's slacks. He tried to savor every molecule of Mike's exquisite scent, even as it was mellowed down by water.

"Yeah, I wanted you to kneel for me in that shower." Each stroke of Mike's hand on James's cock evoked years of wet dreams about the school quarterback. Mike gripping one of his buttocks was like a reminder of the lust-hate feelings James had lived with for years, and now he could finally complete the circle.

With a deep sigh, James pulled the large hand away from his cock and held onto Mike's wrist as he sank to his knees in the puddle of water at his feet. One look up to the toned god standing against the bright lamplight was enough to confirm to James that this was where he wanted to be. He couldn't hold back a smile that bloomed on his lips. "Show me."

Mike pushed his pants down, breathing hard, with water dripping down his face. James had already had the pleasure of seeing the beast in Mike's pants, but it was no less amazing to see it again, already filling, stiffening, ready for play, with water drizzling down its graceful arch. "Can you deep throat?" Mike uttered and leaned against the wall.

James felt a rush of heat to his face and nodded, looking up with a smile. None of his other lovers were even close to Mike's straightforward manner of acting, which he rather liked. "This is a challenge," he whispered, covering the shaft with both his hands. He gave it a slow pump. A moan left his lips when the thick cock twitched in his grip, and he leaned closer, all the way to the purplish head sticking out from between his fingers. He gave it a slow, languid kiss, shuddering at the smoothness of it when he imagined it sliding in, down the slick road of his tongue and into his throat.

"I don't wanna push too much, but I'd really love to feel it." Mike bowed over James and slid his hands to James's shoulders. "My teenage mind kinda imagined you could."

James chuckled against the cock and opened his hands to give the throbbing flesh a lick along the bulging vein on the underside. "I couldn't believe me." It took some time to learn but he had been an eager student. It made him proud that he could now present the skill to Mike for the ultimate test. After all, Mike's cock was bigger than that of James's exes.

Mike unbuttoned his shirt to reveal cover-worthy stomach muscles. They were so well pronounced, for a moment James just stared at the droplets of

water cascading down Mike's body, to his hips, and sliding all the way down his thighs.

"That cock looks so hot in your mouth," whispered Mike.

James smiled, feeling all giddy inside as he opened his mouth to suck it in. Keeping one hand at the base, he cupped Mike's scrotum with the other and weighed the balls in his palm, gently squeezing. His mouth watered when the heavy cockhead rested on his tongue. He arched the muscle, raising Mike's dick in his mouth, just to feel its gentle slide against the palate, and sure enough, the pulsing pressure on his own cock became hardly bearable.

"That's so good, Jamie... suck it." Mike's big hand slid into James's hair and gripped it with delicious force.

James mewled into the cock and took it in deeper, making sure that the head got plenty of attention. He started alternating between bobbing his head over the delicious, musky cock, and caressing it with just his tongue and lips. He couldn't decide which felt better. Spreading his thighs to get some pressure off his own dick, James let his body take charge, and gradually he could accommodate more and more of the length. He was afraid of the shame of not delivering what he promised, so he took it slow, even though his throat ached to accept Mike's glorious shaft.

"Dream suck," Mike whispered and arched against the wall. "I knew you could do it," he rasped, his cock throbbing by James's palate, hot and stiff.

James whimpered and combed Mike's pubes with three of his fingers while still holding onto the base of the prick. Trembling slightly, he positioned himself carefully and pushed. The moment Mike's cockhead breached the invisible barrier and went into James's throat, James's toes curled with the ecstasy rushing all over his skin. It was all the way in. James buried his nose in the damp musk of the pubes and gently squeezed the balls in his hand. He loved this. He loved this so much.

His eyes went up to Mike, seeking his gaze. He needed the heavy palm on his nape again.

"Oh fuck, oh fuck, I'm gonna come," Mike moaned, bent in half over James. Seeing his handsome face all flushed and tense only made it all more worthwhile. James's eyes glossed over, and Mike holding him in place with both hands was only making him tremble more.

It was a drizzle of warm chocolate covering all of James's fears. Was his blowjob so good Mike couldn't hold it? He would have smiled but as soon as he drew back to get some air, liquid heat hit the back of his throat, and he clawed his fingers into the meaty thighs at his sides.

"So fucking amazing." Mike panted, petting James's temples with his thumbs. He looked so beautiful and powerful with his face flushed in pleasure. "Swallow?" Mike looked down into his eyes, and James nodded, with the cock still halfway down his mouth. He would if he hadn't done so already, even if just to make Mike happy.

He slowly withdrew, putting a hand to his throbbing throat. Imagining the wide dick still inside, he reached down between his thighs and squeezed his own cock with a low groan.

"Stop. I want to see you come when I fuck you breathless," Mike said with half-lidded eyes and slipped his hands to James's shoulders.

James sighed but didn't protest despite the need growing in his groin. He liked Mike in control of the pace. "You have a great cock," he whispered, pulling himself up to his shaky feet. One move was enough to lose the slacks, and he was naked against the hottest guy on the planet.

Nothing could spoil the moment Mike Miller clawed his fingers into James's ass and picked him up. He didn't have to suggest it, James instinctually wrapped his legs around his waist and hugged him close. Mike was still panting as he turned around and carried James all the way to the bedroom, kissing his lips and gently nipping at them as he moved along the wall.

Somewhere at the back of his mind, James was worried Mike would be too occupied with their closeness and stumble, but he was too taken with their chemistry to pay much mind to it. A sudden change in gravity brought a yelp out of his lips, but it died down once his back hit the mattress, with Mike's body falling over him like a tiger's. Hungry, the beast was ready to devour all James had to offer and suck the marrow out of his bones.

"You're so hot. I'm gonna get it up again in no time," Mike rasped, his fingers eager to explore all James's body still had on offer. "I'll just get the lube," he muttered, but didn't actually pull back yet. James cupped his face with a low sigh and grinned. He was ecstatic. Mike was doing something to him, and he had no idea how to respond to that yet. After all, it was a man he both knew and didn't.

“Yes.”

When Mike backed off and got up, it was a sight to behold. Almost like the first time James had seen him grown-up, walking out of that crappy convenience store at the gas station, with his coveralls pulled halfway down, and wearing dark shades, his body glistening with sweat. James finally got a better look at Mike’s ass, all round and beefy over those firm thighs. Even the bruises on Mike’s back couldn’t spoil the view as he walked back to the door like the majestic beast he was.

James swallowed hard, pushing back the covers without looking at them because he didn’t want to take his eyes off that beautiful man. Nerves were getting the best of him, twisting and squeezing his stomach. This was Mike Miller. He was going to have Mike Miller inside him. His whole body shuddered with emotion as his eyes met Mike’s from across the room, and the response he got was a hungry grin. Mike waved the little condom packet at James before making his way back. Slower, as if he was giving James ogling time, proud like a lion in the middle of the savannah approaching his chosen lioness.

James took a deep breath and reached out to him. The covers were too cold in contrast to his skin, he needed Mike to cover him with his warmth again. There was nothing he wanted more in the world.

“Turn around,” Mike ordered, slipping to his knees on the mattress. “I’ve been waiting ages to properly see your ass.” He had a lazy, self-satisfied smile on his face that James could imagine waking up to every day. The moment that idea came to his mind, it sank its clutches into his heart and refused to let go. This was way scarier than losing his virginity had been. It wasn’t just about having sex.

James exhaled and slowly turned to his stomach, groaning when his cock slid against the fabric and sank into it under his weight. Mike’s fingers traced James’s back and all the way to his buttocks, until he parted them gently, awakening a deep, carnal need all over James’s body. He was gasping, writhing on the sheet, grinding his hips in the air, and Mike was the only man who could satisfy him.

“It’s so firm. I bet you do special exercises just for your ass.” Mike snorted and ran his fingers along the crack.

James curled his toes and spread his thighs farther. “Guilty.” He smiled and closed his eyes, absorbing Mike’s warmth into his skin.

"You want guys to notice it at the gym and chat you up?" Mike laughed and drizzled some lube between James's buttocks. A shudder ran through James at the cool slickness, but he arched his back and moved his hips just enough to brush his skin against Mike's knee.

"I usually work out when no one's there. My gym's open 24/7."

"Why would you take away the viewing pleasure? Afraid that you wouldn't be able to help yourself?" Mike spread the lube between James's ass cheeks, teasing the anus with his thumb.

James pulled a pillow closer and hugged it. He angled his hips and started making tiny moves in response. The pressure felt so good. "I'm not into hooking up with random guys," whispered James.

"Good boy. Ready for a proper stud." Mike pushed his slippery thumb into James's ass and wiggled it gently. "So fucking tight..."

James yelped and squeezed his ass around the finger. Even with the lube it was rough, and he looked back at Mike. He needed more than that finger touching him. "Lie down?"

Mike smirked and plopped next to James, never taking his finger away and teasing the sensitive anus. "I love the idea of fucking a guy," he groaned and kissed James's lips.

"You seem to know what you're doing," whispered James, drinking in Mike's warm breath. He pulled closer, providing his arm as a pillow.

"I did it with girls a few times." Mike slowly pushed in another finger, stretching James and nipping at his lip from where his head was resting on James's bicep. The fingers were both solid and gentle, a calming presence in the most vulnerable spot on James's body.

He slowly moved his knee up, letting it rest against Mike's leg, and gasped against his mouth. "After you came out?"

"Before. I don't wanna think about it now though. I wanna think about your balls, your dick, your chest..." Mike groaned and pushed his fingers in farther.

James's whole body throbbed in response, and he reached down, curling his fingers around Mike's thick wrist. He pulled on it, pressing the digits in deeper, a delicious slide that made his brain scramble. He slowly turned to his side, pressing even closer to Mike. He was right between the heat of his lover and the much cooler air at his back. "You can feel it now."

Mike dove in for another long kiss and pushed James to his back. His half-lidded gaze made James yearn for another kiss. Mike pulled his fingers out and kneeled between James's thighs. "I wanna see you open up those legs for me." He ripped the condom packet with his teeth. His warm voice, the lust glazing his eyes were the key to James's heart, and he felt it turn.

In the nest of warm fabrics, James spread his knees, with his eyes trained on Mike. His lungs ached with every breath as if Mike still held his large palm over James's chest, even without touching him. It was calming and sweet where James sensed it against his ribcage. "You're not nervous."

"Should I be? Just because I'm a gay-virgin?" Mike snorted as he rolled the condom onto his dick. It was erect again and seemed even bigger than before. "I'm too horny to be nervous." Without another word, he grabbed James under the knees and pushed his legs up to get full access to James's ass. Having Mike's weight on top was the sweetest strain imaginable.

James gasped, grabbing Mike's shoulders. He felt so vulnerable. What if this all turned out to be some kind of elaborate joke? What if Mike only accepted his apologies to get into his pants? His body, however, had no doubts about what it wanted. His stomach fluttered, warm and throbbing with an itch only Mike could scratch. "Well, I am," he uttered.

"How so?" Mike asked, nipping at James's jaw as he slid his cockhead over the slippery hole, only teasing James for now.

James swallowed hard, looking up at him. He kept his hands on Mike's shoulders, just in case he felt he needed to push him back a bit. "This changes things. Since yesterday, everything has been so crazy. Like I'm in the *Twilight Zone* with an alternative version of you. One that is actually easy to stand."

"'Easy to stand'? Wow, talk about encouraging. You really do know how to wow a guy." Mike groaned, gently pushing with his cock, without actually sliding it in.

James gasped, trailing his hands up and down Mike's thick, warm neck. "What I actually mean is... I think I'm gonna miss this," he uttered, completely absorbed by the face above him. The world stopped at the edge of the bed.

"You think too much," Mike said, and his cock pushed right in, emptying James's mind of all unnecessary thoughts. He couldn't even speak because Mike's lips were on his again, that hot tongue penetrating him just like the thick dick.

James clutched at Mike, holding him tight in any way he could think of. Wrapped completely around the big, warm body, James slipped into blissful weightlessness that seemed to swallow him whole. He was completely open to Mike. Nothing hurt, and all he felt was that sweet tingle in his belly and where Mike was entering him. He wouldn't be able to count to ten without making a mistake.

Mike pushed all the way in, pressing all air out of James's lungs. The hard prick pulled back halfway, only to enter again, and again, and again. With James's knees forced up high, Mike laid his whole body weight on top of him, grinding his hips against James's ass at a rapid speed. He was like a warm cage of flesh and blood that kept James from flying off the mattress with the cock pistonning between his buttocks, and the fervent yet gentle lips on his face.

James moaned, shocked by the intensity of sensations hitting him at once. He clawed his fingers into Mike's cheeks and clutched his thighs around his lover's eager hips. "Slow down," he whispered, his body trembling when Mike's hard thrust nailed his prostate.

"Too much for Jamie?" Mike rasped with a grin, but slowed down, the movements of his hips becoming languid, stretched out, but never stopping.

"It's been a while," muttered James, but a sharp pang of pleasure turned his body into boneless goo. "Much better... that's good." He cupped both sides of Mike's face and angled his hips for that spot to be hit again. Every time that big, glorious cockhead brushed over his gland, it was like a wave of warm sea washing over him and tugging on his cock. From the inside. "That angle... it's great," he whispered, gazing into the green of Mike's eyes.

"Oh, yeah? I can do this all night." Mike's voice came in a low rasp, just as sweet as the wave-like movement of his body over James. His cock was hitting that sweet spot inside James each time as Mike thrust into him faster again.

The sound that came out of James was halfway between a laugh and moan. "Don't make empty promises," he whispered and bit the tip of Mike's nose. Now that his body had adjusted to the intrusion, the speed became heart-meltingly sweet. He wished Mike could deliver what he promised because James needed this so much that he was prepared to endure any discomfort that could follow on the next day.

"No empty promises." Mike looked into his eyes, and the world slowed down, even with the heat between them and the thrusts still relentless.

James gasped, pulling Mike's face lower. Inch by inch, the heat came closer, Mike's eyes turned darker, and James was ready to come. He grabbed his dick and started frantically jerking off to the rhythm of Mike's thrusts.

"I wanna be the one who makes you come," Mike whispered into James's lips, sending his world into a spin. The penetration became slower, but strong and hard as Mike held onto James's hair. Each one was perfectly angled to nail James's gland. He had no idea how much Mike knew about guy on guy sex, but he certainly was a keen observer.

James had a thousand words to say to that, but as he looked into Mike's eyes, nothing came out. He nodded and pulled his partner down for a hungry, desperate kiss. They were on fire. He was about to come with Mike Miller inside of him.

Mike wrapped his arms under James to pull him as close as humanly possible, and that was it for James. He came with a low cry, clinging to Mike so hard his joints ached. His eyelids fell shut, ragged breathing made him high on the air, and he simply let go. Bliss descended on him like molten lava, and it was like coming after being teased for years, all of his secret fantasies and hurts coming together in one glorious moment when tension left his body.

"Love the way you clench those muscles," Mike blabbered, moaning into James's ear with his last few thrusts. Having Mike between his legs without a hint of fear was such an overwhelming experience that James just clung to him, kissing his partner's hot skin, lapping up the fresh sweat. He could hardly believe his luck. It was the greatest kind of closure he could ever get. He held Mike through his orgasm, gently petting and scratching the fiery flesh. Mike's back was so tense and muscular James would love to kiss it all over, and then roll to his back for Mike once again.

Mike let out a shuddery breath as he pulled out. He took a moment to dispose of the condom but then was right back, pulling James into a tight hug. "I've never been with anyone like this."

"Me neither," whispered James, hiding his face in the crook of Mike's neck. His well-used hole throbbed, as if already missing the cock, but the never-ending kisses Mike was pressing to his shoulder were making up for it.

James let his legs relax, and having Mike's hot fingers explore his thighs was making it even better. Funny, he would have never taken Mike for a cuddler.

"I wouldn't have known it was your first," whispered James, holding him close. The gentle petting of his thighs was the sweetest massage.

"Was it good for you?" Mike looked up at him, his green eyes sincere and hungry for appreciation.

James swallowed. Was Mike Miller feeling self-conscious about his performance in bed? He smiled and nuzzled Mike's nose, hooking one knee over his partner's hip. Strange, throughout his long-term relationship, he never felt as at ease with his boyfriend as he did now, with a ghost from his past. A very fleshy ghost. He was naked in every possible sense. And he loved it. "I'm great, thank you," he whispered.

Mike chuckled and covered them with a soft sheet. "The pleasure's all mine. Maybe I can provide it again tomorrow." His eyes had that dreamy look when he traced circles over James's forearm. It burned, as if he were marking James with some unknown signs.

"I could show you some tricks," whispered James, drunk on the sweetness that Mike was turning out to be.

"Like the throat one. You need to do it again because I don't think I got it the first time," Mike said. It didn't matter that they were both sweaty and sticky, James could stay like this for a long time. "I think I didn't even know how much I was missing out," Mike added, but even though the context was dirty, he sounded strangely serious.

James chuckled, hugged him close, and kissed his stubbly cheek. "Why, you want to learn that?"

"N-no," Mike uttered, but never backed away for a second. "I mean... It's about more than sex. It's about being close to another man. It's so much deeper. Such a connection." He licked his lips, watching James with a slight frown.

James breathed out, his chest constricting as he stroked Mike's cheek. "It's not something that always happens."

"I can imagine not everyone is so in sync with you." Mike never looked away, hardly even blinking.

James throat throbbed in unison with his heartbeat. "This was... kinda intense," he whispered, trying to stifle the burst of hope in his chest. Maybe he and Mike could get to know each other better?

Mike slowly rolled half of his body on top of James again. "It made me feel alive."

James gave him a frantic nod. “It’s like... I’ve been crushing on you all this time, and now I finally got you.”

Mike smiled back at him and stroked the side of James’s body. “You did. You’re a lot sweeter than I imagined.”

James chuckled, heat rushing to his face. “No, I’m a dick.”

“You definitely *have* a dick.” Mike nuzzled his cheek.

That statement pressed a full on grin to James’s face. He felt so comfortable with Mike, like they had no worries in the world. “So... was that the final push into the gay lifestyle?” he whispered, a bit embarrassed with where the conversation went.

Mike snorted. “Yeah, I suppose there’s no turning back. Anything can happen now.”

James sighed and leaned in to kiss Mike’s nipple. “What was the original plan? What did you want to do?”

Mike bit his lip and let out a deep breath through his nose. “It’s stupid. I was saving up to get a helicopter license.”

James stared at him with a growing sense of loss. It must have been a blow for Mike, who kept a job throughout high school, collecting the money, only to have it taken from him. He didn’t know if it would have been enough to pay for the course Mike wanted, but it would have been a start, something Mike didn’t have. Someone who changed so much, who was such a sweet, caring guy, deserved a chance. “It’s not stupid.”

“It is. I don’t know what I was thinking. I kinda imagined it would get me into a different world. That I’d get to see things. Even if I was just an air chauffeur.” Mike ran his fingers through James’s hair.

James leaned into the caress and pulled Mike’s other hand close, to hold it against his lips. “You would have been a great air chauffeur. You have a way with people.”

“I have a way with Jamie and his ass.” Mike laughed and pinned him to the mattress in one swift move worthy of a wrestler.

James gasped when his ass tingled, as if already conditioned to react to Mike’s strength. There was no way he could disagree with that.

Chapter 8

Mike woke up as the happiest man alive. He rolled over to his side and pulled Jamie closer with a content murmur. He couldn't stop thinking about last night. It was a defining sexual experience. Exactly what he needed to know who he was, his place on Earth, and where he wanted to be until he died. Mike never had a realization he'd call 'transcendent'—hell, he'd laugh at any silly hippie who used the word—but that was exactly what it was. Buried deep in Jamie and pounding his ass like there was no tomorrow while looking into those blue eyes and kneading the firm flesh of his thighs... There was no beginning and no end to what he could say about that.

Jamie's nose wrinkled, and he sneezed, his eyes snapping wide open as if the sound had woken him up. He blinked, looking innocent and empty-headed like a newborn baby. But then he blinked again, and his face glowed with a wide smile. "Hey."

"Hey." Mike grinned back, feeling all gooey on the inside, like a lava cake. He didn't know what else to say though. *Do you wanna do it again?, I love your ass?, Let's go to Vegas together and get married?* Nothing really seemed appropriate.

His chest tightened when Jamie leaned forward in a snake-like move and pushed his warm legs against Mike's. The hair on his thighs and calves tickled Mike's skin in the sweetest way possible. Touching Jamie was nothing like being with a girl, his skin wasn't nearly as smooth, instead it had lean muscle underneath, so pliant and accepting. Jamie's morning stubble was dark against his cheeks and chin, making him look even more masculine.

"I wouldn't want you to be late for the conference." Mike kissed him all over his jaw, and Jamie just spread out under him like a cat.

"Are you pushing me out of bed?" he asked, arching his back over the soft cotton sheet. The dark hair on his body was trimmed just right to lead Mike's eyes down, between Jamie's legs.

"Never. Would you like to stay like this longer?" Mike asked, and just stared at Jamie's beautiful cock.

"Yeah, we still have a bit of time. I don't have to watch some old men talking about sales." Jamie's warm hand found its way to Mike's ear and started

brushing it softly, as if it were a tiny animal. Jamie was so tender when he touched Mike, like he meant every single gesture.

This wasn't exactly what Mike was asking about though. What he meant was if Jamie would like to hang around with him even after this weekend, which already made him feel kinda weird. Mike preferred to imagine Jamie forgot all about their arrangement and treated what they had like a real thing.

"You sure that doesn't turn you on?" Mike chuckled.

Jamie shook his head and leaned in, pressing his plump lips against Mike's. "I'd rather listen to you."

Mike slid his hand to Jamie's nape, to make sure he wasn't getting away any time soon and enjoyed the hot kiss. He closed his eyes, and he could devote all his attention to that soft mouth, the warm limbs that embraced him just perfectly. Mike's heart pounded so fast he was waking up already. "Wow, I win when my competition is old men talking about sales. I'm not very flattered," he muttered into the kiss with a smile.

"I'm not here to flatter you," chuckled Jamie but hugged Mike close.

Mike stroked Jamie's strong back, his insides all fluttery. "Oh, I forgot, I'm the one at your beck and call. You have a beautiful smile, Jamie. Your lips taste like candy, Jamie. You have the tightest ass ever, Jamie. I love how your skin smells, Jamie. Good enough?"

Jamie mewled into Mike's cheek and stroked the back of his neck. "Only if it's honest."

"I honestly loved fucking you." Mike trailed his fingertips over Jamie's ass. He would do a lot to slip inside again, feel Jamie's body close, kiss his fingers and toes.

"I know. I can feel that." Jamie laughed out loud, rolling in the covers.

"How so?"

Jamie stretched, lying on his stomach and gently spreading his thighs underneath the covers. For once, there was nothing that would restrict Mike's access to a guy, but it did nothing to satisfy his hunger. If anything, his appetite had only grown since yesterday, fueled by a night time quickie around three am.

"Well, I'm a bit... tender I guess."

Mike slid closer and kissed his ear. "I hope it didn't hurt? You should tell me if it did."

"Nah, it's all right. You were very enthusiastic," whispered Jamie, as if he had a reason to. But no one could hear them, alone and safe in the warm hotel room. "It doesn't feel bad."

"I'm still enthusiastic if you are." Mike slid his hand to Jamie's nape.

"Not enough time now," said Jamie, rolling his head against it. "How about later?"

"Only if you do that thing with your throat again." Mike grinned and slowly pulled back even though leaving the bed was the last thing he wanted.

Jamie's laugh was followed with a pillow hitting Mike's back.

"What? Just saying!" Mike chuckled and got up. He couldn't remember when he last felt so at ease with someone. Even with his teammates at school, there was always that underlying fear of someone finding out he was gay, but with Jamie none of it mattered. The guy chose to sleep with him even with all the bad blood they used to have, and it felt like finding the missing puzzle piece he'd been searching for all his life.

"So offended," chuckled Jamie, marching across the room toward the bathroom.

Mike followed close behind, just far enough to ogle Jamie's ass. His life had gotten turned upside down, and he loved it.

Jamie's presentation went great, even without gay porn thrown in. On the podium, when no one was able to startle him, he was the picture of confidence. And even though Mike didn't understand half of the technical details explained, he did understand why Jamie's invention was such a big deal and why he made so much money on it. Mike made sure to clap louder than anyone else once Jamie was finished with his speech. He didn't whistle though. Kept it classy. Michelle Obama wouldn't whistle.

Mike was satisfied to see that even Bitch Rich was making notes during the presentation. He couldn't wait to tell Jamie.

Lunch was planned right after the speech so they made their way to the hotel restaurant. Jamie wasn't shying away from discreet touches as they made

their way through the buffet of delicious foods, and didn't even comment when Mike got a bit too much on his plate.

Mike couldn't stop looking at Jamie in a new way, as if his eyes had been opened to a whole new beauty in his new lover. Jamie looked so sharp as well in his tailor-made suit, silk tie, and with a smile that could brighten up the whole room. All Mike wanted was to take Jamie back to their room and rub himself all over the stubble on Jamie's face.

As one of the first to arrive, they chose the same table as the day before. Jamie sipped his juice, looking to the buffet like he expected it to produce a magic rabbit, but Mike knew he was hoping to get someone pleasant to join them.

"The food's amazing," Mike said, making sure he wasn't gorging on his steak too fast. He leaned over to Jamie's ear. "Your presentation was all kinds of awesome, even without dick in it."

Jamie flushed and lowered his head with a groan. "I knew you would think of that! Just don't tell anyone."

With the day being so great, the last thing Mike wanted was to see Richard's smug face, and his sidekicks heading their way. "For fuck's sake, does this guy give up?" he groaned.

Jamie tapped his fingers on the tabletop, without looking up yet. "Richie?"

Mike nodded, just before their table was swarmed by vultures.

"What an amazing presentation, James!" Richard exclaimed, putting his tray with a salad and grilled chicken on the table. "Who would have thought you'd find so much energy for it after yesterday's lost battle."

"It kinda got cancelled out with two shots to Mike's back," said Jamie. He didn't seem as gullible as the day before, but his tone was polite as he dug into his steak.

"I'd call that a win. You two lovebirds were far too alive," Rich said, and his friend snorted.

Mike looked up at them with a frown. "We were dead by the rules of the game. And had our equipment off."

"Yeah, I'm sure James would soon let you examine him in the spirit of in-depth research," said Richard, chomping on his salad with a wide smile.

Jamie blinked, staring at him completely dumbstruck. And there it was, the treacherous flush spreading all over his face. Mike groaned internally, but smiled. He wouldn't give the fucker satisfaction. He put an arm over Jamie's shoulders. "Nah, with my war wounds so deep, it was Jamie examining me all over."

"That's not what we heard," teased Alistair with a grin. "James surprised everyone by changing so much we barely recognized him, but we didn't know he also became an army wife."

Okay, so Mike wasn't all that keen on telling anyone someone fucked his ass, but the terrified look on Jamie's face got him to jump in front of that bus. He was not having these guys tease his... lover? Fake boyfriend?

He leaned back in the chair with a wide smile. "Oh, man, you have no idea what Jamie can do to the prostate. If you knew, you wouldn't be laughing. You should ask your doctor sometime. Who knows, maybe he'd open you up to a whole new world of possibilities. How do you think Jamie landed a guy like me? It wasn't the science talk. It's all in the prostate."

The table went silent.

Jamie burst out laughing and covered Mike's hand with his palm, which was damp with sweat but warm when it squeezed his fingers. "He thinks my geekiness is a bit overrated. But I'm not just that. You heard him, gentlemen."

Richard looked a bit pale even under the layer of orange. He pointed to his phone. "Savannah called, you'll have to excuse me," he muttered and got up, quickly followed by his friends with excuses just as lame.

Mike was actually quite happy with himself, even if burning up under the collar.

Jamie covered his mouth, chuckling so hard his eyes were getting all wet. "Did you see their faces? You have traumatized them for the rest of their lives."

"Good. Maybe they'll piss off next time they think of coming around. I'm not gonna have them make fun of you."

The smile froze on Jamie's face, turning into something more guarded yet soft and tender. "I—didn't expect you to do this. Thank you. There is nothing bad about bottoming, it's just... that those guys don't see it that way, and I can't have them think of me as someone even weaker."

Mike stroked Jamie's arm. "I know. I mean, it's not... uhm, my preference, but I don't think there's anything wrong with it. I actually feel like it's this,

uh... privilege that you let me top.” After the failure on Friday, Mike had suspected that Jamie didn’t think of him as good enough.

Jamie bit his lip, keeping his eyes on Mike’s. Even with the noise all around, it felt as if they were alone. “I guess. I am quite picky.”

“You know how to make a boy feel special.” Mike poked his ribs under the table.

“Right back at you,” said Jamie with a chuckle, playing with his food on the plate.

“Would it be too much to ask if I could go take a nap instead of listening to the next presentation?” Mike nudged Jamie with his elbow.

Jamie grinned but shook his head. “Sorry, I’m here for a reason, but you’re welcome to stay in the room if you’re bored.”

“Cool.” Mike put the last piece of steak into his mouth. “I’ll be back in a few hours, so we can have dinner with everyone and stuff.”

“I’ll walk you. I need a quiet moment after the presentation. The stress is a killer.”

Mike leaned over to give him a soft smooch before standing up. “Oh, yeah, stress relief. I like the way you’re thinking.” He wiggled his eyebrows.

Jamie blinked and looked to the food remaining on his plate. It was clear he hadn’t meant what Mike suggested, but he was still pondering on the possibility of going with it. “I suppose I could have a little something on the go.”

“Or swallow on the go.” Mike pinched Jamie’s stomach and made a move toward the exit. He wanted to be back in that room ASAP.

Jamie followed him, but he was greeting people he knew as they passed through the dining room. Mike loved to see him smile like he did now, and it struck him that he had never seen it back at school. It felt good to have brought it out in him.

They went through the elegant corridor and to their room in silence but strangely, it wasn’t awkward. Mike had his arm over Jamie’s shoulders, and it was nice to just be. Not to mention *be* with the most attractive guy there.

Jamie leaned into him and opened the door with the key card. He pulled Mike in with a small smile. “We’re a dream team, don’t you think?”

“I’d hope so.” Mike stroked Jamie’s hair gently, not to mess it up.

Jamie closed the door, walked Mike all the way to the low table and sat down on a leather-covered stool. “I thought... since I’ll be leaving you for the next few hours, this would give you some time to think about... well, something I want to talk to you about.” The blue eyes looked up at Mike, wide and sincere.

“Um, yeah?” Mike frowned. It sounded serious. Did Jamie want to actually fuck him? Like fuck-fuck him? He wasn’t sure if he was ready to go there.

Jamie took a big gulp of air, and then exhaled it slowly. He played with the bottom of his tie as if it could fill the silence that followed. “As I said, we seem to have fun together. What do you think?”

“Duh. It’s great.” Mike sat down in an armchair by the window, somehow thinking he looked like a Bond villain with the background of the city skyline. He just needed a white cat.

Jamie turned toward him, squinting as he stared into the bright window. “I’m having a lot of fun with you, and you are nothing like I expected, which has me thinking that we could maybe try to get to know each other better. What do you think?” With each word, Jamie’s voice became quieter, but Mike still got every word.

Mike swallowed, his blood pumping faster. “You wanna go to Vegas with me?” he uttered. In the bright light, Jamie looked even paler than he usually was. Was he this nervous?

“If you want. I’ve earned a vacation anyway, so we could pick a destination and go.” Jamie cleared his throat. “I know you’re very tight on money, so we could... you know, continue with the current arrangement. We could speak of the details after I’m back...”

Mike licked his lips, dumbstruck. ‘Current arrangement’? Jamie wanted to keep paying him for company? As much as Mike loved and needed money, it made him feel uncomfortable at best. Was that all Jamie thought of him and their sex and... stuff? So Mike was broke, but the situation had changed since two days ago. He wanted different things now. It wasn’t even about feeling like a hooker, he was prepared to take some shit for three days, but he was not a ‘vacation package’. What was this? Mike all inclusive?

“Y-yeah...” he uttered in the end.

James gave him a tight smile and rushed across the room to pick up Mike’s hand. “I’ll be back later. We could have a nice dinner somewhere, without all those people,” he said, looking deep into Mike’s eyes.

Mike nodded, even though he'd lost all appetite. Dinner would be on James, 'cause Mike Miller couldn't pay for shit. He didn't like this at all. He kind of thought their arrangement dispersed into pleasant nothingness like a spray of Febreze. "I suppose."

James bit his lip and opened his mouth to say something, but the silence was broken by his weird ringtone. It sounded like the soundtrack from a 1990s video game. James groaned but picked it up. "Yeah, I know, I'm getting back there right now. Tell him to wait for me," he told the person he was speaking to. He finished the call with a brief "thanks" and smiled at Mike. "I need to go. There's the promised two thousand in the bedside drawer, just so that you know I'm not trying to cheat you."

Mike gave him a tight smile, unable to utter a word. It was his own damn fault that he got himself into a situation like this in the first place. Mike Miller, prime stud meat for the millionaire. The lunch he'd just had rose in his throat and threatened to escape. He needed to be out of here. The air conditioned room didn't seem all that cool and comfortable anymore. The slight kiss James pressed to his cheek felt like a branding. "So... see you in a few hours. Get some rest. They have a great day spa, I've heard," uttered James, slowly moving back toward the door where his briefcase was already waiting for him.

"See you. I'll... have that nap." Mike muttered, feeling completely out of place. He didn't belong here. This wasn't the thread count his life had. Expensive hotels, restaurants, big brand pants. It was all fake and rubbed him the wrong way. Having sex with James only showed Mike what he was missing, what he really wanted. And what he wanted was something real. Getting paid to be a boy-toy just didn't cut it. Mike wasn't the kind of guy Mr. Jaguar would be looking for.

James waved at him one last time and disappeared. The emptiness he left behind was filling the room like vicious smoke, threatening to choke the life out of Mike. The comfortable sofa, the television on the wall, even the grand bed peeking from the bedroom seemed to ready themselves to jump him.

He walked over to the other room and opened the drawer by the bed to find an envelope with the promised money. He could take it and go to Las Vegas, but it felt so dirty in his hand that even a pauper like him wouldn't take it. Where he saw the possibility of something deep and meaningful, James saw a luxurious fling. A way to rub the noses of his frenemies and a good sexual experience. In a way, Mike couldn't blame him. James couldn't know how intense it would all get for such a gay-virgin like Mike.

He took a piece of paper from a notebook with the hotel logo and quickly wrote:

Thanks for the offer, but it turned out to be more intense for me than this. I think we're looking for different things. I'll find my own way to get what I want. It was great though. XXX Mike.

Mike sneered at the note. It looked pathetic and didn't convey even half of what he was feeling. His handwriting was so bad it looked like it was offending the thick, creamy paper. Just like *he* was a stain on James's life. He would have only been a nuisance.

Having made his decision, he started folding the clothes James got him into neat packages. He didn't want dirt or weird smells on them. The ones that didn't fit into the duffel bag he stuffed into one large plastic bag with the department store's logo, and he gave the room one last look. His eyes were instantly drawn to the bed, and he found himself feeling sorry that the maid had made it. If it were still rustled, he'd consider walking over and smelling the pillow James used last night, but now it seemed like a waste of someone's work.

If worse came to worst, and Vega wouldn't give Mike his job back, he could probably sell some of the clothes on eBay. He could hardly believe thoughts like that were his life again.

Chapter 9

Mike felt numb when the crappy, old bus stopped a few hundred meters from Vega's Gas & Motel. The thought of having to face his boss again, explain that he didn't in fact fuck Vanessa, and that he would be a proper employee from now on was making him physically sick. But with barely having enough money for the bus fare, there was no way around it. It was back to the drawing board. Now that he got a taste of a different life, he would be more motivated to save up some money and eventually move to Vegas. In a year or so, if he was lucky.

He walked along the asphalt, with dirt blowing into his face. He could almost smell the gasoline now, and it brought the nauseating memories of long days filled with nothing of importance, of the smelly room that only fit a single bed, and the complete lack of fulfilment. This was going to be his life again. At least it was getting dark so he didn't have to bear the excruciating heat pouring down from the sky. Everything around him had this purplish shade that made even the dry ground beneath his feet seem a bit otherworldly. He wouldn't mind walking along this road with Jamie.

A car exited the station and drove past him with a low hum. There were a few vehicles parked by the motel, but the station seemed pretty much deserted. This was it, his walk of shame, his nightmare. He held the duffel bag over his arm so hard his palms were all sweaty. Even from afar, Mike could already see Vega getting up from his shabby old chair and making his way to the door. This would not be pretty.

Vega pushed the door open so hard it rattled when it hit the wall. He stopped by the entrance with his arms slightly spread, the beer belly peeking from underneath an old tank top that used to be white but was now a sort of unhealthy yellowish color. At least he wasn't holding a gun.

"Hey, Mr. Vega!" Mike forced a smile as he walked up to his former and hopefully future boss.

"Well, well, well, if it isn't the *prodigulolous* son." Vega smirked.

Mike laughed even though there was nothing funny about his position. This had to be the most humiliating day of his life. Even worse than the day his brother found gay porn on his computer. "Yeah, I suppose so. Stuff got a bit out of hand on Friday, didn't it?"

Vega snorted and crossed his arms on top of the drum of his stomach. “I didn’t expect you to show up after that performance.”

Mike came up to Vega with a frown that he hoped looked apologetic. “Yeah, I kinda... I was on drugs. You know Mr. Jaguar? He gave me coke in the garage, and I kind of went mental. Sorry for that. I never slept with Vanessa. I respect her very much.”

Vega frowned. “You should kiss her feet after all this! Though I doubt she would ever speak to you again.”

Mike looked down at a bug crawling at his feet. That was how he felt now. Crawling at Vega’s feet. And just when he thought that, Vega stepped on the thing, breaking its little back with his dirty shoe. “I will. I’ll never do coke again, boss.”

“Oh, so it’s boss now?” snorted Vega. “I thought I fired you the moment I took out my gun.”

“How about I work for free for two weeks to make up for the stress, huh?” Mike clenched his hand over the handles of the plastic bag with expensive clothes. It was time to put all his stuff on eBay.

Vega narrowed his eyes. “I don’t know... what guarantee do I have you won’t do it again?”

“I promise, man. You know me, I don’t usually go off the rails.” Mike took a deep breath of hot air and put his hands in his pockets.

“A month. We’ll feed you,” said Vega, and Mike already knew that meant cheap toast and expiring food from the store. Horrible, but he would take that chance.

“Thank you for the opportunity, Mr. Vega,” Mike muttered and pulled his hand out for a shake. There was a hum in the background so maybe a lost driver would end Mike’s misery?

“And we’ll lower your hourly wage by a dollar, until I decide I can trust you again,” said Vega. His eyes were slowly narrowing as he zeroed in on something over Mike’s shoulder.

Mike inhaled and gritted his teeth, but looked over his shoulder, annoyed with the noise. His mouth fell open when he saw that it wasn’t a car that disturbed the conversation. A black helicopter was lowering itself to the empty parking lot by the motel, raising dust into a cloud around it.

"What the f—" Vega uttered, barely audible through the noise.

Dirt and garbage started tumbling all around, pushed by the speeding air as the machine set down by the building.

"Is this even legal?" asked Vega, watching the helicopter door opening to reveal a male figure. The guy got out into the parking lot and rushed for the store, his tie and suit jacket floating in the air.

Mike's jaw fell even lower when he recognized the man as no one else but James. What the hell was *he* doing here? Mike dropped both his bags and stared. With the helicopter behind him, in that sleek suit, James looked so classy it made Mike's heart beat faster.

James started jogging, his face open and honest as he approached Mike in front of Vega's store. He stopped two yards away from him and after a moment's hesitation, took one more step. He blinked. "Hey."

"Hey," Mike uttered.

"What the fuck is Mr. Jaguar doing here? You givin' my Mike coke, you shithead?" Vega walked past Mike and poked James's chest.

"Who?" James shook his head, his eyes darting to Mike. He was flushed and out of breath. "What? No, I only had coffee."

Mike slapped his forehead, wishing he could disappear. "What are you doing here?"

James looked back to the helicopter, to Vega, and then back at Mike. "Could we have some privacy, please?"

Vega opened his mouth to say something, but Mike stopped him with a groan. "I'll deal with this, yeah?" he said and grabbed James's arm, pulling him along, away from Vega.

"I'm so happy I found you here," whispered James, tagging along like a puppet. "I was afraid you went God-knows-where, and I wouldn't catch up to you."

Mike frowned at the sight of a bandage on James's hand. That was a much easier topic. "What happened to you? What are you doing here?"

James blinked and glanced at the white fabric. "Oh, this? I punched Richard, and... yeah, I'd never done that before so I hurt my hand."

"Why did you punch him? I mean... he probably deserved it, but why?"

James spread his arms. "He told me he saw you leaving, and he made a comment that just... I just snapped."

Mike raised his eyebrows. So James had it in him after all.

The silence was only bearable because of the hum of the helicopter. James bit his lip and inhaled so much air that his chest seemed to have gained a size. He cupped Mike's face, stepping close with a slight frown. "I'm sorry."

Mike tried to look away, but it was impossible, especially with the touch so warm on his skin. "It's fine. I think we're just looking for different things."

James shook his head and found Mike's hand, squeezing it tightly. "Don't leave."

"I can't do it for money, Jamie. I thought I could, but it feels really weird with someone you like." Mike took a deep breath, trying to slow down the pounding in his chest.

James let out a shuddery breath and nodded, his hair floating with the moving air. "But that's what I'm trying to tell you. I like you too. I just thought... you'd feel weird if I expected you to just tag along with me for nothing after two days together."

"It's not like I had much of a plan anyway." Mike dared to smile at James. Could Jamie possibly feel the same way about him? His whole body went aflame at the thought that he wasn't the only one overwhelmed by their time together.

Jamie's Adam's apple bobbed. His face looked soft and fresh in the purplish light of the setting sun, which made his small smile seem all the sweeter. "I know it's weird, but I've never felt this way before. I don't want to bury you with the rest of my past," he said, squeezing Mike's hand harder.

"You don't?" Mike stood a bit closer, unable to stop himself, as if the blue eyes were drawing him in.

James nodded, his eyes darkening. "When I was with you, it felt so... right. Everything; your voice, the way you touched me." He swallowed and started to whisper, "The way you feel inside me... it makes me feel real."

Mike couldn't help the grin widening on his face. He loved to hear that. He'd love to hear that all the time. "Yeah, I couldn't keep the money after that. No matter how much I need it. It's not about pride, I didn't want to make it seem less than what it was."

Jamie's hand fell from Mike's face, and he squeezed both of Mike's hands, standing so close that their chests were almost touching. "So... will you come with me?"

"Why? You gonna take me away in your chopper?" Mike snorted and glanced to the glorious machine that looked just as out of place in front of the ugly motel as a flying carpet would.

Jamie's eyes glinted. His handsome face was otherworldly, like in a movie. This was where the characters kiss at the end. "I thought you'd like to fly in one before you start working for your licence."

Mike bit his lip and squeezed Jamie's hands so hard it hurt his fingers. "I'd really like that."

Jamie opened his mouth but then closed it without uttering a sound. He leaned in, his chest bumping into Mike's, and their mouths met. Jamie's was soft, luscious, safe.

Mike smiled into the kiss and slid his hands into Jamie's hair. He didn't have the words to describe what he felt, but he hoped his kiss did all the talking. Jamie's arms slid around his neck in a tight hug as the kiss deepened. For a brief moment, it was as though they were in a different place, but eventually, James pulled away and smiled.

"We can go anywhere we want. Your pick."

Mike looked to the helicopter with a head full of ideas. The world seemed to finally open up to Mike Miller. "Walmart."

The End

Author Bio

K.A. Merikan is a joint project of Kat and Agnes Merikan, who jokingly claim to share one mind. They finish each other's sentences and simultaneously come up with the same ideas. Kat and Agnes enjoy writing various kinds of stories, from light-hearted romance to thrillers. They love creating characters that are not easy to classify as good or evil, and firmly believe that even some villains deserve their happy endings. It is easiest to find them in galleries, restaurants and historical sites, always with a computer or notebook, because for Kat and Agnes, every day is a writing day. Future plans include lots of travel, and a villa on the coast of Italy or a flat in Paris where they could retire after yet another crazy venture, only to write more hot homoerotic stories.

As K.A. Merikan, Kat and Agnes have published a number of books, which cross genres while always staying homoerotic.

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