



*Bromance  
to  
Romance*

A LOVE'S LANDSCAPES STORY

ELIZABETH DANIELS

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# Love's Landscapes

*An M/M Romance series*

## BROMANCE TO ROMANCE

**By Elizabeth Daniels**

### 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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# BROMANCE TO ROMANCE

By Elizabeth Daniels

## Photo Description

A young man stares at the camera wearing a white T-Shirt and black-rimmed Ray Ban eye glasses. Facial hair covers his chin and upper lip. Tattoos of a skull and flower are visible on his neck. His look is vulnerable, sincere, and wanting.

## Story Letter

*Dear Author,*

*My name is \_\_\_\_\_ and I'm a grad student at \_\_\_\_\_. I'm looking for love but sometimes it's hard to find guys that want more than a hook-up. Will I find the love of my life on this gay dating site? Or is he already on campus? I snapped this photo via my web cam—is it for my online dating profile or am I sending it to a special someone? What will he think of the tattoos under my shirt? Can he bring out the romantic side hiding behind my glasses? How do we meet and find our HEA?*

*No BDSM and light on the angst please. Also I like cuddle times. :)*

*Thanks!!*

*Sincerely,*

*Julia*

## Story Info

**Genre:** contemporary

**Tags:** friends to lovers, phone sex, first love, college, nursing informatics, slow burn/UST, helpful friends, non-explicit sex, tattoos

**Word Count:** 19,974

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To Julia—I hope what they say is true and that the third time is a charm. Thanks for the great prompt and the chance to write these boys.

To the LLUMAS who saved me when I was drowning and to Lori who encouraged me to write phone sex at my desk. xoxo

# **BROMANCE TO ROMANCE**

**By Elizabeth Daniels**

## Chapter 1

Dan Foster sat in his apartment at his kitchen bar flipping through the apps on his phone. Another Friday night would be spent alone, and it depressed him more than he cared to admit. He could have jumped on the invite for a boys' night out, but the drive down the I-5 was never fun, and with the way Malcolm drove, he would need to have an IV of vodka to survive. Normally, he would wait until his roommate and best friend, Drew, got home and see if he wanted to hang out, but it was Drew's late night at work, and Dan was getting antsy.

He looked at his phone for the time; it was only 8:47 p.m., and nothing happened this early on a party night. If he was going to do this, he needed to make up his mind and get ready. The words of his late grandfather came to mind: "If the barn needs painting... paint it!" He decided his love life was the barn, and even though his grandfather had been talking about women and make-up, Dan's life needed a new coat of paint.

Dan went to the cupboard next to the fridge, pulled out a bottle of Glenfiddich, and grabbed one of the few glasses that wasn't a jar. He needed the strong stuff if he was going to do this: put himself out there again. He wasn't worried about going out really. Hell, he wanted to go out and meet people—meet the love of his life actually and have a romance to end all romances, but it was going out alone, without a backup plan or anyone to fall back on, that required the liquid courage. Maybe the night would be dull, and he would leave minutes after he walked through the door or maybe this would be a night he would never forget. Dan was certain it would be the former, but the chance at an unforgettable night, even for an introvert, was a dangerous temptation.

Dan poured two fingers of the whiskey into a lowball glass and walked to his small bedroom. He stood in front of his closet, staring at the color-coded clothes hanging on matching wood hangers. The order of his closet calmed him as he was able to see each piece easily. He decided that comfortable but appropriate would be the best way to go—he selected a pair of dark denim jeans, vintage Black Flag T-shirt, and a pair of age worn Doc Martens. He wouldn't make any other decisions until the liquor settled in his system and he felt in the right mood. Dan wasn't sure how this was going to go tonight, but he laid his outfit on the bed and went to get ready.



Stepping out of the shower, Dan wiped the steam off the mirror and looked at his reflection. "You're one lonely boy, and you're not on Gossip Girl." Dan laughed at his knowledge of pop culture shows targeting teenage girls. At least he had the background knowledge of the books from his cousin, aptly named Serena, that Chuck Bass was gay in the books. Dan thought it was a shame they didn't stay truer with the show, he might have paid more attention. Dan went to his room to finish getting ready.

Dan checked the time and gave himself a once-over in the mirror. His clothing was decent enough to be a "going out" outfit in the warm weather and showed off his tattoos. Though they weren't for public consumption, he hated attempting to hide them.

Stepping out the front door, Dan turned and slid the deadbolt into place. He was ready to go. The Backdoor was only a mile from his apartment, and the warm air from the Santa Ana winds bringing a breeze to the dry air was welcoming. Dan walked along the busy street, humming along to a mash-up of songs filtering in and out of his head, and he listened to the sounds of traffic. He wasn't a gearhead or whatever they were called now, but there were enough cars around where he grew up that he could tell certain ones apart.

He walked to the corner and pressed the button to cross the intersection that led to the bar. Dan watched as a blue diesel truck pulled into the garage across the street. He couldn't help but gawk as it circled the parking lot and came to a stop, its grill facing the bar and looking like it was smiling. The truck brought back a memory, and Dan was instantly transported back to his father's truck, chatting to other truckers on the CB radio, trying to use the lingo and pretending he was older than he was.

"Ten-four, good buddy. Roger that, Smokey. A bandit is on your tail. Over and out."

Dan chuckled as he mumbled to himself, shaking his head, knowing what he said meant nothing at all, but it was still fun to play pretend. He was waiting for the light to change when the engine of the truck was silenced, doors were opened, and he heard voices. He couldn't help but stare as three men exited the cab. In the light from the street lamps he could see two were older, and the third man looked like a fallen angel. Where the hell did they come from? Dan hoped they were not stopping to get something from the convenience store, but that they would turn north as that would put them right in his path. The sound from the accessible pedestrian signal let him know it was okay to cross. He tore his gaze away from the men and headed toward the bar.

The deep bass of the music was pulsing through the walls of The Backdoor when Dan arrived at the entrance. The line was longer than he'd thought at first glance, not being able to see it from the street. An adorable young boy was perched on a stool at the door, checking IDs. Huh? He must be the new bouncer. The boy was slim with platinum blond hair; he wore a pair of jeans so tight he must have been poured into them with a black T-shirt that had so many holes through it that it hardly qualified as a shirt at all and the tallest pair of silver boots he had seen on a man, woman, or drag queen.

Dan watched the line as each person walked through the door until an unruly customer, refusing to show ID, began to argue with the boy. Dan was sure a fight was going to break out, and the customer would take the boy down, when a sound like a wounded animal pierced through the commotion.

He looked around the crowd of bodies to see a man, a large man with dark skin and a shaved head, wearing more leather than Dan's vegan heart could take, holding the customer by his arm and pulling it behind his back at a terrible angle. The man in leather leaned in to whisper in the customer's ear, and his body went slack. *Whoa. What was that?* Dan wasn't sure and was not about to ask either. The customer reached into his back pocket and produced his wallet and ID. The bouncer took out a flashlight, passed it over the ID and then over the customer from head to toe with an impish grin. He handed the ID back to the customer, but when he tried to pass, the bouncer stopped him with his arm across the entrance and a shake of his head. The customer stared as the bouncer grinned, pursed his lips like he wanted a kiss, and pointed to his cheek. *I guess this is the cover charge tonight?* The customer blushed and leaned over to give the bouncer a quick peck on the cheek. The boy beamed and removed his arm from the entrance. As the customer passed, the bouncer gave him a smack on the ass so hard the sound made a snap, and the line waiting to get in let out a collective gasp followed by a round of applause. The bouncer hopped off his stool, performed a deep curtsy and returned to his perch and his job.

Dan nodded and grinned as he made his way through the line and up to the door.

"Ooh, look at you," the bouncer crooned and pointed at Dan's body. "Who was the lucky boy that used you to prove they could color within the lines?"

Dan shook his head. Comments about his tattoos were par for the course no matter where he went. "It was more than one."

The bouncer clapped his hands and threw his head back with laughter. "You, my colorful one, get in free for that comeback." The bouncer turned and

crooked his finger at the dark-skinned man in leather. "Bobby, make sure this hunk of a walking coloring book gets his drinks on the house tonight."

"You can't do that, Noah." The dark man gave the bouncer, Noah, a hard look and shook his head.

Noah patted the man's cheek. "Oh, Bobby. You poor daft man." Noah sat up straight on the stool, stretched out his leg and pressed his foot against Dan's chest. "Do you need to see the bruises on my knees?"

Dan was amazed by the blush that crept up the man's dark neck and stayed on his cheeks.

"I didn't mean..." Bobby faltered.

"Those bruises mean I get to do whatever the fuck I want, when I want and tonight, this gorgeous flower-necked bastard gets his drinks for free." Noah waved his hand in the air in dismissal. "Now off with you and make it so."

Bobby hunkered off into the bar and Dan looked down at the booted foot perched on his chest and up to the man it belonged to. "Uh, your foot, Noah?" Dan inquired. "You want to move it?"

"Not yet. ID, please." Noah smirked as he made his request.

Dan handed over his ID and tried to move back to dislodge Noah's foot, but the door frame was against his back impeding his escape. His efforts did not go unnoticed and Noah pressed the heel of his boot against Dan's chest.

"Shit that hurts." Dan hissed.

"Tsk, tsk, Daniel. Trying to get away so soon?" Noah shook his head. "You're a naughty boy, aren't you?" He inched his booted toe up and under Dan's chin. "Don't suppose you'd kiss it to make it better?" Noah asked with a pout.

"Not my kink, Noah." Dan lifted the bouncer's foot and slid out from under it. "Not tonight, anyway." Dan moved quickly and snatched his ID out of Noah's hands. "Thanks for the drink!" He blew the bouncer a kiss and turned and walked into the bar.

He stood in the entrance to the bar and clicked the heels of his Doc's together, summoning Judy Garland for good luck. He would need it.

Dan grabbed his beer and swiveled the bar stool around to scan the growing crowd of the bar. He didn't know why he was here tonight. Every time he came to The Backdoor for a drink it ended the same way; lame pick-up lines from even lamer guys who wanted nothing more than a lame hookup that often left Dan alone, empty, and with a wet spot in the most unfortunate places.

The atmosphere hadn't changed in years. The bar was the oldest business in town. It had been around long before Dan was born and was run by the same lesbian couple who opened it decades ago. As gay bars go, it wasn't fancy. It was functional. It had a long walnut-topped bar with a brass foot rail, small dance floor, an old fashioned juke-box, half-moon booths tucked away in dark corners with ample room to get comfortable, and two pool tables for those who liked to use phallic symbols to flirt.

The clientele of The Backdoor was of the college variety or those who have been in the area long enough to know it wasn't the hippest choice in town, but a place where everybody knew your name. Drinks were cheap, the staff was accommodating with a smile, and if you were lucky, a guy could see the inside of the most used stall in the men's room.

As cliché as it was, sex of all types happened in the bathrooms at The Backdoor. There may be no sex in the champagne room, but boys got it on in the first stall to the left. The Backdoor's name was tongue in cheek, yet even after several cases of hate crime vandalism, the owners never changed it.

Dan tipped the cold glass of beer against his lips and paused as a dark-haired guy caught his eye. Dan gave him the usual head to toe once-over and almost choked on his beer as the guy grabbed his crotch, thrust against his hand, and wagged his tongue. Seriously? Dan grimaced behind his glass, raised his eyebrows, and shook his head in a subtle brush off of Mr. Nasty across the room.

"Nice ink." Dan flicked his eyes towards the voice with the compliment.

The urge to whistle at the man leaning against the bar next to him was overwhelming. He was tall, taller than Dan's five feet ten inches, and his skin was a warmed golden tan but not from the sun. This was natural and the urge to see if it tasted as good as it looked made Dan smirk. The guy had dark hair cropped short, thick eyebrows over long lashes, and dark chocolate-colored eyes. If this wasn't dessert laid out in front of him... Dan chuckled as a cheesy pick-up line came into his head. Now was not the time to turn into a hypocrite.

"Uh, thanks." Dan nodded and raised his glass in salute.

The man grinned, showing off a straight row of impossibly white teeth. Dan tried to keep his thoughts neutral and not let his odd turn-on by excellent teeth take over.

The man put out his hand. "Thomas."

Dan looked at Thomas' hand and up to his face, trying to read the guy. "Dan." He placed his hand in Thomas' and received a very firm albeit dry handshake. No spark. No feeling in it at all.

"Nice to meet you, Dan." Thomas smiled as he slowly pumped his hand up and down. "You come here often?"

"Are you trying to hit on me?" Dan pulled his hand back. "Because you know..."

"What? Oh, no. No. I'm sorry." Thomas fumbled over his words and turned toward the bar.

Dan studied Thomas as he caught the bartender's attention and ordered a gin and tonic. Well then. Thomas wasn't giving anything away with his drink choice, but Dan liked that he ordered out of the norm. Most patrons of The Backdoor, like himself, directly ordered beer and didn't bother with mixed drinks. Even the simple ones.

Thomas grabbed his glass, turned back to Dan, and gave him a nervous grin.

"So, Tommy." Dan attempted to draw the attractive man into a conversation.

"It's Thomas."

"Right, Thomas. What brings you here tonight?" Dan asked.

"I'm meeting a friend for drinks."

"Oh really? Good friend?" Dan inquired as he scooted an inch or two off his stool and closer to Tommy.

"Best friend and more."

"How nice. So where is the strapping lad?"

Thomas pointed across the room, and at the thin, lanky blond boy walking out of the restroom. Dan would be surprised if the boy was old enough to get in, let alone get a drink without being carded.

"You like 'em young, eh Thomas?"

Thomas turned his head and gave a look of disgust to Dan. "That," he pointed to the blond twink walking toward them, "is my little brother."

Dan cringed. "So, you're not here looking for a date, then?" Dan gave Thomas an animated smile, raising his eyebrows and widening his eyes in a cartoonish fashion. "With a boy?"

"No," Thomas answered.

"So... you're not gay, I take it?" Dan asked.

"No," Thomas replied deadpan.

"Okay then. Have a nice time visiting your little brother." Dan eyed the young man as he walked up and threw his arms around Thomas' neck with abandon and squealed when Thomas picked him up and spun him around.

Hmm. So that's how it is in their family, he thought. Brotherly love at its finest and oddly close as well. Dan shrugged and slid off the barstool. He gave Thomas three pats on the back and said, "You two have fun catching up and," he raised his glass, "all that comes with it." Dan nodded to them both and slinked off before he started rewriting *Flowers in the Attic* with a hunk of an older brother who had dark features and his twink of a kid brother with long limbs that wrapped around his waist and the things they do while their mother wasn't around.

"I so need to get a boyfriend and get laid properly on a regular basis," Dan mumbled.

"I can help with that," a voice said.

Dan looked up and realized he'd walked straight across the bar and almost directly into the chest of Mr. Nasty. "Oh, um... thanks for the offer, but not if we were the last two men on earth and male pregnancy was a reality."

Mr. Nasty blinked and cocked his head to the side. "Male pregnancy? You mean like sea horses?"

"Huh?" Dan was busy scanning the bar for someone to spend the night with, either having sex or planning their next fifty years together. He preferred the latter but after his latest dry spell, he wasn't about to be picky. Where was the triad he saw on his way here?

"Guys getting pregnant. Is that a real thing?" Mr. Nasty asked.

Dan huffed. "Oh yeah, well, at least in books it is. They call it mpreg. I have a friend I could hook you up with. She loves the stuff," Dan answered, not

looking at Mr. Nasty who had moved closer to him, or so the change in smell indicated.

“You wanna read me a bedtime story, pretty boy?” Mr. Nasty rasped.

Dan turned and faced the guy. “Look, I really don’t want to sound like an asshole, but you’re not my type... okay?” Dan gave a tight-lipped smile to soften the sting of rejection he was serving up.

Mr. Nasty took the hint and walked away to try his sick game on the next guy. Dan wasn’t much in the mood to see who he could chat up now after his short and shot-down attempt at flirting with the one straight boy in the bar. Figures that it would happen to Dan on the night he decided to put himself out there again. This crowd, this endless scene of hookups and one-night stands weren’t for him anymore. He was getting bored with it. Even if the sex was good seventy-five percent of the time, he just wanted more. The problem was, Dan wasn’t sure how to go about getting the more he wanted.

Draining the last of his beer, Dan set his glass on the table and pulled his phone from his back pocket. He swiped across the screen and saw a text from Drew.

D-bag: *Hey, I am home early? Where are you?*

Dan smiled at the text. He was happy it was Drew and really happy he was home early. Some boys liked to go out all the time, but Drew was the perfect roommate and the best friend Dan had ever had. Drew was more of a homebody than Dan was, though Drew was more outgoing in new situations. Funny how their personalities flip-flopped the way they did. Their friendship was pure, it had been from the moment they met at freshman orientation as undergrads. It was comfortable and easy and tonight, after Dan’s failed attempts to find romance or anything worthwhile at the bar, Drew was what Dan needed.

DannyBoy: *The Backdoor.*

D-bag: *God, Dan. Is that figuratively, literally or are you at the bar?*

DannyBoy: *:o(*

D-bag: *That bad, babes? Come home.*

Dan knew that no matter what or who he did, Drew would be there for him.

DannyBoy: *See you in ten!*

Dan slipped his phone back in his pocket and caught the eye of Noah on his way out. Noah gave him a nod and a wave and Dan walked out the side door of the bar to make his way home for some serious Drew time.

\*\*\*\*



## Chapter 2

“That’s it! I give up. I’m becoming a spinster. I’m buying a cottage, learning to knit, and building a cat sanctuary in the backyard.”

Drew Baxter watched as his best friend and roommate walked through the door of their apartment and flopped down on the sofa with his head in Drew’s lap. Drew adjusted his tablet and made room for Dan.

“Get off my lawn you hipsters!” Dan yelled, pointing his finger at four different spots on their kitchen wall.

“Do I sound the part?” Dan asked, tipping his head back against Drew’s thigh to look at him.

Drew looked down at his friend. His light brown, almost blond hair was smashed against his thigh, the strands taking on the light from the lamp and making it look as if the blond streaks were sun-kissed. Dan wore black-rimmed glasses that framed dark brown eyes, his nose sloped and turned up at the end, and scruff covered every pore of his face it could. The spots that were left bare surrounded lips that were a color whose likeness only existed in a sixty-four box of crayons...

“Earth to Andrew,” Dan said in a singsong voice.

Drew snapped out of his dreamy examination of Dan’s face and blinked to clear his vision. “Sorry, Dan. Hipsters. Your lawn.” He cleared his throat and adjusted his position to jar Dan’s head lower on his lap and not so close to his growing erection. “Yeah, you totally sound the part.”

Dan sighed, turning his head and resting his cheek against Drew’s thigh. “I had the worst night, Drew.”

Drew lifted his hand, placed it on Dan’s shoulder and started to rub it in small soothing circles. Just like he did every time Dan came home like this. Just like every time he consoled him over some asshole who either fucked him or fucked him over. Just like every time he wished he was touching his best friend like this—as more than a best friend.

“What happened, Danny Boy?” Drew asked, knowing full well what the answer would be.

“I hit on a straight boy,” Dan replied with an exaggerated sigh.

“And what’s different about this time?” Drew inquired.

Dan sighed. “This one was gorgeous.” Dan curled his legs up and wrapped his arm around Drew’s knees.

“So what happened?” Drew ran his fingers from Dan’s shoulder up to his neck and traced the outline of the flower tattoo placed there years ago.

“Nothing happened. That’s the point. He was straight.” Dan slapped his hand against Drew’s thigh.

“How’d you find that out?” Drew asked, even though he did not want to know the details. He loved being Dan’s friend and go-to with all the woes of his love life, but there was such a thing as too much information.

“I asked,” Dan pitifully offered.

Drew laughed. “Nice moves you got there, Foster.”

“It’s hopeless. I *am* hopeless. Why can’t I just enjoy the hookups and be happy?”

“Because hookups aren’t real?” Drew answered honestly.

“The sex is real,” Dan stated.

“Yeah, but what do you get after the hookup?”

“Fucked,” Dan said.

“Exactly. Before, during, and after.”

“What do I do? I just started grad school. It’s not like I have a career, yet. I work at a coffee shop where I wear a hairnet and an apron and get looks if my tattoos show.” Dan’s self-pity was reaching a crescendo.

“Which are pretty hard to hide,” Drew stated.

“You’re telling me. You’d think by the year two thousand fourteen, seeing a dude with ink on his skin wouldn’t be a problem. Hell, half the kids that come in have more ink and piercings than I do, and I bet you my grandfather’s Mini Cooper the majority of them have ink for status and not for any real meaning.”

Drew began to massage Dan’s shoulder to get him to relax. “First, your grandfather’s Mini is only a model and not a car, so you aren’t betting much. Second, your tattoos are part of you. It’s the full package, and if people don’t like that, they can kick rocks.”

Dan kissed Drew’s knee and turned to lay on his stomach with his head turned toward Drew and his cheek against his thigh again. “Tickle my back,

Drew,” Dan asked, his voice strained. “Help me, my one true and dearest friend, please. You’re my only hope.”

“Flattery and Star Wars geek talk will get you everywhere.” Drew chuckled and ran his fingers over the soft strands of his best friend’s hair.

“Why can’t all the boys be like you, Drew?” Dan sighed.

Drew took a deep breath and held it. He wanted to tell Dan that the boys didn’t have to be “like” him, they could “be” him if only Dan would take a second look at him. A look that went beyond friends and into something more. “You know they broke the mold when they made me and they forgot to add the potential for romance and boyfriends.” Drew hated that line. He *was* boyfriend material, and he *was* romantic. For fuck’s sake, he was so romantic it hurt to sit on this couch with his best friend, the best friend he had been in love with for more than four years, and pretend this was nothing more than just friendship. How did he end up here? This wasn’t his usual deal, to pine after the one he couldn’t have. He’d had boyfriends in the years since he and Dan became friends, but they never worked out. Either Drew gave up or they realized they would never measure up... to Dan. Drew was lucky his list of exes never let Dan in on this bit of trivia.

Dan sighed and rubbed his cheek back and forth against Drew’s leg. Drew began drawing lazy circles up and down Dan’s back as he closed his eyes and took a deep breath. These were the moments he loved and hated. The closeness he has with his best friend was amazing, but it was times such as this where Drew wanted to open his mouth and tell Dan everything in his heart.

He couldn’t do it though, he never could. All he wanted was to have his best friend in his life, forever, and if he crossed the friendship line, and they lost what they had—Drew would be devastated.

Dan shifted on the couch and brought his hand up to his mouth as he yawned. “I’m getting sleepy.” He raised his head and brought his right hand up to Drew’s arm, giving it a brief squeeze. “You ready for bed?”

Drew rested his head against the back of the couch, counted to three and looked down at the relaxed male body against his. Was he ready for bed? That was a loaded question. He smiled at Dan and pushed his hair behind his ear.

“Sure. I have to get up early for my flight to Denver, anyway.”

“You’re leaving tomorrow?” Dan asked as he took Drew’s hand and rested his cheek against it. “What am I going to do without you for an entire week?”

Drew wanted to tell Dan to come with him so bad the want physically hurt. He wanted to show Dan the beauty of Colorado: take him to the 16th Street Mall, drive out to the Garden of the Gods, and go for a workout at Red Rock Canyon Amphitheater, where later they could pretend to be Bono and Larry Mullen Jr. on the stage. He wanted this to be one of many trips they could take, but Dan always insisted those were boyfriend things to do which Drew always argued was a stupid reason. They were best friends, and friends traveled together. "You could find a new best friend," Drew suggested.

"Never! You and I have the best bromance ever, baby." Dan sat up and turned his body toward Drew. "You know you are irreplaceable to me." Grabbing Drew's tablet, Dan stretched across Drew and set it behind him on the sofa table. Drew attempted to be sly about turning his head and breathing in the scent of man, sweat, and the citrus cologne Dan wore. Dan pulled back and took Drew's hand in his. "I'm worried about my waistline with all the take-out, drive-thru, and ramen noodles I'll consume the week you are gone." Dan patted his flat stomach. "Your healthy cooking keeps this fabulous figure."

Drew blushed and chuckled at the compliment; he liked cooking for him and Dan. He felt as if they were a couple when he did ... he really needed to stop thinking that way. They weren't a couple and wouldn't be. Not if Drew didn't take the chance to find out if they could be, anyway.

Drew patted Dan's stomach and flushed at the touch. It shouldn't have made him feel anything more, but it did. Drew sat up quickly, yanking Dan with him as he stood and dropped Dan's hand.

"Bed," Drew cleared his throat and nodded. "We should go to bed." He started walking across the living room heading down the hall to his room.

"Drew!" Dan yelled from behind him, but Drew didn't stop. He needed to get out of the same physical space as Dan before he did something stupid. What the hell was wrong with him? What was different about tonight that he wanted to push the boundaries of their friendship? Fuck. He needed to...

Drew was stopped in his thoughts as a firm grip on his hand tugged and pulled him back against a hard and warm male body. Drew opened and closed his jaw in an attempt to control the verbal vomit that was begging to be projected across the room. Strong arms circled him from behind, wrapping around his chest and holding him tightly, his back to Dan's front.

"What's wrong, Drew?" Dan whispered, his mouth so close to Drew's ear he could feel the warmth of his breath, and it sent shivers through Drew's body down to his toes. Why did Dan have to sound so damned concerned?

“Nothing. Just have a lot to do before the morning flight,” Drew lied.

Dan dropped his arms from around Drew's chest and let his hands rest lightly on Drew's hips. Drew inhaled a ragged breath as he slowly turned around to face Dan. The sincere concern was written all over his best friend's face, and Drew was lost. He was lost, and he was screwed, and he was done being passive.

Dan shrugged and sighed. “Okay then. Good nig—”

Drew cut off the words coming out of Dan's mouth as he clumsily pressed his lips against Dan's. Dan let out a startled gasp at the contact, and Drew pulled away. He searched Dan's eyes that were wide with panic and something else Drew wasn't prepared to name. He pressed his chest against Dan's, walking him back until he was against the wall and raised his hands to cup Dan's face. He gave Dan their usual kiss goodnight: one kiss on the forehead and one kiss on each cheek, but Drew didn't stop there. He kissed his way from Dan's cheek and along his jaw until he came to a pair of slightly parted lips that he had to taste. Drew looked up to see Dan watching him and with his eyes open, he pressed his lips against Dan's again. This time, there was no gasp at the contact, and Drew slid his hands from Dan's face. One hand slid back to hold Dan's head and bring it in closer as the other wrapped around his waist. Drew closed his eyes and slanted his lips over Dan's, and when Dan's hands finally made contact with Drew's body, resting on his shoulders, Drew flicked his tongue against Dan's lips, licking at the seam and asking for entrance. He didn't have to wait long. Dan opened up and thrust his tongue inside Drew's mouth, making a sound that was part whimper, part moan, and part porn star.

Drew was intoxicated by kissing Dan and having him kiss back. There was nothing friendly about the kiss. Their tongues dueled for domination, and hands were roaming over each other's bodies as if they had more than two appendages. The feel of Dan against him this way had his dick throbbing against his zipper. This wouldn't be the first time he got a hard-on while kissing Dan, but this wasn't one of his wet dreams. This was reality, and Dan was real, and what the fuck were they doing?

Drew pulled away from Dan, panting as he looked at his best friend slumped against the wall next to his bedroom. Dan's lips were red, swollen, and glistened with moisture in the low light of the hallway. Drew fought the urge to dive back in for another kiss when he heard his name coming from Dan's mouth in a breathless question.

*Way to fuck up your friendship, Baxter.*

He stood tall, smoothed his hair down and walked toward his door. He stopped just inches away from Dan and raised his hand. Dan watched Drew, his eyes full of questions and maybe a bit of wonder, but Drew didn't touch him. He clenched his fist and opened his hand. He gave Dan's shoulder two light and friendly smacks and muttered, "Night, Dan."

Drew didn't wait for a response. He opened his bedroom door, walked in and shut it slowly, pushing it until he heard the click that meant it was good and closed. He leaned against the door, taking slow and deep breaths as he brought his hands up and covered his mouth. Drew couldn't stifle the small laugh of excitement that passed as he played back what had just happened. He'd kissed Dan. *Oh. My. God.* He'd kissed Dan, and Dan had kissed him back, and he was leaving in the morning for a week.

Drew felt boneless as he let his body slide down the door until his ass hit the floor. He had kissed his best friend tonight. The best friend he'd been in love with for the last four years. The best friend that had no idea Drew felt the way he did about him. This would be the worst seven days of his life.

Drew balled his hands and pressed them against his eyes. He couldn't dwell on this. He had to pack and get ready for his flight and the presentation of the new defibrillators for patients with tachycardia.

This thing with Dan would have to wait. After all, Drew had waited four years for anything to happen. What was one more week?

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### Chapter 3

Dan stared at the closed bedroom door of one Drew Baxter, best friend and hot as hell kisser. Lifting a shaky right hand, Dan touched his lips, pressing against them and letting a smile spread under his fingers as he thought about the kiss.

He knew something was off with Drew when he came home that night. Dan was his usual self-absorbed self, but where in the past Drew would offer him an encyclopedia of ideas and advice on his love life, tonight he had been almost abrupt. But this kiss? Dan wasn't expecting that and would never have expected it. Sure, they kissed as friends every night when they said good night, but what Drew just laid on him was not a friendly kiss, and Dan wanted more. Fuck yeah, he wanted more.

Dan wanted to pound on Drew's door and demand that he talked to him. What was wrong with the guy that he shoved his tongue down Dan's throat then walked away? No explanation at all, just a damn bro pat and he was gone. Maybe that was a good thing? A little space would do them good, but a little space wasn't what his libido wanted at the moment. His little Dan wanted to meet little Drew, have a sleep over and do naughty things with each other.

As impulsive as Dan wanted to be, he knew this was not a situation that should be decided with his dick. You didn't throw away four years of friendship with the most brilliant, humble, and—he just now found out—sexy as hell best friend he'd ever had, over a kiss that made his knees weak.

Dan pivoted on his heel and turned from Drew's door. Nothing would come of him staring and willing Drew to talk him. Dan set his alarm for the butt crack of dawn to get up and confront Drew before he left for Colorado. Left for a week. Leaving Dan alone with his thoughts for a week could be a recipe for disaster.

Walking the four steps down the hall to his bedroom, he opened the door and looked around the room. Everything was the same: the bright blue blanket on his bed, the pile of ridiculously priced textbooks on his desk recently bought to start his first semester at grad school, and the same four walls with the same posters of his favorite indie rock bands... but it was all so different now. The walls seemed taller, the room a bit bigger, and every color his eyes took in was vibrant. It was like he was tripping on a drug, a drug that was Drew, his best friend. This feeling was the best high ever.

Dan's high fell short when he woke to the sound of his alarm, jumped out of bed, wrenched open his door, and walked into the crisscross of duct tape across the frame. He batted at the tape, wincing as he pulled the pieces off his arm hair and the frame. *Fucking, Drew!* His friend loved to play pranks on him, and this was not the way Dan wanted to wake up. Frankly, the way he wanted to wake up had to do with the jizz that was making his boxers stick to his stomach. What was up with shit sticking to him?

Removing what he thought was all the tape, he looked up as something tickled his head. There was a piece of paper, yellow and long, like the ones Drew used for his seminar notes, hanging from the top of the door frame. Dan reached up and gently lifted the paper and tape so as not to lose any of what could be on it. He looked over the familiar chicken scratch of Drew's handwriting and slammed his fist into the wall at the first letters of the fucking note.

*Dan,*

*When you read this, I'll be gone. I'm leaving on a jet plane to catch a rocky mountain high and any other cheesy folk songs you can think of where people leave the ones they, um... like.*

*Bad timing is bad timing, and we have some seriously bad timing. I don't know what to tell you about last night, but I'm not sorry. I will never be sorry. I have wanted to do that for four years, and I am not sorry.*

*I have a meeting before I check into the hotel in Denver at three. I left my itinerary for the conference next to the coffee pot—which is ready for your morning cup, just turn it on.*

*I'll call when I can.*

*I hope you answer.*

*Always,*

*Drew*

Dan crumbled the note in his hand and threw it against the wall. *He was gone?* Drew left already? Dan couldn't decide if that was a dick move or the best thing for the situation. This whole deal was confusing, and the only thing Dan could decide was that he wouldn't decide anything until he had caffeine flowing through his system.



Walking down the hall, he stopped and turned on his right foot, bent down and picked up the note. As much as it hurt that Drew would leave before they had a chance to talk, Dan couldn't bring himself to dismiss his words that easily. He'd never received a note, a love letter, or anything close to it before. At first, he'd felt pissed off—after all he did get up earlier than he had to for any class to catch Drew before he left—but those words “I am not sorry” were flipping around his brain all the way down to his stomach.

He needed coffee. Fast.

Dan walked into the small kitchen of the two-bedroom apartment he and Drew shared. They'd found the apartment their senior year as undergrads and knew it was perfect for them. A few blocks away from the UCLA campus and close to the trendy area of Westwood, it was easy to walk where they needed to go and yet not too far away if they wanted to go to the beach, the lake, the mountains, or even the desert. Variety was what Dan loved about California; it had the best of everything you could want. If you could afford it at least.

He inhaled as he walked toward the small counter and let the smell of freshly ground coffee take over his senses. Dan turned the coffee pot on, leaning his elbows on the top, as he laced his fingers together and rested his chin on them.

Drew Baxter had kissed him. No. Drew Baxter had kissed him like he had never been kissed before. Who knew Drew had that in him? All these years they'd known one another, Drew seemed to be the mild-mannered boy who studied Registered Nursing, not to become a nurse but a Nursing Informatics Specialist, to teach nurses the new technology that would enrich their careers. He had always seemed to be a step ahead of everyone in school, always knowing what he wanted and where he was going. Unlike Dan, who wavered between majors before he decided on Environmental Engineering and stuck with it. Drew was the rock that Dan anchored himself to, a friend he could count on to listen when he needed help with anything school-related and to just be the guy Dan liked to hang out with. Sure, they had their moments together, Dan thought as he let his thoughts run wild and began examining each small moment between him and his best friend to see if he missed something along the way.

*I have wanted to do that for four years, and I am not sorry.*

Dan poured himself a cup of coffee, taking the first sip black as he always did, just to see if today would be the day he would give in and not need his

vices. Cringing at the bitter taste, he spun around and grabbed his creamer out of the refrigerator, pouring enough into his cup to change the coffee to a lighter color, and pulled the dropper out of his liquid Stevia, emptying the entire contents into his cup.

“What can I say?” Dan spoke to the empty room as he stirred his coffee with a silver spoon. “I like my coffee how I like my men; strong, tan, and sweet.” He shrugged as he began a conversation with himself and took a long drink of the sweet nectar given to him by the god-like man that was Drew.

So Drew had wanted to kiss him for four years and he wasn't sorry about it. Dan wasn't either, but his best friend had a bit of explaining to do. Dan needed answers and a follow-up visit of Drew's lips on his.

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## Chapter 4

Drew flipped his phone over and over again as he waited in line at the rental counter in the Denver International Airport to pick up his car. He went over his morning as he waited. He knew it wasn't the best thing to sneak out of the apartment the way he did, but he wasn't ready to deal with Dan yet. He wasn't ready to face what he had done to their friendship. The impulse to write the note hit him as he was getting coffee ready for his best friend. He made Dan coffee every morning as he was up long before Dan was most days, but this morning, it had been a bit of a peace offering.

He had been lost in the sound of the coffee beans grinding and began writing the note in his head. The words came easy, and he imagined him speaking them directly to Dan. Of course that led to a fantasy of Dan leaping in his arms and declaring he had felt the same for the last four years. Dan shook his head. That was another one of his wet dreams. He was sure he would get the "I love you, but I'm not in love with you, dude" speech from Dan, and Drew was more than certain that could wait until his conference was over.

Drew dropped his phone as a body slammed into him from behind. He cursed as he knelt down to retrieve his phone and its parts that were now separate from each other.

"Dammit."

Drew heard the muffled word and craned his neck to see who it came from.

"Excuse me. I'm so sorry." He heard from behind him.

Drew looked up as a well-manicured hand reached out to help him up. He'd expected someone larger by the body blow he'd endured. He wasn't expecting his gaze to follow the hand up to the kindest face of a woman with bright red hair standing over him.

Drew placed his hand in the woman's and used the strength in his thighs to push himself up. "It's okay," he said. "Things happen." Pulling himself up to a full standing position, he towered over the woman. He gave her hand a light squeeze and pumped it up and down. "My name's Drew."

The smile that came across her face was breathtaking. Not that Drew was into women, but he appreciated beauty when he saw it, and this woman was nothing short of beautiful.

She tilted her head to the side and nodded. "Nice to meet you, Drew. I'm Samantha, but friends call me Sam."

Drew smiled back, it was hard not to when the smile reached her amber eyes and met his. "Should I call you...?"

"Sam. You can call me Sam. If you call me Samantha, I might think you want to put me in time-out or send me on a coffee run."

"Okay then, Sam," Drew chuckled and put the pieces of his phone back together, pressing the button on the right side and holding it to turn it back on. "Are you here on business?"

Sam shook her head. "Nope, I live here."

"Ahh. So how is it we've collided in line for rentals, then?"

Sam blushed. "I really am sorry about that." She looked down and slipped off one of her shoes. "My heel snapped, stupid cheap knock-offs." She waved the shoe in front of Drew's face before she placed her hand on his shoulder to stand on one foot and put the broken shoe back on her foot. "I guess now we have a story to tell our grandchildren about how we met though, don't we?"

Drew choked on air at her statement. "Um, Sam..."

"Oh, I did it again! I didn't mean in a romantic way." She held up her left hand and wiggled her fingers; a platinum wedding set with an impressive diamond caught his eye. "I'm married. I just mean, we would have a story to tell our individual grandchildren. Stranger body checks you in line at DIA as you wait to pick up your rental and bam, you met your best friend for life."

Drew couldn't help but laugh as she rapidly fired her explanation at him. "In that case, yes, we would have a story to tell our grandchildren." *Grandchildren?* That word brought up thoughts of Dan, who had managed to escape his mind as he dealt with his new best friend, Sam.

"Uh oh. I know that look." Sam punctuated her statement by placing her hands on her hips and tapping her fingers against her orange skirt. "Who has you tied up in knots?"

"It's that obvious?"

"Oh honey. It's written all over your face."

"Next in line, please," the clerk at the counter called out.

Dan looked over his shoulder. "That's me."

“You go on. I’ll be here. I’m in line after all.”

Dan walked toward the counter. “Why are you in line?”

“Some bastard rear-ended me in the Target parking lot. I’m here to get a rental until my car is fixed.”

“Jesus. Are you okay?” Drew asked.

“I’m fine. It’s Betsy that took a beating.”

“You named your car Betsy?”

“Of course. Don’t you name,” Sam waved in the general vicinity of Drew’s body, “things that are important to you?”

Drew laughed out loud, a full-body laugh that pinched his stomach. “This is not the conversation I’d ever imagined having in line, in an airport, with a woman, waiting to get a car.” Drew turned to address the clerk about his car when the pleasant smell that was overtly woman hit him before the soft whisper caressed his ear.

“See, a story to tell our grandchildren,” Sam whispered.

Drew signed the papers for the rental and took the keys from the clerk. Turning on his heel, he faced Sam. “You want to grab some coffee with me?”

She smiled and held up her hand to the clerk as a signal to wait. “Let me add some Bailey’s to that coffee and you’re on!” Sam walked to the counter and said over her shoulder, “You can tell me all about the knots, and how we can set them straight.”

“Um, straight isn’t the word I would use for this situation,” Drew admitted.

Sam slipped the keys and paperwork off the rental counter and gave Drew a patient smile. “Honey, that was obvious too.” She looped her arm through his. “Let’s get caffeinated and inebriated and you can tell me all about him.”

Drew crooked his arm and nodded. “Sounds like a plan, Sam.”

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“And you snuck out before talking to him and left the state?” Sam asked, her voice louder than it had been over an hour ago when they got to the coffee shop. The girl sure had a way of getting what she wanted, and she pulled the entire story out of Drew about his four-year crush on Dan.

“Well, yeah. What was I supposed to do?” Dan shrugged.

“Um, try slipping into his room, his bed, and then his heart?”

“You think the way to Dan’s heart is through sex?” Dan asked skeptically.

“Drew, dear, I think the way to every man’s heart is through sex.”

“You have a point there,” he admitted.

“But honestly, why did you run?”

“I didn’t...” Drew was cut off by a look from Sam that he now knew meant to cut the bullshit and man up. “I didn’t run. I flew?” Drew shrugged and internally squirmed under Sam’s gaze.

“Fine. I left. I ran. I couldn’t deal with the look of pity that would be in his eyes when he looked at me. I’ve seen Dan cut and run with guys. I wasn’t ready for that. Besides, I did leave a note.”

Sam sighed. “You left a love letter. One that would turn anyone into a puddle of goo when they read it.”

“Goo? That sounds gross.”

“Goo is good. Trust me on this.” Sam raised her coffee in salute and reached into her purse hanging on the back of her chair and produced yet another travel-sized bottle of Bailey’s Irish Cream.

“Are you sure you should be drinking when you just got a rental car?” Dan asked.

Sam waved him off. “Lou works at the restaurant in the hotel. I texted him earlier and told him to meet me here and drive me home.”

“Your husband seems like a pretty awesome guy.”

“He is, and he knows when I meet someone, and they need some Sam time, there is nothing he or I can do about it.”

“Is this something you often do? Pick up strange men in airports and liquor them up in hopes of getting them to spill their sorry excuse of a love life to you?”

“Yes and no. First, you haven’t touched a single drop of alcohol.”

“I have a meeting,” Drew checked his watch, “in an hour and a half. I can’t. But trust me, I would love to drink miniature bottles of booze with you.” Drew leaned forward and whispered, “Where’d you get those anyway?”

“Don’t ask.” Sam smiled and winked. “See. You need some Sam time. I do the drinking, and you get the therapy. It’s a win/win situation.”

Drew nodded and thought about the situation he was spilling to a complete stranger who felt more like the sister he never had. Funny how fate throws people into your life when you least expect it but need them the most. He hadn't planned on Sam, but he was thankful the universe decided to throw her at him. Literally.

"I've now heard all about the one and only Dan Foster, and now I want to see a picture. I know you have one."

Drew smiled sheepishly. "I do, but only one. I told him to send me a picture, so I could separate his calls from the numerous other Dans that I talk to on a daily basis."

"Nice pick up line. You couldn't have just asked your best friend to send you a picture for his contact?"

"Nope. Not with Dan. He is special that way."

"Okay, then. Lemme see him." Sam stretched out her hand and wiggled her fingers impatiently.

Drew pulled his phone out and swiped the screen to unlock it. He was about to scroll through his contacts when Sam reached across the table and took his phone from him. "Hey!"

"Drew, I don't need you to show me where he is. I bet he is an icon on one of your desktops..."

Drew stilled as he watched Sam's manicured finger slide across his phone, once, twice, and then she looked up at him with a knowing smile.

"Dan Foster... wow! I knew you said he was good looking but this, even this needy expression he has in this picture—"

Drew cut her off. "Needy? You think he looks needy in that picture? I think he looks like he is trying to sell something."

Sam looked at the picture on his phone and tapped the screen. "Did he take this for you?"

"What do you mean?"

"Does he use this for anything else, like Facebook, or Twitter?" she asked.

"Not that I know of. I asked for a picture, he took it, and that's what I got."

Sam tapped the screen again. "You need to call your boy."

"He's not mine."

“He is. More than either of you realize. Pictures can say so much. You know they used to say when you took a picture, the camera would steal your soul.” Her gaze locked on Drew’s and the lines around her eyes crinkled as she looked at him. “I think his soul’s lost, more lost than he knows, and it’s because you have it.”

Drew reached across the table and snatched his phone out of her hands. “Sam, you have no idea what you are talking about. Dan isn’t like that to me, never will be. Let it go.”

He shoved his phone back into his pocket and slouched down in his chair. How could she say that? What did she see that he hadn’t noticed all these years, and was she right? Could one picture taken with Dan’s webcam show anything about a person that he himself had missed, being glued to his side for four years?

“I’m sorry. I overstepped a line there, didn’t I? I just call it like I see it and Drew, that picture says so much. You should call him.”

“I told him I would,” Drew stated.

“Do it now.” Sam pressed.

“Look, I know I have been open with you about this whole situation, and I do appreciate your willingness to talk with me about it, but you don’t know Dan. You are way off on this, trust me.”

“You’re right and I apologize again. I will just say this and then drop it. Don’t wait for what you think is the right time. Had you waited for the right time to kiss him, you never would have. Love and emotions aren’t rational. Overthinking can lead to being lonely. That’s just my opinion.” Sam shrugged. “Did I tell you it took Lou and me three years to get our act together?”

Drew shook his head.

“Well, his act. He stood me up at least a dozen times over the three years we tried to get together.”

“Three years? What made it finally work?” Drew asked.

“He asked if he had a chance with me.” Sam’s face changed with her answer, it softened and the love she had for her husband was palpable.

“That’s it?”

“That’s it. The vulnerability that came through with that simple question hit me in the solar plexus, and I never looked back. Sometimes, it’s the honest



admission that does the most damage when you are breaking down the walls, and you want that kind of damage.”

Drew nodded as Sam talked about the struggles she and her husband had in the three years before they finally figured out their relationship. It wasn't easy for them and yet, where they are now seemed to be amazing. He couldn't help but let his mind wander to him and Dan in the future. Would they be this happy in twelve years? Would they be the older and wiser men, counseling the younger generation about giving in and giving it all for love?

He wasn't sure about anything, not right now. He had a meeting with the distribution company of the new defibrillators and his promised call to Dan after he checked into the hotel.

He'd never both dreaded and looked forward to a call more in his life.

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## Chapter 5

Dan buttoned the fly of his jeans, shoved his arms into the T-shirt hanging around his neck and walked out of his room. He'd spent the morning going over everything he could remember about his friendship with Drew and wondering where he'd missed the signs. The signs that his best friend wanted to shove his tongue down his throat.

The remembrance of the short, but intimate and passionate kiss caused blood to rush to his dick, and he reached down to adjust himself. He was getting a hard-on thinking of Drew, which was new, but not strange. He loved his best friend. Dan couldn't imagine having a day with Drew not in his life, but could a single kiss, a kiss that he felt down to his toes, be the start of a relationship?

Dan walked to the living room and grabbed his phone. The blinking indicator light showed he had a missed call. He glanced at his watch. It was too early for Drew to have called, yet when he swiped the screen, the missed call *was* from his best friend.

*Miss me already, baby?* Dan smiled as the thought crept into his head. Dan typed in the password and listened to his voice mail. Muffled sounds came through, followed by sounds of a crowd, and then he heard Drew's voice.

*"Sam, you have no idea what you are talking about. Dan isn't like that to me, never will be. Let it go..."*

*Sam?* Dan's fists clenched at his side. Who the hell was Sam and why was Drew talking to him about Dan? What did he mean, Dan isn't like that to him? Shit. What the hell was that about? Dan pressed a button to listen to the message again. There was another voice after Drew's statement, but Dan couldn't make out what was being said, and then a sound like a phone being put away, and the call ended. Great. Just what Dan didn't need on top of Drew and this kissing business; more fuel for his insecurity to latch onto. He sighed. He needed to talk to someone, but the sad thing was that the person he would normally take his boy problems to was the boy that was causing the problem.

Deciding therapy and a drink were in order, he knew just where to go.

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Walking into The Backdoor in the middle of the day was something Dan had never done before. He could have gone anywhere else for a drink, but

considering the night that ended with a kiss began here, it felt fitting. He walked toward the bar, slid onto one of the many empty stools and let out a shocked gasp when the not-so-flashy version of Noah, the bouncer, popped up from behind the bar.

“The flower-necked bastard returns. Did you come back for me or just my ass?” Noah shook said ass for emphasis. Dressed in a light pair of jeans that weren't cutting off his circulation and a white V-neck T-shirt, with his hair free of product and his face clean and fresh, Noah was almost unrecognizable, if not for the tell-tale attitude the man possessed.

“Neither... You bartend too?” Dan asked confused.

“I perform so many jobs here your tattoos would fall off trying to keep up,” Noah answered with a wink. “You here for a drink, gorgeous?”

“Yeah.” Dan nodded. “I'll take a Newcastle.”

Dan watched as Noah grabbed a glass and pulled the beer, tipping it at just the right angle to give it the perfect head and slid the glass in front of him.

Dan took a long drink. “Perform? You said you performed jobs here?”

Noah rose on his toes and leaned over the bar. He was so close Dan could feel his breath across his face. “A private show will cost ya.” He fell back on his feet and began doing whatever it was bartenders did behind the bar when they weren't slinging drinks.

“Thanks for the offer, but I'll take a rain check.”

Noah shrugged. “Your loss, boy. So what brings you in...?”

“It's Dan, my name's Dan,” he insisted.

Noah nodded in compliance. “What brings you in, Dan?”

“A boy,” Dan admitted.

“Oh, sugar-plum, isn't it always?”

“Yeah, but this one is different,” Dan declared.

Noah hooked his foot in the rails of the stool behind the bar, pulled it toward him and sat ramrod straight, crossed his legs and folded his hands in his lap. “Tell Uncle Noah how?”

“Uncle?” Dan asked incredulously.

“Want me to make you say it?” Noah gave a grin that Dan would call creepy if the guy weren't so off-the-wall adorable.

Dan took a drink to steady his nerves, the nerves that became noticeable each time he now thought about Drew. He took a deep breath and let it all out. “No. This time it’s different because the boy is my best friend, and I kissed him. Well, he kissed me, and I kissed him back and he left before we had a chance to talk even though I got up early to talk to him before he left, but instead I got trapped in a web of duct tape...” Dan took another drink, “and a note, the best note that I’ve ever read from Drew telling me that he was gone, and that he wasn’t sorry about the kiss. That he had wanted to do it for four years.” Dan slapped the top of the bar. “Do you know how long we have been friends? Four fucking years. Four years of us being closer than I imagined I could be to another person. Four years of him wanting to kiss me and instead becoming my hag when it came to my love life. Four years of...”

“Of what, Dan?” Noah asked.

Dan peered into his glass, searching for an answer. Noah waited, not uttering a word. Eventually Dan looked up and met the bartender’s eye. “I don’t know. That’s the problem.” Dan tipped his glass and drained the last of the beer, setting it down on the bar with a loud thud. “And I don’t know what would have happened if he had tried something more.”

“I get that,” Noah replied with a nod.

Dan raised his eyebrows and pursed his lips at Noah’s reply. He tilted his head toward the glass in a silent indication that he wanted another beer.

“You get what?” Dan inquired, taking the beer from Noah and sipping it. Noah didn’t take his seat again. Instead he leaned his hip against the counter and looked intently at Dan.

“I get your problem. You want your best friend but are pissed you didn’t make the first move.”

Dan choked on his beer and sprayed it across the bar. “I what?”

Noah grabbed a wet cloth and wiped down the bar top as he shook his head. “It’s not rocket science, sugar. You two have been stuck in foreplay for four years. I am surprised your blue-balled bromance hasn’t blossomed to a romance before now.”

Dan stared at Noah, wide-eyed. Had they been stuck in foreplay all this time? Dan went over a few memories and realized they had everything he wanted in a relationship outside of sex. Drew was his best friend, he was his partner in more ways than he could count on his fingers *and* toes. They even

had an intimate relationship, but they weren't having sex. How did he miss all of this? Was he that arrogant and selfish that he couldn't see what was right in front of him? His mother used to tell him the best place to find your true love was in your backyard, yet Dan didn't have to look further than across the hall from his own bedroom.

Thumping his head down on the bar, he sighed, "I'm such an idiot."

"We've all been there, trust me. It's the rite of passage, and you're pulling that boat into the harbor to dock."

Dan raised his head and looked at Noah. "Did you just use boats as a sexual euphemism?"

"You took it as one, so run with it."

Dan's reply never came as his phone vibrated in his back pocket, and the familiar opening riff of "I Believe in a Thing Called Love," by The Darkness played through the reverent silence of the bar.

"Seriously?" Noah exclaimed as Dan pulled his phone out of his pocket and grinned, knowing the new ringtone was assigned to Drew.

"What? It's Drew." Dan shrugged.

"You are so whipped," Noah laughed and tossed the wet cloth at him.

Dan swatted at the cloth, flipped Noah off and swiped his phone to accept the call.

"Finished with Sam already?" he asked Drew as a greeting.

"How do you know about Sam?" Drew inquired.

"You should lock your phone better before you butt dial me when you're picking up dudes on work trips..." Dan felt his face flush as Drew's response to his taunt was laughter. *So that's how it's going to be?* "Look, Drew, I don't have time to talk, I was just having a drink with No—"

"Would you shut up for a second," Drew demanded. "You get ideas stuck in that overactive brain of yours and never let me finish a sentence."

Dan huffed and flipped Noah off again as he walked around the bar and tried to press his ear to Dan's cell phone to eavesdrop on his conversation.

"Shutting up now." Dan pouted.

"Good. Dan, Sam is a girl, believe it or not. I met her in line at the airport waiting for my car. She's a married woman of twelve years, whose husband would kick my ass if I had the thought to switch teams for her."

“Why’d she have your phone?”

“I was showing her what you looked like,” Drew offered.

Dan’s face flushed with heat again for a much different reason, and he bit his lip. “You were showing her me?”

“Yeah.”

“Why?” Dan held his breath waiting for an answer.

“Because you were the main topic of conversation from the minute she body checked me, and she wanted to know if the visual matched my infatuation.”

Dan hooked his feet into the rungs of the bar stool and swiveled his seat back and forth. “Drew Baxter, you sure know how to flatter a guy. Do you know that?”

Dan heard Drew’s exhale through the speaker and leaned into it as if Drew were next to him and not thousands of miles away.

“No, but it’s nice to hear. So um... you got my note?”

“I did, and even though you kiss like all my fantasies rolled into one, I’m pissed that you left before I got up. Dammit, I set my alarm and was prepared to watch the sunrise just to see you before you left.”

“Jesus. If I’d known...”

“Well, now you do, and now you are gone for an entire week, and you left me with what? A goodbye kiss?”

“It wasn’t goodbye.”

“What was it?” Dan asked.

Drew sighed. “Dan?”

“Yeah?”

“Do I have a chance with you?”

Dan smiled and chuckled as Noah nodded to him and walked away. Sliding off the bar stool, he walked toward the pool table and ran his fingers along the felt, taking the eight ball and rolling it into the corner pocket.

“Keep talking like that and hell yeah, you do.”

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## Chapter 6

Drew was elated that the phone call with Dan had gone better than he'd hoped. Dan said he had a chance with him. Sure, Drew had stolen the line from Sam and the story about her husband, but it was an honest question. He wanted a chance with Dan, and he was tired of being docile about it. It was time Dan saw him as a man and not just his best friend. It was time for Clark to become Superman and sweep his best friend off his feet.

All Drew wanted to do was get home and see Dan. Right now, though, duty called. His time was taken up with meeting on top of meeting, presentations, conferences, and networking. How was he supposed to concentrate when all he could think about was his best friend and how his lips felt beneath his own?

Drew loved his job, and this was the first time he was having trouble focusing. The representative from the makers of the new defibrillators described in detail how the machines would improve function within hospitals but were easy enough to use and should be placed in schools as well. It was important stuff, but his mind kept wandering to dark, tousled hair and how soft it felt under his hands. He perked up at the mention of schools. His cousin had a rare heart condition, and he knew he would feel safer if the nursing staff had access to help her and other children if the need arose, and emergency personnel wasn't there in time. Briefly, he let his mind focus on something other than Dan. Thankfully, the meeting concluded earlier than he expected. His fingers itched to dig his phone out of his pocket and call Dan back.

Drew knew Dan had an aversion to romance and thought Drew wasn't romantic at all. His best friend was in for a surprise when he got home. Home. It would be a long week before he could get home and back to Dan to... to do what, he wasn't sure yet. A short phone call wasn't the right way to figure out what happened now. Where would they go now that Drew had done what he had dreamed about and kissed Dan? He closed his eyes and thought about that kiss, about Dan being hot, soft, and yielding under Drew's mouth. He wanted Dan compliant underneath him, begging Drew to be inside him... or begging to fuck Drew. He wasn't going to be picky about whose dick went where. He just wanted them to be together.

Taking the elevator up to his floor, he walked down the hall in a daze. Thoughts of sex with Dan were par for the course, but they never had the possibility of becoming reality. Until now. Now, Drew had these fantasies and

this list of all the things he wanted to do with Dan and to Dan—both in and out of bed. He picked up his pace to get to his room before his erection and wet spot were visible to conference goers.

Using the key card, Drew unlocked his door, entered the room, and tossed his bag and laptop case on the bed. He followed his belongings as he flopped face first onto the hard mattress, grabbed a pillow, and screamed out his sexual tension. He had a list of things he wanted to do with Dan, but they hadn't breached that topic yet. Hell, they'd barely talked after the kiss, but Drew had hopes. Hopes that he was willing to do whatever it took to make this thing with Dan a reality. Dan said he had a chance, and he wondered if the chance included dirty talk or was it too soon for that. He groaned into the pillow, rolled over, and tossed it across the room as he sat up and took in his surroundings.

The room was typical for a standard hotel room. It had a queen-sized bed, a small table with two chairs, a bedside table with—Drew opened the top drawer of the table and nodded at the lack of religious literature that used to be present in hotels—a hotel phone on top, and a flat screen television shut inside an oversized armoire.

Drew pushed himself off the bed and stood, placing his hands on his hips and pressing forward to relieve the tension building in his back. This thing, this possibility of something more with Dan, was far too new and unexplored for him to stress out over. He knew something would happen when he got home, but he was in Denver to do a job, his job that he enjoyed and got a great deal of satisfaction from. Drew needed to focus on work first and Dan later.

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Drew walked into his hotel room, shrugged out of his jacket, and threw it at the wall. This day had been too long and too frustrating to deal with. The conference had been moving swiftly until it reached deadlock between contracts, insurance providers, and people who really had no business adding their thoughts in, when they had no idea how the health care system worked. Sure, health care was a business, but where Drew was concerned, patient care came first. Preventive measures were first priority, and then they dealt with the monetary aspects. If they'd just kept quiet and listened to his presentation, they would have seen where he was going. Being cut off like that, not being able to finish a damn sentence, had him thinking of Dan in many ways.

He needed to talk to his best friend.

Loosening his tie, he walked to the bathroom to take a shower. He had to wash this day off and let the warm water roll over his muscles to relax him,



then he would call Dan. Drew smiled as he pulled the curtain back and turned the faucet on. This had been the longest week in a long line of long weeks. He normally thrived at conferences, but this one, he was off his game. It could be the personal connection he had with the defibrillators, or it could be how confused he was with this situation with Dan.

Stepping into the shower, he turned and lowered his head, letting the hot stream of water pour over his tight and tired muscles. His mind wandered to thoughts of Dan a good number of times throughout his normal daily routine. They were best friends, and they lived together, yet Drew kept his dirtiest thoughts about Dan confined to his private moments. Moments when he was alone and could let his mind take a turn to the erotic possibilities. This week though, he couldn't get his mind out of the gutter and off Dan to fully concentrate. Drew loved his job, but Dan was becoming a distraction in the worst way.

Drew quickly washed the day away and toweled off after the shower. Pulling on a pair of boxers and nothing else, he grabbed his phone off the counter and made his way across the room. Staring at the bed, he wanted nothing more than to curl up under the covers and sleep until the alarm blared its warning, and he could be on his way home. Home... the thought of going home to Dan was punctuated by the phone vibrating in his hand. Drew turned it over and saw the familiar face of Dan gracing his screen, and he smiled. He thought for a second about Sam's analysis of Dan's picture and wondered if it was true.

"Speak of the devil," Drew said as he answered the call.

"Hey, Drew. I'm sorry, are you busy?" Dan asked.

"Nope, just got out of the shower. What's up?"

"Oh, you said 'speak of the devil,' so I thought you were with someone." Dan's voice was soft and unsure.

Drew chuckled. "Ah, no. Alone. I was just thinking about you."

"You were?" Dan asked

"Yeah, I seem to be doing that a lot the last few days. More than usual, actually," Drew confessed. "I hope that isn't too creepy to hear. That I think about you?"

"No." Dan sighed. "I mean, I think about you too, always have. It's just now the thoughts are different."

“How so?” Drew asked as he crawled onto the bed and lay back against the pillows.

“Well, like tonight, when I was in your room.”

“You were just hanging out in my room?” Drew probed.

“Would it be odd to say that I missed you?” Dan replied.

“No, I like the sound of that.”

“I went to your room to talk to you when I got home from work and forgot you weren't home. Force of habit, I guess,” Dan stated.

“Yeah.” Drew exhaled with his answer.

“But when I walked in, your smell was there. I mean, it's your room, so it should smell like you but that smell, Drew, your smell. It was as if I was wrapped up in the biggest hug, and I didn't want to leave. So I kinda, um... grabbed that blue hoodie you wear all the time and took it to my room.”

“Okay...”

Dan continued his story as if he hadn't heard Drew respond. “I took a shower to wash the smell of the coffee house off me and... you might think this is weird.”

“What's weird?”

“I'm in bed right now, wearing it.”

Drew shifted on the bed, sliding his free hand down his chest to his thigh and spreading his legs as his cock twitched and filled at Dan's confession.

“Wearing it and what else?”

“Nothing, just my boxers.”

“Why would I think that's weird? I think that's hot.”

“Drew?” Dan whispered his name.

“Yeah?”

“I miss you. Fuck. This is so new and not new, and you aren't here and I miss you and your smell. God. It's on your hoodie and smelling you and hearing your voice...” Dan's sharp inhale went through Drew like fire.

Drew groaned and raked his nails up the inside of his thigh, cupping his balls and rolling them between his fingers, giving them a slight tug.

“I wish I was there.”

“I wish you were here too. I can't stop thinking about that kiss.”

“Me either,” Drew admitted. “Hey, Dan?”

“Drew,” Dan whispered his name.

“Touch yourself.”

“Yes,” Dan hissed.

Drew lifted his shoulder and pressed the phone against his ear to hold it in place. Sliding his hands under the waistband of his boxers, he dug his heels into the bed, lifting his hips and shoving his boxers down his legs. Using his toes, he untangled them from his feet and kicked them off and across the room. His cock was free, hard and resting against his stomach—Drew ran his forefinger around the tip of his cock, catching the bead of pre-cum that had formed and brought it to his mouth.

“Are you hard, Dan?” Drew asked as he brought his fist around his dick and started to stroke from root to tip, curving his palm over the head and pressing before sliding it back down.

“Fuck, yeah,” Dan panted. “Tell me I'm not in this alone.”

“Never, Danny Boy. Never,” Drew declared. Increasing the pace of his strokes, he spread his legs out farther and felt the cool air against the curve of his ass. Drew brought his left leg up, as close to his hip as he could, the stretch of muscle in his thigh provided a comfortable pain against the pleasure he gave his dick.

“Tell me what to do.” Dan's voice had gone deep, husky, and needy.

Drew had never heard Dan like this, and the sound of his voice alone was going to make him come long before he was ready. Drew had never imagined Dan to be slightly submissive despite his flirty attitude, and now that he was asking for direction, it made Drew's cock harden further.

“What are you doing now? Tell me.”

“Stroking my dick,” Dan groaned. “Over my boxers.”

“Stop,” Drew instructed.

“W-what?” Dan stuttered.

“I said stop. Take your hand off your dick. Put your phone on speaker and set it on the pillow next to you.”

Drew listened to Dan huff on his end of the phone and could tell that he'd put it on speaker when he replied.

"Done. Now what?" Dan panted.

"Breathe."

"Fucker," Dan huffed.

"Not yet," Drew promised.

"Stop teasing me and tell me what to fucking do," Dan hissed. "Please."

The "please" pushed Drew's resolve over the edge. He wanted to draw this out and make Dan beg, but he was begging already, and Drew wasn't sure if he was in the right frame of mind to truly dominate. He was too turned on and too needy himself.

"Slide your hands into your boxers and do not touch your dick."

"I hate you," Dan whined.

"No, you don't," Drew insisted.

"No, I don't. I want you."

Drew grunted at Dan's admission. "Shove your boxers down your thighs and all the way off. Now push up on your elbows and tell me what you see."

"I see my dick, and it's hard. Harder than I think I have ever seen it. Fuck, I want to touch it. I want to imagine it's you..."

"Stop." Drew's response served a dual purpose. He needed Dan to shut up, and he needed to get a hold of his emotions. They were going to do this. This was one of Drew's fantasies, and he was quickly losing his shit over Dan being so fucking obedient.

"Lean back and pull the hood of my hoodie up. Can you still smell me?"

Dan's groan was the only answer Drew received.

"Good. Bring your right hand to your mouth, rub your thumb over your lips and press down hard on your bottom lip." Drew put his phone on speaker and set it next to him, mimicking the moves he was giving to Dan. "Now open your mouth, lick the tip of your thumb, and slide it into your mouth and suck."

Drew heard telling sounds through the phone that let him know Dan was doing what he was told.

“Get that thumb nice and wet, Danny Boy. Swirl your tongue around the top before popping it out of your mouth, and I want to hear it, so suck on it... hard.”

Drew could hear Dan's moans as he sucked on his own thumb, and it was driving him crazy. Knowing Dan couldn't see him, he slid his hand down to squeeze his dick and gasped as his cold hand touched the heat of his shaft.

“Who knew you could be so bossy?” Dan asked, his words coming out of the speaker.

“Who knew you wanted me to be?” Drew replied. “Fuck, the sounds you make, Dan.” Drew squeezed his dick again and ran the tips of his fingers lightly up and down his shaft. “You make me crazy, and you're not here.”

“I want you so bad. Tell me, Drew. Tell me what to do. God, I want to touch you. I want to touch you, as you touch me, as you fuck me. I've never wanted something so bad.”

Drew was quickly losing control with each word Dan spoke. He was supposed to be the one in control. He was always in control when it came to what he wanted with Dan and at this moment, he was tired of being in control.

“Fuck it,” he said. “Dan, do you have lube close by?”

“Right here,” Dan answered.

Drew chuckled. “Were you going to get off without me?”

“No... it's why I called. Your smell, it turned me on, and I got so hard... I want to come so bad.”

“Dan...” Drew breathed his name as if it were his confession. “Come with me then. Lube that hard cock up and grip it. Use both hands and fuck that fist.” Drew reached under the pillow where he'd stashed the small bottle of lube on the off chance he had the energy to jack off. He poured lube over his dick, gripped it, and began stroking his cock as he heard the sounds Dan was making.

“Yes, fuck that feels so good,” Dan groaned. “Baby, it feels so fucking good.”

Drew was lost with the endearment. “Yeah, lift your hips, drive that cock up and down through your fist. I want to hear it. Don't you hold back on me, I want to hear it—I want to hear you get yourself off.”

“Are you—”

Drew moaned as he pumped his fist along his shaft, squeezing at the top and rubbing the palm against the head, pressing down before he slid his hand down and up again. Reaching down with his free hand, he rolled his balls between his fingers, pulling on the loose skin of his scrotum as he raced toward his orgasm. His sac tightened, and his balls pulled up close to his body. "Yeah, I am, and I'm thinking about you while I stroke my dick, Danny Boy. Thinking about you riding me, watching your face as you fuck yourself on my cock, and I stroke yours as it bounces in front of me. I want to see your face as you lose control when you come and shoot all over my chest and up to my mouth. I want to taste your come. I want you to lick it off my chest and feed it to me from your tongue." Drew was rambling, releasing words he'd only thought in the dark corners of his mind when he let himself imagine sex with Dan.

"That's," Dan panted the words, "so fucking hot. Oh my God. I'm close, so close."

Drew was close too. He stroked his cock faster, lifting his hips off the bed as he dug his heels in. "Me too. Come with me, fuck, now..."

Drew felt the rush of orgasm through his balls as he tossed his head back, stroking his cock furiously, and came harder than he thought possible. The orgasm shot through him, making him shudder and his abs contract. It never seemed to end as he stroked his cock, slowing down as each spurt of semen hit his stomach and chest. He lost track of Dan's sounds as he came. They were muffled, and he wondered what Dan had done, he wondered what he looked like coming. Drew turned his head toward his phone and could hear what sounded like whimpering coming from Dan's end.

He shook his head at the sound. "You still there?"

Dan laughed. "Nope, I am floating on the highest high I have ever been on and don't plan on coming down anytime soon. I feel fucking fantastic."

"Yeah, that was more than I expected," Drew admitted. The bliss of orgasm let his words flow freely. It felt good to be honest with Dan—about everything.

"It was."

Drew grinned. "What happened to you at the end, I couldn't hear you?"

"Um... I turned my head," Dan answered.

"Oookay?" Drew dragged out the first syllable.

"I turned my head into the hood of your sweatshirt, to um... smell you when I came. It made it feel like you were closer to me."

“Jesus, Dan. Do you know what you do to me?” Drew asked.

“Honestly, I didn’t. But I’m starting to get an idea,” Dan admitted and quickly turned the conversation away from their first sexual experience together to when Drew was coming home.

Drew was glad for the distraction though his limp dick was now resting against his thigh, and his semen was drying on his chest. It didn’t matter as long as Dan kept talking. Cleaning up could be done anytime. This new open and easy Dan was something Drew refused to let go of.

They talked for several minutes before Drew yawned. “Sorry, it’s been a long day.”

“I guess I should let you go and get some sleep,” Dan supposed.

“Yeah, I have an early meeting tomorrow. The last one and then I can get the hell out of Denver.”

“Drew?” Dan asked in a careful tone. “Can I pick you up at the airport?”

As if Drew would ever say no to that. “I’d like that. I’d like that a lot.”

“Okay, send me your flight information in the morning?” Dan suggested.

“I will. Goodnight, Dan.”

“G’night, Drew. Sweet dreams.”

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Five days of conferences, meetings, luncheons, and business dinners and Drew was exhausted. This morning’s last meeting with the company had an excellent showing, and they had scheduled plans for installation of the new defibrillators in hospitals, private medical offices, and at least a dozen school districts on the west coast alone. Despite the frustrations that had made up yesterday, the conference was ending on a positive note.

Drew zipped his suitcase closed and did one last check of his hotel room to make sure he hadn’t missed anything. Satisfied he hadn’t, he pulled his phone out and sent a quick text to Dan, letting him know what time he would be arriving in Los Angeles.

His stomach did somersaults, remembering last night’s conversation with Dan and what they’d done. Going back to how they were was pretty much off the table, he concluded, picking up his baggage.

Drew gripped the handle of his suitcase so hard his fingers were going numb. Phone sex with Dan had been amazing. It was quick, quicker than his

usual solo sessions, but where in the past, he had visions of what Dan would say or do, the reality surpassed it by miles. Dan's voice, his moans, the gasp followed by the quiet muffled way he said Drew's name as he came and, fuck, the admission that he had turned his head into the hoodie to breathe in Drew's scent. The sounds Dan made as he came were embedded in his memory, and he wished he had a recording of it. At the thought, Drew smiled. Soon he wouldn't need a recording, and that made him eager to get home and... what?

The week apart hadn't been as bad as he thought. It gave them time to talk and be friends without the elephant in the room—the kiss and the swift change in their relationship. The kiss was always in the back, middle, and front of Drew's mind, and yet it wasn't clouding and ruining what he had with Dan. The phone sex was an additional animal to the Drew and Dan zoo they were building, and yet Drew wouldn't change it for the world. He prayed once he got home, and they were in front of one another, things wouldn't be awkward.

A guy could only hope.

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## Chapter 7

Dan checked the time again, as he bounced back and forth on his toes, waiting for the passengers of Flight UA781 to come through security. His stomach was a mess, and his mouth had gone dry when the first passengers came out. He wished he could have met Drew at the gate. He wanted to surprise him when he got off the plane and not just wait for him at baggage claim.

The first sight of his best friend made Dan's breath catch. It was like one of those cheesy romantic movies that Dan secretly loved, where the people part and cease to exist, and all he could see was Drew walking toward him in slow motion. Drew's walk was confident, his back straight and his carry-on slung over his shoulder. He stood and scanned the room, until his gaze landed on Dan and he smiled.

Dan felt his knees weaken at the smile, and he summoned the energy to smile back as the familiar feeling of Drew coming home meshed with the rush of a first date. Drew didn't know it yet, but today *would* be their first date. Dan had spent their week apart cleaning the apartment from top to bottom and consulting his mother on a romantic dinner for two.

The lunch date with his mother had proved to be eye opening. Dan always had an honest and open relationship with his parents about his sexuality. He'd told them, at an early age that he wanted to kiss boys and not girls, and they accepted it and had never thought differently of him. Dan knew he had the support that many didn't get and, at times, he was arrogant and selfish about those who struggled with coming out. He'd made a mistake with Jonathan, a younger boy he'd met at college who was living with his uncle after leaving his very religious family. When they'd first met, Dan swore Jonathan was straight but after a few cuddles on the couch watching movies and Jonathan offering to massage Dan's sore hamstrings after a tough Cross Fit workout, he'd thought differently. The boys had a troublesome relationship; Dan wanted Jonathan and couldn't understand why Jonathan wouldn't simply come out and be his boyfriend. Jonathan's fear of being completely disowned by his family for having feelings for a boy clouded the feelings he'd had for Dan, and Dan had ended all contact with him. He did keep the last letter Jonathan wrote to him, thanking him for accepting him and being his friend when no one else would. The last lines of the letter were committed to his memory and made Dan sad when he thought about them—"I will always be glad we met. I love you and

hope we can still be friends.” That letter was written almost three years ago. Dan had never spoken to Jonathan again.

When Dan's mom had met him at the café for lunch, she'd barely sat down when he blurted out his news.

*“I kissed Drew!” he told her.*

*“It's about time, Danny.” She smiled and waved the waitress over to get a glass of iced tea.*

*“What do you mean ‘it's about time’?”*

*“Oh, son. The two of you have been flirting with each other since you met.”*

*Dan stared at his mother as if she'd sprouted two heads. With that statement, she might as well have.*

*“We what? What are you talking about, Mother?”*

*“Do you remember when you brought Drew home?” she asked.*

*“Of course. It was the first weekend after we met at school.”*

*“Yes, you walked through the door with a smile plastered on your face, holding the hand of a tall and good-looking young man and declared him your new best friend.”*

*“So? What about that says we were flirting?” Dan requested.*

*“Dan, my dear. Listen to me and know that what I'm going to say, I say out of love because I'm your mother, and I only want the very best for you.”*

*Dan sat back in his chair and folded his arms over his chest. He didn't like it when his mother offered a disclaimer before she told him something. It was a sign that what she was going to say, he wouldn't like. He clamped his mouth shut and nodded for her to continue as he started to tap a rhythm out with his foot.*

*“Drew is in love with you. I think he may have been in love with you since you met. It's not a bad thing to love your best friend. Your father and I were friends before we became lovers—”*

*“Mother!” Dan had heard his mother talk about her sex life. When it came to his, they danced around the subject of sex and being safe, but he'd never heard his mom refer to his dad as a lover. He scrunched up his face at her in disgust.*

*“Oh, please. How do you think you were born?”*

*"I know about the birds and the bees, but lover? Really?"*

*"We were talking about you, son. Not me. Now where was I?"*

*The waitress picked the perfect time to interrupt them as she arrived with his mother's drink and asked if they were ready to order.*

*Dan's mother took her time ordering, and he began to lose his patience. The waitress walked away, and he glared at his mother.*

*"Don't you dare give me that look, young man. You're neither too old nor big to turn over my knee." She laughed as she handed out the empty threat.*

*"Mom, please. I'm dying here. Drew kissed me, and I kissed him back, and I've been going in circles trying to figure out how I missed this. How did I miss him?"*

*Reaching across the table, his mother took his hand in hers, the contact calming him slightly. "Dan, you have always been a selfish child." She shook her head when he opened his mouth to speak. "I'm not dressing you down, son. It's your way. You're focused and most of the time, that focus lands on you and what you want or need. That is not always a bad thing. You're driven by your focus, and it has paid off in many ways with school and your ambition. But, my dear, dear son, when it comes to love and matters of the heart, you're clueless."*

*"I've had boyfriends." Dan defended himself. "Lots of them."*

*"And that is my point." She squeezed his hand. "What's the longest relationship you've had with a man?"*

*Dan lifted his chin to answer back with a smart-ass comment and stopped. What was the longest relationship he'd had? Most of the men were hookups or casual sex, but there hadn't been anyone long term since the rather screwed-up relationship with Jonathan, and that relationship only lasted a few months.*

*He slumped in his chair in defeat. "Oh my God. Mother, I'm a slut."*

*Pulling back to cover her not-so-quiet laugh, his mother grinned. "I wouldn't use that word, but since you offered it."*

*"Thanks a lot!" Dan grinned back. He loved how easy it was to talk with his mother even if she was calling him names.*

*"Now, how long have you been friends with Drew?" she asked.*

*"Four years."*

*“Who do you go to when you have problems with school, work, friends, boys...” She trailed off with her list.*

*Dan shrugged. “Drew. He is my best friend. Who else would I go to?”*

*“Now ask yourself, how many serious relationships has Drew had since you’ve lived together?”*

*Dan had to think about that. There were a few guys, but it always seemed like when Dan met them, they didn’t come around anymore.*

*Dan said. “I don’t have an exact number, but not many.”*

*“There’s a reason for that. Look inside yourself and take a good look at Drew. You will see it when you’re ready.” His mother gave her last bit of advice as the waitress returned with their lunch, and they ate in companionable silence, only talking when necessary.*

And now Dan stood, watching his best friend walk toward him, smiling softly. Seeing clearly for the first time, he noticed the look of insecurity that washed over Drew’s face before he schooled his features to reflect nonchalance.

Not thinking about what he was doing, Dan walked straight up to Drew, threw his arms around his neck, and pressed his lips against Drew’s. Dan felt Drew stiffen at the first touch, and then arms wrapped around Dan tightly, pulling him closer to the warmth of Drew’s body, and he melted into the kiss. Dan pulled back and looked into the hooded eyes staring back at him. “Welcome home.”

Drew’s smile reached his eyes and lit up his face. “If this is how you greet me when I go away and come back, remind me to leave more often.”

Dan smacked Drew on the chest and shook his head. “Don’t talk about leaving, again. At least not the way you left me this time.”

Drew’s face dropped, and he ran his hand up Dan’s back to cup the back of his neck, pulling him close, so their foreheads touched. “I’m sorry. Forgive me?” Drew whispered.

How could Dan fight against the tender touch and soft plea from Drew? “Of course.” He looked at Drew from under his lashes. “Of course. You ready to get home?”

Drew smiled again, and Dan relaxed against him. “More than you know.” He stepped back and took Dan’s hand, twining their fingers together, and nodded at their linked hands. “Is this okay?”

Dan's heart sped up at the touch, and he looked at their joined hands. The perfection of them together was overwhelming, yet he managed a smile at Drew. "More than okay." He tugged Drew's hand to get him walking toward the escalators that would take them down and out of the busy airport. Dan wasn't one for public displays of affection, but he found he couldn't stop touching Drew. They walked onto the escalator and on their descent, Drew looked up at him, and Dan reached out to brush a stray hair off his forehead.

"I missed you," Dan said before his brain could catch up with his mouth.

Drew stared back at Dan and the heat in his gaze made Dan blush. "You have no idea how many times I've wanted to hear you say that."

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Dan drummed his fingers on the steering wheel as he drove back to their apartment. His hands were sweaty, and his heart was racing. He went over the details regarding the preparation for Drew's homecoming. The food was ready, the table was set, he'd placed the remote for the music close for when the mood needed it, the wine was chilled, and Drew was here. He whistled as his nerves got the better of him.

"Are you okay?" Drew asked and placed a hand on Dan's thigh, giving it a squeeze.

Dan nodded, not quite able to speak at that moment, and made the last turn into their apartment complex. He turned his head quickly toward Drew, giving what he hoped was a reassuring smile, and parked his car. Turning off the engine, he pulled his keys out of the ignition and sat back with a sigh. He pressed his head against the seat and turned to find Drew looking at him. His eyebrow was cocked over his right eye, and a smirk played across his mouth.

"What's up, Foster?" Drew asked with a cocky raise of his head.

"Up? What would be up? Just getting us home, safely. Two boys. Two boys who are best friends, who have kissed and had um... hot phone sex and who kissed again and held hands and we are home now, and you are here, and I am here and—"

Dan's rambling was cut off by the press of Drew's lips against his. He twisted in his seat and returned the kiss. He rose, trying to crawl across the center console and directly into Drew's lap, when a sharp pain dug into his hip and stomach. "Fuck!"

He felt Drew's laugh against his lips. "I like how eager you are for me and how safe you are playing things." Drew reached down between them and pressed the release for Dan's seat belt. "But let's take this inside."

Drew placed a light kiss on Dan's forehead and turned to open the door, exiting the car. Dan watched as Drew got out, noticing how the jeans Drew wore clung to his thighs and that Drew had a really nice ass. *How had he missed that before?* Shaking his head and exhaling to shake the nerves that were threatening to drown him, he got out of the car and followed Drew up the stairs to his apartment. He crossed his fingers and said a prayer to St. Anthony, hoping the patron saint of lost souls wouldn't mind the prayer and Dan currently being without religion. He needed all the help he could get tonight.

Dan raced up the stairs to reach the door before Drew. He turned and smiled at the questioning look on his friend's face as he took his keys out of his pocket. Snatching the keys from Drew's hand, Dan pressed his back against the door, fumbling with the doorknob as he turned and tried to get the key in. He gave Drew what he hoped was a seductive smile. "Let me. I have something to show you."

"I knew you were up to something, Danny Boy." Drew rocked back on his heels and waited for Dan to unlock the door.

Dan watched Drew's face as they walked into their apartment, waiting for a sign that it was too much. That Dan's attempt at being romantic and creating a semi-new space for them to move from a bromance to an epic romance wasn't overdone or too cheesy. He ground his teeth together as he waited for Drew to take it all in. He didn't have to wait long. The door was barely closed when he was pushed against it, and Drew's body pushed against his and his mouth slanted over Dan's. Drew's tongue licked at the seam of his lips, and Dan opened for him easily. This kiss, it was different from their first, but no less intense. This time, Dan was as active as he could be until Drew grabbed his hands and brought them high above his head, pinning them to the door.

"You did this for me?" Drew asked, as he linked their hands together and rubbed his nose along Dan's jaw.

"All for you." Dan was having a slight problem responding as the blood left his brain and went straight to his dick. He was glad he'd ordered a dinner that still needed to be heated in the oven, he was certain dessert would come first tonight.

Drew nuzzled Dan's neck, tickling as Drew inhaled. "I missed the way you smell too," Drew whispered.

He grabbed Drew's face and brought them nose to nose. "I know we have a lot to talk about and we should be adult about this whole thing..."

Drew nodded and pressed his forehead against Dan's. "But?"

"But, fuck it. Take me to bed, Drew." Dan pushed at his best friend and started to unbutton his jeans and laughed at Drew's face as he walked backwards, stripping his clothes off as well.

"First one to bed gets to top?" Drew teased and turned and raced toward his bedroom.

Dan laughed and whistled as he slowly removed his clothes and took his time walking to the bedroom.

"You're so predictable," Drew said when Dan finally made his way into the room. Laid out on the bed, naked and hard, Dan's mouth went dry, and he could only stand and stare.

"Tell me what to do, Drew..."

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## Epilogue

*One year later...*

“Are you sure about this?” Dan yelled from the bathroom. Struggling with his tie, he gave up and turned to look at Drew who stood in the doorway, arms folded over his chest and a wide grin on his face.

“About you or you wearing the tie?” Drew teased.

“Knock it off. I’m serious, Drew. I think this is a big deal, you know, and I don’t want to screw it up.”

Dan stared at Drew in wonder. They had been friends for so long and one kiss, one simple, sexy, mind-blowing kiss changed it all. He wished they hadn’t wasted four years, and yet he was also thankful that they had. His new take on romance had him believing that things happened for a reason, and just maybe the reason they were friends and not lovers all these years was to build the foundation of their relationship. The last year together had been better than he could have ever imagined. Who would have thought the love of his life would be his best friend?

“You could never screw it up, Danny Boy,” Drew said as he walked in the bathroom and started to fix Dan’s tie.

“This promotion is huge, and I want your celebration to be amazing, as amazing as you are.” Dan watched Drew as his long fingers expertly tied his tie in a Windsor knot that had the stripes in perfect alignment, satisfying and quieting his busy mind.

“You know, a simple night at home with just the two of us would be wonderful and perfectly fine for me,” Drew said as he smoothed Dan’s tie and pulled his vest over his chest and buttoned it. “You look gorgeous.”

Dan turned to the mirror and looked at the reflection staring back at him. He and Drew made a damn good-looking couple in their suits. He grinned, thinking they looked even better out of them. Their styles were complete opposites, but they complimented each other just like their personalities did. Dan had always been looking for the one who would be exactly like him and having this past year with Drew, he knew that would be more than boring. He loved that he liked his romantic comedies and Drew tolerated them. Just as Drew loved football, and Dan tolerated the sport... though he gave great commentary on the tight ends as they bent over before the snap of the ball.



The last year had not been full of roses and unicorns dancing under rainbows, but learning to be friend, lover, and boyfriend to Drew had been the best education ever. Dan had found that your best friend could still be your best friend even when you were getting it on, and that getting it on with your best friend was... the best. Dan couldn't imagine it could be the way it was. There was no holding back with Drew, and he knew everything there was to know about Dan. Sure, at times that was a pain in the ass, being known so well—so Dan made sure to surprise Drew as often as he could. Like tonight.

“You ready to get your party on?” Dan asked as he shook his hips.

“Keep moving your hips like that, and we won't leave the apartment.” Drew's gaze had fallen to Dan's hips and slowly made its way back to his face. He smirked and cocked his eyebrow. That look was a temptation, but he wouldn't give in, Dan worked too hard to pull this night together.

“The only back door you will be seeing for the next few hours, my love, will be that of the bar. We have a date.” Dan stood straight and crooked his elbow, offering it to Drew.

“As you wish,” Drew bowed and took Dan's arm as he rose.

“Quoting *The Princess Bride* will get you nothing but blue balls...” Dan said as he patted Drew's hand that rested in the crook of his arm, and they walked out of the bathroom, making their way through the apartment.

“I had four years of that, I think I can handle a couple of hours.”

“Never going to let me forget that, are you?” Dan stopped walking before they opened the door to head to the party.

Drew placed his free hand on Dan's cheek and turned his face so their eyes met. “I will never forget it, Dan. I don't want to. It got us to where we are now, and I will never forget that. I will tease the hell out of you for it, for the rest of our lives, but I will never forget it.”

Dan blushed at Drew's words. No matter how hard he tried, he would never be as romantic as Drew, and he loved the man for it. He turned his head and kissed Drew's palm. “Then never let me forget it.” Dan smiled. “I love you, Andrew Baxter.”

Drew removed his hand from Dan's arm and placed both hands on his face, bringing their mouths together in a soft and promising kiss. “I love you too, Daniel Foster.” Drew kissed Dan's forehead and each cheek before he spun him around and smacked his ass. “Now take me out and get me drunk.”

Dan laughed as they walked out of the apartment and headed toward the car. The night was young, and so were they. Dan and Drew had the rest of their lives to spend together, but tonight would be spent with friends; friends that were once new and helped get both men's heads straight. Dan was expecting Noah and Sam to become fast friends, and he feared for the poor boys of the bar who were pining over crushes. Friends who were important to them. *After all, there was nothing more important than friends*, he thought, looking at Drew.

**The End**

## **Author Bio**

*Elizabeth Daniels is the possible made up persona of a girl who loves love and loves to read about love.*

*Elizabeth is a wife and mother who lives in the desert valley of Southern California surrounded by gorgeous mountains that are covered with bright orange poppies every spring. She shuffles a home full of boys and finds it unnerving to be the minority in the house most of the time. She loves animals, doesn't eat them, and has rescued the three canines that lay at her feet as she writes.*

*She recently took her love of boys who love boys on a challenge to let the characters out of her head and tell their own stories.*

*She is taking a chance at this thing called writing, when she is not busy being lost in a book.*

*She may be crazy.*

*She may be brilliant.*

*She may be trying not to talk about herself in the third person because it's pretentious and creepy.*

## **Contact & Media Info**

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