



A
MIRACULOUS
WEEK

LAURA S. FOX

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By

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M/M Romance

Intended for Mature Audiences Only

This book contains graphic depictions of sexual intercourse and strong language, and it is not meant for readers who are less than 18 years of age.

Chapter One - A Setup Made In Hell

Collin took one last look in the mirror before answering the damned phone, which, by his standards, must be a tool forged in the depths of Mount Doom since it counted as a torture tool that told him, with round the clock accuracy, when he ate too many calories or hadn't yet hit his ten thousand steps for the day. He could be blamed for turning an inanimate thing into Satan's favorite device, but he never was one to dwell much on personal responsibility when it came to self-flagellation.

Satan's torture tool works, he thought with satisfaction as he threw one last look in the mirror at the nice but subtly defined abs and pecs. At twenty-six, he might not be considered a twink for long, but he believed that the transition to a twink couldn't be thought of as that bad.

"Hi, Amanda," he chirped as he finally decided that the look in the mirror was at least ninety percent according to standards. Still, one rebellious strand of ash blond hair chose to give him a run for his money. He pushed it back, in line with the others, only to see it coming back with a vengeance to stick like glue to his forehead. Whatever. He could go with that James Dean - but belonging to the twenty-first century - look.

"Ready to rumble, partner?" Amanda's voice came through the speaker annoyingly energetic.

"I was born ready," Collin replied with a smirk. "But are you sure you want to spend the last week of freedom cooped up in a tent in the middle of nowhere, instead of pouring champagne on chiseled bodies of male strippers? I could totally arrange that."

Amanda's hoarse laughter convinced him quickly that wasn't such a great idea. "Bachelorette parties are so passe, Collin. Just move your ass downstairs. The bus is waiting."

"Seriously? I haven't dressed yet," Collin replied with growing alarm. Great. His phone could tell him many things, but the time was never something he cared about.

"Come down already. Just throw a pair of jeans and a t-shirt on you. Guys always have it so frigging easy."

"Really?" Collin leered into the mirror, fully conscious that Amanda couldn't see his face.

"Maybe not you, I get it," Amanda acquiesced. "Now move your bubble gay butt to the bus. Everyone's waiting for you."

For good measure, Collin turned slightly to check his butt. It was reasonably bubbly, but not enough to be called obscene. Still, he could go with the lower cut jeans. Just to make an impression. Although, there weren't any gay guys coming with the crew on the trip, so his struggles were in vain.

He sighed. “All right, coming. Hey, you got me a single tent, right? I’d hate to make a poor hetero guy uncomfortable. Blame it on my personality but I might not be able to keep myself from teasing him.”

“Sure, sure,” Amanda said brightly. “Everything’s been taken care of.”

Something of his best friend’s tone made him doubt that. Amanda was many things, but organized was not a quality one could place next to her name. He hoped Frank had taken care of things. Because if it were Amanda, they were all doomed to starve or began their careers as professional survivors in the woods. Could he become capable of drinking his own piss? He shuddered. Hopefully, it wouldn’t come down to that.

He opted for a pair of regular cut jeans and a loose t-shirt. After all, he didn’t have to impress anyone, so it was ‘kay to dress down for a change.

Frank welcomed him and took the duffel bag to throw it together with the rest of the luggage in the bus’s underbelly. Collin whistled when he saw how packed it was already. “Is the entire class of 2012 coming?”

“You’ll see for yourself,” Frank replied with a grin.

Collin shrugged and hopped into the large bus. Yeap, all their friends were there, ready to party, as it seemed by the raucous laughter and animated conversation. Collin quickly scanned the rented bus for available seats, satisfied to see one in the back, where he liked to sit. It looked like some of the luggage had been stored there, but he didn’t mind. He could doze off on the mountain of rucksacks and duffel bags until they reached their destination.

He shook hands and high-fived everyone on his way to the back of the bus. Damn, he was still sleepy. The mountain of luggage would work well as a pillow. He plumped on his seat with a satisfied sigh.

His thigh connected with a solid mass of muscles, warm and firm. He turned to see who would keep him company until they got to the camping grounds. His face fell in an instant.

“Hi, Collin.”

His jaw set hard, and his teeth ground like a millstone from the fifteenth century. “Oh, didn’t see you there. Hi, Fart.”

The nickname he had thought for the bastard had just slipped by accident, and Fort Killin’s sour face told him he must have heard it before. Still, what the heck was he doing there, and why did

he have to take place by the back of the bus, since that was reserved for Collin, as everyone knew? Well, he hadn't told Amanda and Frank specifically they should have kept the spot for him and him only, but still.

Fort turned his head away from him so hard that a light pop could be heard. All right, so he didn't want to be an asshole, but come on, of all people, did he have to spend his entire way there next to that frigging bully?

Collin stole a quick look at Fort. Time had been nice to the asshole. In high school, he had been built more muscular and bigger than anyone else, but now he looked more like a man and less like a high school douchebag bully. He filled his jeans nicely, and Collin could see a huge package guarded by a dozen metal teeth dragon, aka a zipper. Really, that thing was so huge, it was a wonder those jeans could keep it in. It had to be a monstrous dick, with a large head that any gay guy could fantasize about, but without daring to take it on.

All right, so it wasn't a quick look. It was a long one. Collin observed Fort's longish hairstyle. His light brown hair still had streaks of gold in it, Collin noticed with crooked admiration. Front to back, Fort Killin was a walking wet dream, with his deep caramel eyes, plump lips, and an ass to die for. He was athletic, had a huge dick, and his body had to be made by Ancient Greek sculptors.

Too bad, he was an asshole and a bully.

Collin felt a tiny bit bad for letting the nickname slip, but frankly, he couldn't bring himself to care. Still, this was a trip for Amanda and Frank, and he could be a bit more polite. After all, they weren't in high school anymore.

"Sorry about that. It slipped. Force of habit."

"I bet," was the terse reply.

Well, he had done his best. He apologized, something that Fort had never done, although he had turned Collin's last year of high school pretty much into a nightmare. Not entirely since Collin had not only a bubbly butt but also a bubbly personality, which meant that he had still had fun. Bubbly butt, yeah, he liked that.

The driver swerved, and Collin found himself all over Fort. Instinctively, he grabbed onto the first thing that happened under his flailing hands. One of them landed on something firm and of an unmistakable cylindrical shape.

Mortified, Collin moved his hand away and then scooted close to the heap of luggage. "Sorry about that," he mumbled.

"Stop saying sorry all the time."

Great, the asshole was pissed because a gay dude had grabbed his schlong. Collin hadn't invited him to sit in the back, so what was the big deal? It had been an accident, for fuck's sake.

"So, how have you been doing?" Fort asked.

Collin blinked a few times and risked a look at his trip companion. Fort had his hands resting on his knees, but there was something in how he sat there that made him look uncomfortable.

"Don't you have enough room or something?"

Fort turned his head at him and bore his beautiful eyes into his. "You didn't answer my question."

Why the fuck do you care? was the actual thing Collin wanted to say, but then he remembered that for Amanda's and Frank's sake, he needed to play nice. "Pretty good, I guess. I have my own catering business. I cook, too. You know, the whole enchilada." He laughed at his own pun and then reconsidered. What was he doing, trying to have a polite conversation with that asshole?

"I work for an accounting firm."

Accounting? Collin tried to hide his surprise. That body belonged on the football field, not locked in a cramped room, in front of a computer, stressing over columns of financial figures.

"I know what you might be thinking," Fort continued in a monotone voice. "But football wasn't the kind of life I wanted."

"Well, good for you," Collin mumbled. "Nice that you figured it out before having your tenth head concussion."

Fort stared at him. Collin didn't know what to make of that look. It could be disdain, but he wasn't sure. Of course, the queer kid had gotten into catering. He was now prancing around the kitchen, pretending to be a chef. Yeah, that was pretty much what Fort's look was saying.

They sat there in awkward silence. Collin filled it by watching Fort. Why did the asshole have to be his fantasy guy? For some time, he had thought that he must be into some weird bondage and humiliation fetish for thinking so much of that guy. But that wasn't who he was.

No, Collin was a cool, independent gay dude who didn't care about kinks like that. And Fort was still the biggest asshole in the universe, regardless of how yummy that bulge of his in front was and how warm his caramel eyes were.

"Didn't expect to see you here," Fort said, all of a sudden.

Collin bristled. "Really? Why? Amanda's like my bestie."

“Yeah. But you had to know I was coming.”

Collin fell silent at that. Did that douchebag think that he wouldn't come to his best friend's weird as fuck goodbye to freedom camping trip only because a frigging bully was invited, too? “Eh, what do you know? I'm not scared of you,” he said promptly.

That wasn't entirely true. Collin was pretty sure Fort could break him in two like a twig if he wanted. He could be an accountant now, but usually, accountants weren't supposed to have arms and legs like tree trunks. Only the image of a sweaty and naked Fort holding him down in a wrestling move was bound to give him the willies.

Why the hell was he thinking of that? The guy had played football in high school, not wrestling.

“Why would you be scared?” Fort asked.

“That's exactly what I'm saying. I'm not scared.”

All right, maybe a little. A tiny bit.

Collin was pissed as hell as he got off the bus and grabbed his duffel bag. Fort had decided to take a nap on their way there, so he had dozed off, but not without anchoring one muscular thigh against Collin's leg and, eventually, resting his head on Collin's shoulder.

Needless to say, he hadn't been able to sleep a wink.

Ah, great, that ordeal was over. Collin stretched and yawned before grabbing his duffel bag from the pile placed on the ground. From the corner of one eye, he could see Fort moving about. Nah, he wasn't watching. If he were, he would notice how the guy's bicep bulged when he threw his duffel bag on his bag and held it with one arm.

But Collin wasn't watching. Whoever had to bunk with Fort, he'd have a bad trip. Probably the dude was a snoring machine. At his size, he could probably shake mountains with his snoring.

Unless, of course, Fort wasn't alone on this trip. Nah, he wouldn't have slept with his head on Collin's shoulder all the frigging way there. Still, it didn't hurt to check. He had an entire compassionate speech he would hold in his mind, to pity the poor girl.

“So, where's your girlfriend?” Collin asked.

Fort stopped and threw him a long look. It was one weird-ass look because Collin felt instant goosebumps everywhere. What was about Fort's glare that had always made him feel so overly conscious of his body, his clothes if he had a bad hair day or not --

He needed to stop. He wasn't some silly little person reading into his crush's behavior signs of interest. Wait, was Fort his cr--

Nope, nope, nope, his mind wasn't going there.

"I don't have a girlfriend," Fort replied.

Collin had been so caught up in his verbal mentalization that, at first, he didn't register Fort's words. "Really?" he said in a snappy tone that he hated instantly. He wasn't snappy; he was bubbly. "A fine lad like you, people would think that you need to keep them away with a stick or something," he opted for a joke to soften his initial reaction.

Fort wasn't laughing. Of course, why would he? He always looked like someone peed in his soup, and he was debating whether to wring the server's neck or trash the entire place.

That kind of attitude made him a beast on the field. Fort Killin always made a killing when playing, running the most, the fastest, tackling, jumping, scoring ... The whole thing.

Only that he wasn't playing football anymore, as it seemed. Collin had often checked the sports news in the secret hope that he would see Fort in one of the headlines. Of course, already hit enough in the head not to be able to speak coherently and married to a supermodel who was already cheating on him and planning on taking him to the cleaners when divorcing him.

He must have been grinning while thinking of that scenario because he noticed with some latency that someone was standing in his sun. Fort was the one blocking the sun, of course. Collin looked him straight in the eyes. Why did the fucker have to have such pretty eyes? And those eyelashes ... As vain as he was, Collin had yet to buy a little curling thing for his eyelashes. There had to be boundaries he needed not to cross.

"I don't see a boyfriend," Fort said in a thick voice.

Collin snapped out of it. Fort was towering over him, and that wasn't one bit comfortable. Actually, it was pretty scary. But he needed not to show it.

So, he put his chin up and looked up at Fort. "My boyfriend runs a multi-million dollar business, is an accomplished violinist and pianist, speaks seven foreign languages, and is like super handsome. Ah, and he knows karate." He made a gesture with his hands to convince Fort that traditional martial arts were part of his imaginary boyfriend's life, day in and day out.

"And he couldn't spare a week to spend with you?" Fort's face looked stricken with disgust.

"And miss on the merger?" Collin had no idea if he could come up with some impressive business names on the spot but decided to leave it at that as if the importance of that fake deal had to be known by everyone. "No, I couldn't do that to him. He's very important to the company. They don't do anything without him. Actually, it's great that this trip came up. He says

that he needs his head in the game, and if I were home, he wouldn't get anything done because I would distract him. I might even ruin the merger."

All right, it was such a huge and stupid lie, and he was talking way too much. He needed to shut up and right away.

"Hm. Does he trust you enough to let you go alone?"

Hm. Fort was one hundred years too late to 'hm' at him. Collin steeled himself. "Of course. What do you think I am? Some manwhore? And who could I sleep with around here? The rabbits and the squirrels?"

Amanda cleared her throat to get everyone's attention. "Guys, guys, we need to organize ourselves a little. We will call your names, and Frank will give you the tents to carry." There were a few groans and exaggerated sighs from the audience. "Hey, we want this week to be one to remember a lifetime, right? So let's start build memories by engaging on a grueling trip to the camping grounds with the tents on our backs, as the laws of camping, hiking, and whatever want. All right?"

All those present murmured in agreement. Frank dutifully handed the tents, first to the people who came on the trip as couples and then to those who had their reasons to bunk together, as best friends.

Collin waited patiently. The pile of packed tents was getting smaller, and one single there had his name written on it. Finally, Frank was down to the last one.

"Ah, and this one is for Collin."

He made a step toward Frank.

"And Fort."

What the fuck? Right, he hadn't heard the asshole's name being called, now that he thought about it. But seriously --

"What the fuck?!"

Amanda looked guiltily at him. "I messed up, C." She made puppy eyes at him, hoping she would be forgiven.

"I'm not fucking sleeping in the same tent with this asshole!" Collin exploded. Puppy eyes worked on him most times, but that wasn't one of those times.

Frank put his hands up to appease him. "Come on, C, don't be like that. We're all friends here. And we just made a honest mistake. We counted the people and --"

Collin groaned. He wanted to remind Frank that he had explicitly asked for a single, but it felt like doing so would trigger a string of expletives aimed at his best friends, which wasn't how he had envisioned this trip. So, he took one deep breath. "All right, I don't want to spoil your special week. There is only one way out of this situation."

Amanda beamed at him. "Ah, C, I knew you would understand --"

"I'll have to go back."

"No way," Amanda and Frank protested in unison. "This trip wouldn't be the same without you. Do you plan on leaving us? Like this?"

Oh, they had both messed up the organization, Collin realized. "Guys, don't behave like I'm leaving you at the altar or anything. It's just that I can't ... Not with this asshole," he added under his breath and looked at Fort.

Who was smiling triumphantly. "You going back? Aren't you going to ruin the merger if you do?"

Amanda and Frank looked at both of them with confused eyes. "What merger?"

Ah, damn, he couldn't let that asshole win. Probably Fort suspected there was no boyfriend, but Collin wouldn't admit it for the world. He ground his teeth. "You know what, guys? We're all adults here," he said brightly, addressing only Amanda and Frank. "I will stand Fart here for a week, if that's what it takes to make the two of you happy."

"Really?" Amanda clapped her hands in glee. Frank looked relieved, too.

"Yeah," Collin said, somewhat vexed. "But make him carry the tent. He's the one who announced that he was coming too late and messed up the math, I'm sure," he said from the tip of his lips.

That wasn't true, but Collin needed to be angry at someone, and he couldn't be at his best friends. There were no protests from Fort, so Collin began walking after the others.

Stomp, stomp, stomp. Heavy footsteps followed him. Amanda and Frank had moved to the front of the line to guide everyone.

"Is that too heavy for you?" Collin asked sweetly but didn't look back.

"No," came the sour response.

"Then stop stomping like you need to carry the universe on your shoulders. Are you pissed or something?"

"Yeah."

Of course. Fort Killin couldn't stand his guts, and Collin felt the same. It just sucked that they had to bunk together. "Tough luck. I don't like it, either, that I have to share a tent with you."

"That's not what I'm pissed about."

"Then what about?" Not like he was interested or anything.

"Stop calling me that horrible nickname."

Was he starting to hear things, or was there genuine hurt in that voice? Collin liked to joke a lot, but he was never mean. Not to his friends, at least. Well, Fort wasn't a friend, so --

No, no. He was the bigger baby here. "All right," he said reluctantly. "I won't. How about asshole, though?"

An hmph followed. Asshole wasn't in the cards, either.

Collin stopped and turned to face Fort. "You know what? Don't worry about how I'm going to call you. Because I won't speak to you at all."

With that decision in mind, he turned on his heels and began walking fast. Let Fort sweat while carrying the tent. A sweaty Fort, taking off his t-shirt and wiping his forehead --

What was he thinking now?

He hated the asshole.

Chapter Two - Nice Catch

Collin hated how they walked in the back, but some honor code he had no idea what was called obliged him to stick with the asshole carrying their tent. And that wasn't all, much to his annoyance.

Why did he have to feel guilty? After his originally triumphant march in front of Fort, he now felt like a huge dick, and not in the sense of the result of taking penis enlargement pills. After all, he had decided to punish Fort for messing up his camping trip with the crew. Amanda and Frank were a bit guilty, but best friends were always excluded when there was someone else he could blame.

Still, he was a huge dick for letting Fort carrying the tent all the way. They were walking a narrow path, and he could swear he could hear Fort breathing hard. Hah! No longer in shape? But no, that wasn't Fort ... Just his imagination. He stopped brusquely and turned on his heels.

Fort was looking down, so he just crashed into him.

"Wow, watch where you're going," Collin warned and pushed his hands against Fort's chest.

Oh, damn, those were some fine pecs, made of granite or steel ... But also just a tiny bit squishy. Not much, just enough to make them frigging juicy --

"What is it?" Fort's voice was gruff. "Are you talking to me now? And why do you keep feeling me up?"

Collin removed his hands as if burned. "I was just interested in the fabric. It's nice to the touch."

"It's a t-shirt," Fort pointed out. "One hundred percent cotton. Just like yours."

Collin scoffed. Yeah, he had just been caught with his hand in the cookie jar, but he wouldn't admit it. "You can't know that it's like mine."

His voice died down when Fort placed both hands on his chest and squeezed.

He yelped and took one step back. "Hey, what the hell do you think you're doing?"

"Testing the fabric," Fort said through his teeth. "Let's move. We need to keep up with the others."

Collin forgot about his soiled reputation for a moment to protest. "Hey, I wanted to talk to you." Why the hell could he still feel Fort's hands, large and warm, on his chest? His imagination was something nowadays.

Fort stopped just as he wanted to move past him. "Yeah?"

Yeah? Collin mimicked in his mind, imagining how he would make funny faces to Fort to mock him.

“Let me carry the tent,” he said shortly.

“No.”

“What do you mean ‘no’?” Collin grabbed Fort’s forearm to stop him from moving.

“Do you need me to explain the word ‘no’ to you? I bet you don’t hear it often, when you bat them pretty eyelashes at people, but no is no. Like in I won’t give you the tent to carry.”

Pretty eyelashes? If it were a contest, Fort would win by a landslide. Really, he had girly eyelashes, that was how pretty they were. Collin stood no chance, and he was dying to have them as curly as that. Without the use of a curling tool of torture, though.

“Stop munching insults. I can see your lips moving,” Fort added.

Collin was suddenly aware of Fort’s eyes set on his lips. What the hell was that weird atmosphere? “Give me that,” he said suddenly and pulled at the rolled tent.

“Hey, stop it!”

No one stopped him when he wanted to do something. Now Collin felt entitled to do his best to make Fort give up, but his hand somehow slip, and in one blink of a second, he felt his feet no longer on solid ground.

Before he could even yell properly, he was grabbed and held. Fort’s face was right in front of him, and he stared into the caramel eyes like he was suddenly in a trance.

This isn’t right. Fort’s breathing was hot on his face. And, Collin realizes too late, the firm hand that had grabbed him to stop him from tumbling down the steep hill to their right was planted on his butt.

“Hey, get off me.” Collin squirmed. How come Fort’s hand fit so well to his butt cheek? It was like in his fantasies where a strong guy would hold his ass, his hands molded to the shape of his buttocks while pounding him --

Fort pulled him up and scowled at him. “Waters, stay on your two feet. The next time, I might not be able to catch you.”

No one was in any danger anymore, but there was still a suspicious hand hanging around his butt. Collin bristled. “Fine. Now can you please let go of my ass?”

Fort was still way too close for comfort. Collin was trying hard not to stare. He had never looked that close at him, ever. He was even more handsome --

No, no, no. Fort Killin was a bully who was probably waiting just for the right moment to start making fun of the queer kid. Collin didn't plan on letting himself be bullied, but Fort could ruin everyone's vacation, and that he couldn't allow.

"Sure," Fort drawled and finally moved his hand away.

"All right," Collin mumbled.

Fort pushed him gently in front. "Just walk and make sure not to misstep. I'd hate to go looking for you down there."

Collin threw a cautious look to the right. Hmm, that was pretty steep, not life-threatening steep, but he would end up with plenty of scratches and bruises if he got down that hill without protection.

"Come on, move," Fort said, but his voice wasn't harsh or anything. "I'll keep an eye on you."

"Like always," Collin murmured under his breath.

He still remembered quite distinctly how much of a pain that last year of high school had been. Fort watching him like he just bade his time when to assault him. It was such an unnerving look, and Collin always lost his marbles when it happened. That frown etched on his face, the pursed lips, the tight fists.

Collin had promised himself that he would never be afraid, but Fort Killin scared him. He had been a source of nightmares and other kinds of dreams all that year - and later - and Collin couldn't yet shake it off and pretend it was nothing. Amanda and Frank should have known better than springing something like that on him.

Was he fearless enough to face one week under the same roof with this guy? They weren't in high school anymore. They were adults, and adults didn't bully one another, right?

He was overly conscious of Fort's gaze boring in the back of his head. "Would you please stop staring?" he said loudly, but without turning. "And it was my turn to carry the tent."

"Not going to happen," Fort said sternly.

Damn, even his voice had gotten sexier over the years, a bit gruff. Collin shook his head. How long had it been since the last time he had gotten laid? Well, he didn't have to think that hard. His friends thought he was living some out of Sex And The City, the gay version adventures, when in fact, he had only had that one boyfriend.

Ex-boyfriend. Collin wouldn't admit for the world that he had hoped Henry to be his other half. They had met under auspicious circumstances; they had fallen in love with each other at first sight, and they had even exchanged vows!

To think he had been so stupid to believe that charade. It was much easier to act all flighty and like he was sleeping with a new guy every weekend. Amanda always said, ‘Still not over Henry?’, to which he always replied, ‘Of course, I’m completely over him’, only so that they could have the same conversation the next time.

“What did you say?”

That was Mr. Gruff But Sexy Voice calling for him from behind. Collin must have gotten so worked up on his own that he probably started talking out loud. “Nothing,” he replied.

“We’re going to be together for one week. Once we set up the tent, we’re going to sit down and have a talk,” Fort said sternly.

Collin wanted to protest. He didn’t want to sit down with Fort and have a talk. That sounded scary. Could it be that Fort wanted to kill him and hide his body in the woods? It would be simple. He would just tell others that Collin slipped like an idiot and tumbled down a cliff.

There weren’t many cliffs in the area, Collin reasoned to himself. They were going to camp in a civilized place, not deep in the woods. And Fort had just saved him from a tumbling earlier.

But what if Collin felt like murdering him? The thought scared him instantly, so he gave off a little yelp.

“What? What’s going on?” Fort asked, alarmed.

“Nothing,” Collin announced brightly.

“Are you sure? You sounded like you stepped on a bug or something.”

Ah, so Fort thought he could pull his leg. The queer kid was afraid of bugs. He turned. “I didn’t. It was a rat.”

“A rat? Are you scared of mice?” Fort had such a smug expression that Collin wanted to wipe it off his face. How exactly, it was debatable since Collin was sure he would be dead meat before he could even think of throwing a punch at Fort. But, wait, he had just thought of that; did it mean that --

“You know, Waters, you should stop already. We’ll have time at the camp for you to insult me all you want. Now, let’s go, or we won’t be able to keep up with the others.”

Insult? Like Collin would dare. But he had dared, earlier, when calling him names. Hmm, maybe he was braver than he thought.

“I’m not scared of mice,” he announced as he started stomping away. “And it was a rat. Much bigger than a mouse, with beady eyes, and a long, naked tail.”

“If you say so.”

Damn, that smugness. Collin could pretend he hadn't heard it. Maybe he could switch places with someone at the camp and not have to deal with Fort at all. The thought put a spring in his step.

“Where do you want us to set up our tent?” Fort asked him, while everyone milled about, interested in the same thing. “Somewhere the bugs can't bother us, right?”

Collin didn't have to look at Fort to know he was grinning again. “Whatever, I'm not scared of them.”

“Then, we'll put it there.”

Collin followed Fort's extended arm, trying to ignore how his knees were turning into mush, just taking in those perfect muscles in motion. He needed to get a grip. Falling for a bully, no matter how sexy, was uber stupid. He wasn't falling, anyway.

He was just ... unfucked. Not laid. Crazy for a hookup, which he hadn't done ever, seeing how he had broken up with Henry only one year ago. There was a time during which ex-boyfriends weren't allowed to get on with anyone, right?

Only that Henry had appeared with that male bimbo just two months after their breakup. That had been when Collin saw them, at least. And that guy was just like him, only blonder, thinner, and stupider. Henry had a type. Only that Collin had grown out of being a skinny kid, and also out of his stupidity to believe that love could last forever.

“You go ahead and do your thing,” Collin said. “I just need to talk to Amanda for a minute.”

There was no way he would sit down and talk to Fort about whatever the hell the guy wanted to talk about. It wouldn't go down well for him, that was sure.

Amanda and Frank were trying to set up their tent, which proved a real feat. Good thing Frank was a bit more coordinated than his soon to be bride.

“Hey, guys.”

“Ah, Collin. How do you feel? I mean, about Fort and all,” Amanda said with a small crooked smile.

“Yeah, about that. Can you find someone who would like to switch places with me? I love you, guys, but I don't think I can do it.”

Amanda grimaced and shook her head. "I don't think so, C. Everyone kind of chosen their partners before they left home."

"And why would you want to switch? You've always liked Fort," Frank said bluntly.

"I what?!"

Amanda grabbed her soon to be husband and put her small hand over his mouth. "Forgive Frank. He got sunstroked."

For sure. Collin had never heard of a more outrageous thing in his life. But he didn't have time to lose. "Okay, if you don't want to ask, I'll go around and do it myself."

Liking Fort? More like hating him. Frank was totally suffering from sunstroke.

It took him more than half an hour of begging, bribing, and even mild blackmail to discover that no one in the entire camp wanted to bunk with Fort in his place. Of course, the guy was an asshole, so there were no surprises there.

What if they didn't want to bunk with him? Collin thought for a moment. He could be annoying, maybe. No, what was he talking about? He was lovable, like a cute little dog.

Now he had the right to feel downright depressed. These people were supposed to be his friends, and now they were all in a weird alliance against him. Okay, so he wasn't paranoid, but he could swear he saw some of them exchanging odd glances when he had tried to talk them into switching places.

That was so weird.

He searched with his eyes for Fort and the place where he was supposed to spend the night.

"Over here," he heard someone calling.

"Why there?" he asked impatiently.

It looked like Fort preferred a place more remote from the group of tents now in all stages of being set up. Not only that, but he had set up their tent in what looked like a vantage point where one could look downward at the rest of the camp. Could it be that Fort wanted to strangle him in peace so that the others couldn't notice anything until it was too late?

No, no, he was getting paranoid again. Collin climbed the small hill and looked at the tent that was already raised. "So, you picked the spot by yourself?" he asked, feeling miffed.

"I asked you," Fort said curtly.

Yeah, and he had been busy admiring Fort's muscular arm, and then he had thought only of switching places. "You know, if you don't like being with a group that much, why did you come on this trip?"

Fort threw him a sharp look. "I chose a place with fewer bugs."

Collin snorted. "Yeah, right. Okay, buddy, I see that you set up the tent by yourself without waiting for me."

"Are you pissed? I'm sure you would have found any number of reasons not to help," Fort replied.

"Why would I do that?"

"Because you don't want to break a nail or something."

Collin gasped in rightful indignation. He took a look at his short nails - well, they were manicured, but only a little - and then pushed them in front of Fort's eyes. "Really? Like what nail?"

"Hey, take your hands off my face," Fort warned.

But Collin was all worked up at this point. "No, no, please enlighten me. Just how many cliches about gay guys do you have in that big melon of yours?"

Fort surprised him by grabbing his hands and pulling them close. "You had these done at a beauty salon?"

Collin pulled his hands away. "No. I'm perfectly capable of caring for my nails at home. And men can take care of themselves without breaking some weird code of masculinity."

Fort grinned at him. "Sure." He didn't add anything.

He just decided that moment to take off his t-shirt, making all those fantastic muscles ripple and wipe his forehead, just like in Collin's earlier fantasy. Why, oh why, did he have to be so ripped?

"Are you sure you're an accountant?" Collin asked crossly.

"Yeah. Why are you asking? Do you think I'm stupid or something?"

Collin's lips twitched. No way hell they would go through the week without killing each other. It would take a miracle. But he had to prove that he was a grown-up now. "No. I'm just surprised with your career choices. Don't tell me you wear glasses now."

"Only when I work at the computer," Fort replied.

Collin snickered. A guy like that wearing glasses. It was funny. But if he thought about it, he could see Fort, with his longish hair and intelligent eyes, wearing a cool pair of glasses, not the geekish type ...

All right, that was hot. His laughter died.

“Laugh all you want.” Fort sounded pissed. He grabbed a bottle of water and began drinking.

Collin’s eyes were drawn instantly to the bead of sweat traveling down Fort’s throat while his Adam’s apple moved. He swallowed audibly.

“Thirsty?” Fort asked and handed him the bottle.

Collin was in a daze as he took it and drank from it. Then he realized that he was putting his lips where Fort’s had been and sputtered, spreading water all over the other’s face and chest. “Oh, shit,” he barely managed.

Fort wiped his face with the t-shirt. His caramel eyes were murderous now. “I don’t have the cooties, Waters. Stop acting like such a baby.”

“Sorry about that,” he mumbled.

“Yeah, I bet you’re sorry,” Fort replied.

He unzipped the tent door and went inside.

All right, so he had been a real asshole, Collin thought. And Fort was wrong to believe that Collin had acted like that because he was disgusted or anything. It had been quite the opposite, not that he could admit it to a bully who thought gay guys were less than men. Just the thought of an indirect kiss ...

His mind was forbidden from going there. Now, the logical thing to do was to go inside the tent and apologize properly. With that decision in mind, he walked in.

Only to be met by a sight taken from fantasies he would have to build from that point onward.

Chapter Three - That One Type

Collin stared for a second at Fort's perfect naked ass and then zipped close the tent door with steady hands. No one should see that. Of course, he realized too late that he had imprisoned himself inside with that sexy asshole. Thus, he remained with his back turned, rewinding in his head the perfect mounds of muscular flesh, the dimples right above, the hint of --

"Why did you zipper down the door? It will get too hot in an instant."

Collin continued to stare at the canvas in front of his eyes, crouching slightly since their tent wasn't that tall. That's why Fort had been bending while pushing down his jeans.

"You were naked," Collin whispered angrily.

"I was just changing into something more comfortable. Now open the damned door."

Collin humphed and turned. At least, his tent partner was decent now, if a pair of shorts and nothing else counted as that. If he focused enough, he could see Fort's snake quite well through the soft fabric. Could it be that the guy liked going commando? That would be a sight. But no, that would be way too obscene, and even Fort had to know not to tempt fate by flaunting the gifts Mother Nature and his parents had given him.

"Would you please get out of the way?"

Collin moved and then considered laying down his backpack. The truth was he wanted to change his clothes, too. "Would you please," he mimicked Fort's words, "get out and let the door down while I change?"

"We're both guys, Waters. There's nothing I've never seen before."

"Oh, yeah? What if I don't have a testicle?" Collin challenged him. To make a point of his determination to change, he began rummaging through his backpack.

Fort threw him a concerned look. Damn, the guy was good; his strategy had evolved since they had been in high school. Now, he could play the concerned citizen. That was something to bear in mind if he wanted to survive the week.

"I wouldn't laugh at you," Fort said solemnly. "Was it an accident or --"

Collin pursed his lips. Something in how Fort stared at him rubbed him the wrong way. "Just get the fuck out, Killin. I'm not going to show you my one and only testicle."

Fort grinned. "Too bad. I was really curious."

Collin grabbed the first thing he could find in his backpack and threw it in the asshole's general direction. Fort caught it deftly. And then, no surprise there, he burst into laughter. Collin felt the

color draining from his face. He must have put it inside his backpack without thinking. Wendy had been with him for a long time; she was his lucky charm, although she could use a chemical treatment for her coat to regain its original fluffiness.

“Aren’t you too old for a teddy bear?” Fort gestured, making Wendy probably experience the equivalent in her world of a 9G pull. “Hi, Mr. Bear,” he said as he stopped the abuse and looked at the stuffed toy.

Collin grabbed her quickly. “It’s my sister’s,” he said stiffly. “And it’s Miss. Not Mr.”

Fort threw him a crossed look. “You don’t have a sister.”

Just how the hell he knew that? Collin set his jaw hard. “Just get out before I kill you,” he said in a calm voice.

It was easier to be angry than mortified. So, maybe it was a stupid superstition on his part, and he wasn’t holding Wendy in his sleep or anything creepy like that, but he had had her hidden in his bag each time something good had happened in his life. Her presence was a constant and represented comfort of mind.

“All right.” Fort put his hands up. “I’ll leave you and Miss ... What’s her name?”

“We-- none of your business!” Collin stuffed Wendy back into his backpack. “Why aren’t you out already?”

Fort withdrew, stepping back. He turned only so that he could unzip the door. “We have a flap door, too,” he said and demonstrated by pulling it down.

Collin wanted to protest again, say that a flap door could quickly flap in the wind, and allow the entire camp to stare unhindered at his naked butt. Since he had the reputation of a guy who felt good in his skin, he would have difficulty explaining why he actually acted shy. But that would cause the asshole to continue their conversation, which he didn’t want at all.

So, he opted to remove a clean shirt and a pair of tracksuit pants from the backpack. He changed into them with the speed of light, ran his hands through his hair, and hurried outside until Fort didn’t have the glorious idea to come back and torture him some more. Probably he was already with the others, telling them how Collin couldn’t sleep without holding his teddy bear.

He couldn’t see Fort, which was both a reason to worry and a cause for relief. Everyone down there was getting ready for a late lunch, and his grumbling stomach was a sign that food was overdue.

Amanda called for him. “Let’s all eat together, C!”

They had packed meals, beverages kept in cooling boxes, and plenty of ingredients to cook for a week, which was why Frank and Amanda had enlisted a few others' help to carry all those things there.

Still, Collin had a surprise ready for everyone. He had packed enough of his version of meals ready to eat, the gourmet version, for their first lunch together. To start their wild week on the right foot. "Coming!"

He grabbed the bags he had carefully placed in a cooling bag and got down. "I have a surprise for you, guys," he announced, and he was welcomed by clapping and cheers. Everyone knew he was one hell of a cook. That also meant that everyone expected him to do most of the cooking, but he didn't mind. Although he had a suspicion he would get fed up with barbecue foods until the week ended. It was no problem. He could always add a twist to them to make them feel less monotonous.

Amanda hurried to help them heat the food and began serving them. Good thing he had thought of everyone, Collin thought with satisfaction.

"Where is mine?"

Collin stopped smiling upon hearing Fort's voice. Apparently, he had been busy gathering some firewood, although they had plenty of supplies. Right, he hadn't thought there would be someone extra. And that was unforgivable for his reputation as a cook, as he needed - always - to pack some extras.

Everyone fell silent, and Fort frowned before he had a chance to say anything. "It's all right. I get the message." He placed the gathered wood in a neat pile and began walking toward the tent.

"Don't you guys have anything to give him?" Collin asked.

Everyone was already digging in, apparently too preoccupied with stuffing their faces, when one of them went hungry. Collin had known these guys and gals to be better than this, but it looked like no one liked Fort, which was no surprise.

Still, they were acting like a bunch of rude people, so Collin decided to take the matter into his own hands. He hurried after Fort with the plate still in his hands.

Fort was sitting on a small foldable chair, with a sandwich in his hand and a dark expression on his face.

"Here," Collin said and pushed the full plate under Fort's nose.

"What's this?" Fort asked, acting all suspicious for some reason.

“It’s not poisoned,” Collin retorted, now feeling irritated over being judged for being nice.

“That’s not what I asked. What’s this?” Fort asked stubbornly.

“It’s just frittata,” Collin replied.

“Just? I see green stuff,” Fort insisted as he examined Collin’s plate.

“I just like adding stuff to it. Like asparagus. And chives,” he explained.

Fort still didn’t seem convinced. “How do I know you didn’t put something funny in it?”

“Like what? I cook for a living, you ass,” Collin said through his teeth. “I wouldn’t give anyone something to eat that’s not edible.”

Fort took the plate and then looked lost with the sandwich in one hand and his other busy, as well. Collin grabbed the sandwich from Fort’s hand and crouched. Then he took a bite and grimaced. “You like your food a bit bland, don’t you?”

Fort shrugged. “I’m not ruining meat with ketchup.”

Collin rolled his eyes and went inside for his pouch of herbs. He never left anywhere without it. He sprinkled some on Fort’s precious meat - Fort’s meat, what the hell was his mind doing? - and then hurried outside.

Fort appeared contented with the frittata and was eating without protesting anymore.

Collin observed him and the feeling of guilt from earlier came rushing back. “Thanks for carrying the tent. And setting it up. Also, I apologize for everyone. They were just hungry.”

Fort quirked an eyebrow but didn’t stop eating.

“And I’m sorry, too,” Collin added. “For being ... you know.”

“Are you going to eat that?” Fort pointed at the barely touched sandwich in his hand.

Collin blinked a few times. Fort had already wolved down the portion Collin had brought him. “You’re a big boy, for sure,” he commented and handed him the sandwich.

Fort didn’t mind devouring that, too, in just a few bites.

“Has no one ever tell you to take it easy and chew your food?”

A shrug was the only answer he got. Great, now he would be the one to go hungry until later when they would cook something. “Do have an extra sandwich somewhere?”

Fort smacked his lips and smiled. “Nope.”

“Ah, great.” Collin stood up and groaned. “I wasn’t expecting to go foraging so early in the trip, but I guess I should get moving.”

“Why don’t you ask the others if they have anything left? The way I see it, you fed everyone, except yourself.”

“It’s not a big deal. I’ll figure out something until the next meal.”

He was about to walk away when Fort caught his arm. “I’m just teasing you. I have plenty of sandwiches packed. And you look like you could use some meat on your bones.”

Whereas Henry had used to nag him - in what he thought to be a funny way - to be careful not to get fat, this guy was calling him skinny in the face.

He crossed his arms over his chest. “Do you think I’m too skinny?” It was easier to divert the hurt and anger he still felt toward Henry after all this time.

The truth was he didn’t dare to hook up. He had wanted Henry to be the one, and he had done everything for that to happen; it wasn’t fair that he was supposed to hop the clubs now in a quest for dicks. That wasn’t who he was, even if he had led all his friends to believe that it was what he was doing. Just seeing Amanda worry over him had worn him down emotionally. No one else was allowed to feel bad because of Henry; that was something for him to think about.

He was again caught up in his own head that he missed Fort’s reply to his question. He raised his eyes and noticed how Fort measured him up and down with a slow and - withering? insulting? humiliating? - look.

“What?” Collin asked, suddenly unnerved by the once over.

“You look fine,” Fort said thickly. “But it looks to me like you’re starving yourself a little.”

“I’m not starving myself,” Collin protested. “If I were starving myself, do you think I would have these?” He pulled up his t-shirt to expose his six-pack. Those abs had been a grueling task to achieve, and he was proud of them. “Check them up. You could bounce a nickel on them.”

Fort’s large hand was on his abdomen, caressing it gently.

Collin stopped breathing. What was that about? Why was Fort touching him like that? And why the hell his entire blood flow was suddenly bent on changing direction and pooling in --

“All right, all right. That tickles,” he attempted to stop Fort.

But the other hand joined in, and now Fort was using his thumbs to brush over his abs, only to reach higher and make Collin freeze. It would be so simple for those hands to end up even higher, on his pecs and --

“I can feel your ribs,” Fort said.

Collin pushed down his t-shirt, forcing the other’s hands away from him. “Yeah, it’s normal. I’m not fat.”

Fort shrugged. “How can you be a cook and eat so little?”

Collin pursed his lips. “I work it out.”

“All the food you eat, you mean?” Fort asked. His voice gave away his surprise.

“Well, most of it,” Collin replied. He was trying. And he liked the food only that he preferred to eat little from nutritious sources instead of too much junk with no value. “Stop looking at me with those judging eyes. You don’t know my life.” He had used the stock phrase popular online only to end up the conversation.

It looked like Fort was taking it at face value. “Yeah, I don’t. Is your boyfriend torturing you over your looks?”

“What bo-- It is natural for him to have standards. He is, after all, a multi-billionaire who --”

“Speaks seven foreign languages and plays the clarinet --”

“Violin and piano --”

“And plays with sticks --”

“He knows karate --”

“How old is he? One hundred and four? When did he have the time to learn all that?”

Collin squared his shoulders. All right, so the imaginary boyfriend couldn’t be too young because he obviously sounded fake. “He’s forty ... nine.” He opted for a number at random.

“Forty-nine? Twenty-three years older than you?” Fort’s voice was louder now.

“Yeah. I’m into daddies. What of it?” Collin said with determination.

Fort’s face fell in such a comical way that Collin staved off the need to laugh in his face with much difficulty. If he hadn’t known any better, he would have thought Fort looked downright dejected. No, stricken was a better word.

“Don’t tell me you have something against that,” Collin added, but with less conviction than before. “Love is love.” That suddenly sounded just like any other cliché, maybe because he used it to cover a lie and an imaginary boyfriend.

Collin wasn't into daddies. He wasn't into twinks, and he wasn't into twunks. He wasn't into younger, older, in-between aged guys. He didn't like blonds, brunets, or dark-haired hotties.

He wasn't choosy. He just had only one type. And, unfortunately for him, that type was staring right back at him with eyes so full of hurt that Collin wanted to start shouting and ask what the hell he had done wrong.

"I'm not against it, as long as you love him," Fort said cryptically and walked away.

"Where are you going?"

"I'm going to gather more wood," Fort announced but without even turning his head.

Collin could feel a migraine coming up. Not that he had had one in his life, according to the definition given by medical dictionaries, but it sounded like the right thing to apply to his current situation.

Fort Killin was nothing like he remembered him. Well, he was still a walking wet dream, but Collin had always thought of him as some dumb jock with a short fuse. Now, he realized that there were depths to the guy he had no idea what to do with.

Whatever. He wasn't the guy's shrink or anything. If Fort had any problems with his imaginary boyfriend, then he would have to suck it up since Collin really didn't know what to do about it.

"Maybe I could stop lying like an idiot," he said under his breath.

For a while, he stood there, pondering over his options. He could go and help others with whatever chores they had. On the other hand, he could just join Fort in his quest for more firewood.

Usually, he would have opted for pleasing many. But this time, Collin didn't feel as much as a people pleaser as before. He would rather not have Fort frown over each of their conversations.

Have you forgotten how much of a bully he used to be?

Well, we're not in high school anymore.

After that short debate with himself, Collin hurried after Fort. They would have to spend six nights under the same tent roof, and it couldn't be such a great idea to spend those sulking instead of sleeping peacefully.

Fort hadn't bothered to put on a t-shirt, so Collin noticed his perfect muscular back through the trees right away. "Hey," he called. "I thought of helping you."

A small grunt and a brief look were the only reply he got.

“You know,” he began babbling, as he started to pick up twigs, “I had no idea I could fall for someone who’s almost my dad’s age. But it just happened.”

“I don’t care about your love life, Waters,” Fort grumbled.

Then why the hell did you act like the sky fell on you because I said I got dicked on the regular by a dude almost twice my age?

That was a thought Collin kept to himself. “All right. What about yours? How come there’s no girlfriend?”

“I don’t want to talk about my love life, either.”

Collin snorted. “You know these twigs will be a pain to carry back. I followed you like for ten minutes or more.”

Fort straightened up and listened.

Collin felt goosebumps everywhere on his body. The look on the other’s face triggered all the alarm points he knew he had.

A twig cracked somewhere. Collin yelped, and in one second, he was in Fort’s arms.

Chapter Four - Skunks And Gremlins

“Waters,” Fort grunted. “You’re strangling me.”

He must have done that, but instead of releasing Fort’s neck, he curled his arms around it with even more determination. He whispered, “I think we’re in danger.”

“Yeah, I’m in danger of getting strangled. Stop it right now.”

“No way,” Collin protested. “How can you be so calm when --”

He made the mistake of making eye contact with Fort, and they were really, really close. Staring into those beautiful caramel eyes fringed by the curliest eyelashes in existence was a big mistake. Huge.

Because right now, he was lost, his tongue was a little animal playing dead in his mouth, and his brain worked on one neuron - it wasn’t even the one in charge of breathing because he had totally forgotten how to do that. What was he doing in Fort’s arms? Where were they? What were they? Why did the universe exist?

Was he starting to imagine things, or was the tiny distance between them getting smaller? It was easy to observe precisely how curly those eyelashes were, almost to the last of them, and Fort was blowing hot air on his face, more precisely, on his lips --

“Ah, guys, there you were.”

Fort dropped Collin so fast, and he removed his hands just as quickly, that there was a sudden distance of at least one yard between them.

Frank’s curly head appeared from the greenery. “Amanda kept pestering me to find you.” He grinned all knowingly. “She was worried you might be fighting or something.”

“Why would I fight this guy? I’m not even talking to him.” Collin had no idea why he felt so defensive. Somewhere, in his brain, a little voice was telling him that he had to cover for something.

“Didn’t look like that.” Collin had always liked Frank’s goofy grin, but this time it was getting on his nerves. “So, you two good?”

Collin shrugged.

“Then sorry to bother you. I’ll just get going.” Frank turned on his heels.

“Wait,” Collin called after him. “I’m coming, too.”

A strong hand grabbed his arm, right above the elbow.

Frank turned. "Okay. Are you?"

Collin had two choices. One, shrug off Fort's vice grip and follow Frank to the camp. Two, pretend he still had something to do there and see what that was all about. "Not right now. I just remembered that I wanted to look for raspberries."

"Sure." Frank flashed another grin at him and sauntered out of view.

"What's wrong with you?" Fort asked as soon as Frank was out of earshot.

Collin moved his arm to get rid of the other's touch but just ended swinging it around. All right, that was enough goofing around. Someone had to be the bigger baby, and that was him. He was exactly two months older than Fort. Apparently, his brain liked to collect useless information, like Fort's favorite color, middle name, and shoe size. That had been in high school. For the last eight years, he had tried to stop thinking about him; for a while, he had even succeeded when he had met Henry. That was enough to make him feel miserable.

"What's wrong with me?" He remembered he was supposed to protest. "What's wrong with you?"

"I didn't do anything!"

"You dropped me like I was a sack of potatoes. Rotten."

"Rotten. Why rotten?"

"That's a figure of speech. That's how fast you let go of me."

"And you jumped one yard away like I had the plague," Fort argued.

Collin took one deep breath. Fort's fingers were digging into his bicep, and it kind of hurt. "Do you mind?"

Fort let go of his arm.

"Um," Collin started, "Frank could have misinterpreted the situation. So I was protecting your reputation."

"My reputation?"

"Yeah. I mean, you're a straight guy, and surely don't want to be seen with, um, with a well-known seducer like me."

Seducer? What the hell was wrong with his brain and tongue coordination lately? Nobody talked like that.

"I thought you had a boyfriend." Fort looked puzzled.

“Yeah. I seduced him, too,” Collin replied. “I mean, it ended with him. My career as a seducer.”

Fort pinched the bridge of his nose and shook his head like he needed to get rid of a fly in his ear. “I don’t think it did,” he said in a low voice.

“What?” Collin asked.

There was noise from the path, and now he knew better not to jump into Fort’s arms, like before. A group from their camp joined them, and when Collin looked around, he noticed that Fort had decided to leave.

That was for the better. Any minute they spent in close proximity was dangerous. Somehow, they ended doing things like jumping into each other’s arms.

He, Collin, did that, not Fort. Which meant that he was still not over his dubious crush, and his week would be a total nightmare.

They returned to the camp hours later, with all kinds of forest fruits collected from the bushes they had eventually identified. Collin had a small basket filled to the brim; one of the others had given it to him, and he wanted to bring some to Fort. Clearly, the guy needed some sugar in his life.

Amanda joined them and pulled him away from the group. “Will you make that awesome raspeberry sauce?” She pointed at the basket.

“Yeah, sure,” Collin said brightly. Maybe he could save some for Fort. He couldn’t deny Amanda anything on her special last week of freedom - her words, not his. And if she wanted his special raspberry sauce, he would make it.

“Frank told me,” Amanda said in a conspiratorial tone.

“Told you what?”

“About you and Fort, that you were kissing in the woods.”

“What?!”

“Hush,” Amanda whispered. “I mean, if it’s not a secret --”

“We weren’t kissing,” Collin whispered, too. “Does your future husband like to make up stories?”

Amanda appeared disconcerted by his categorical denial. “You weren’t? Frank could swear he saw you in Fort’s arms, your faces close and everything.”

“Amanda,” Collin said slowly, measuring his words, “Fort Killin is a bully, and I wouldn’t kiss him if he were the last guy on earth. I mean, I would rather kiss a ... skunk. Yeah, even a stinky creature must be a better kisser than Fort Killin.”

Amanda froze and stared over his shoulder. Collin didn’t have to turn to know why she had suddenly lost all the color in her face.

“He’s standing right behind me, isn’t he?”

Amanda just nodded, and her entire face scrunched up in an apologetic grimace. Collin closed his eyes, gave himself a mental slap, and then turned. As he opened his mouth, Amanda scurried off past him. “Sorry, Collin. You’re on your own,” she said quickly.

“Traitor,” Collin threw at her back, but without one ounce of venom.

Fort crossed his arms over his chest and looked at him. It was the same look from high school, the one that made Collin feel like his entire body stood still, not to make the wrong move and cause the beast to pounce.

But, he repeated to himself for the umpteenth time, they weren’t in high school anymore. “Well,” he said and mimicked Fort’s posture.

Fort moved his arm and placed his hands on his hips. Collin did the same.

“Are you mocking me, Waters?”

“Why would I do that?”

“You keep doing whatever I’m doing.”

“I saw a documentary,” Collin replied calmly. As Fort shifted his weight from one foot to another, he did the same. “Mimicking your opponent’s movements establishes you as his equal and makes him think again about attacking you.”

Fort stared at him as if he was suddenly growing a second head. “I’m pretty sure something like that would earn you an ass-kicking. What kind of documentary was that?”

Collin shrugged. “Something with monkeys. Or ants?” He blinked as he tried to remember.

Fort snorted. “You haven’t changed a bit, Waters.”

“What’s that supposed to mean?”

Fort didn’t answer.

Collin remembered that he was supposed to apologize for saying those rude things earlier.

“Look, I didn’t mean what I said to Amanda earlier.”

“Which part didn’t you mean?”

“The one about the skunk. I wouldn’t kiss one, not even if I’m on reality TV, and there’s a guarantee that I would get Prince Charming if I did that.”

“But you did get your Prince Charming,” Fort pointed out.

Right, the imaginary boyfriend. Collin kept forgetting about him. Good thing he hadn’t mentioned a name, or he would have screwed up by now big time. “Anyway, it’s not true.”

“Do you really think I’m a bad kisser?” Fort asked suddenly.

Collin was lost for words for a moment. “Um, yes? I mean, I wouldn’t know, right?”

“Ah, so you were just judging me, without knowing me at all.”

Oh, he looked upset now. There were small flashes of lightning coming from those pretty eyes.

If Fort thought he would be so easily impressed and forced to back down, he would have to think again.

Collin stepped in front of him, praying inwardly that he wouldn’t get a punch for daring that. “Well, Killin, I know you enough, and I don’t need to know anything else to have an opinion.”

Fort pursed his lips. The flashes of lightning were gone, replaced by vast expanses of ice. Collin blinked. “I’m sorry,” he said automatically.

“No, you’re not,” Fort said and moved past him, driving his shoulder into Collin’s hard.

For the sake of not appearing a weakling, he stood his ground and winced and groaned only after Fort was gone. He rubbed his shoulder and went to join the others. Fort wouldn’t get any raspberries for being an ass. That served him right. If he wanted to be a sour ugly soul, there was nothing Collin could do.

His raspberry sauce was a success, and Collin accepted all the compliments with a smile on his face. But he felt as if he was going through the motions, without feeling the usual satisfaction when people appreciated him. Time and time again, he turned his head to see if Fort was coming to join everyone at dinner, but it looked like Grinch wanted to ruin everyone’s fun.

Actually, no one seemed to care about Fort and his absence. Not even Amanda and Frank, and that was weird because they had invited him, and they were usually better people than this.

“Someone is missing,” he said out loud. “I made twelve plates. And there’s one left.”

“I could solve the issue,” Grant, one guy on the chubby side, announced. His girlfriend, Mary, nudged him in the ribs. “Or maybe not,” he added, rubbing his side and smiling guiltily at the girl.

“I think it’s Fort,” Collin made a second attempt to draw the others’ attention.

“If he doesn’t like to eat, it’s not our fault,” Christine, a girl who he knew to be the sweetest person on the face of the earth, replied.

“Do you guys have something against him?” Collin exploded.

Everyone stopped eating and stared at him curiously.

“Don’t you?” Christine asked. “Everybody knows how you feel about him.”

Collin wanted to argue but didn’t know what to say.

“We’re just siding with you,” Christine assured him.

Okay, so that was what friends did, but Collin could do with a little less siding in this case. Fort was alone and miserable right now, probably munching on his bland sandwiches. That image alone was enough to bring tears to his eyes, while the rest of the group couldn’t give a damn. Was that part of growing up? Collin shuddered at the thought.

“Frank, you should go and tell him to join us. You guys invited him, right?”

Frank made a move to stand, but Amanda caught his arm. Collin’s eyes grew as big as saucers.

“If you’re so worried about him, you should go,” Amanda said.

Collin rubbed the back of his neck. Even Amanda? What the hell had gotten into everyone? When they had been in high school, his friends had never been so overtly against Fort. I mean, they had hanged with different gangs, and their paths had never intersected, but there had never been a full-blown war between them. Oh, no, were they now ganging upon Fort because he was alone, and they were many? That was an awful thing even to think. No, it had to be that they were too hungry and didn’t want to walk a few yards to let a guy who could be starving --

Collin stood up. “I’m going to get him. But I don’t want to hear one mean thing from you when he gets here, okay?”

Ten pairs of eyes looked at him with no expression in them. Was he jumping to conclusions? But they were already acting like Fort was the enemy or something. And, in all truth, he hadn’t done one bad thing since the beginning of this trip. Of course, there were still six days left, and plenty could happen, but for now, they had no reason to hate him.

He walked toward the tent he shared with Fort with measured steps. Everyone's eyes were on his back; he could feel them.

The tent was surprisingly empty. Where the hell could he have gone now? Collin felt restless. Should he go and search for him? But if he was getting worked up for nothing? What if Fort had decided to go home since everyone acted like a scumbag toward him? But no, his backpack and other things were there.

Collin sat on his sleeping bag and began thinking. If he were Fort Killin, where would he go to mope and feel miserable?

Without going too far from the camp, Collin began scouting the place. He hoped the others didn't notice his restlessness, and now he was convinced that they wouldn't care anyway since they were all suddenly gremlins, the after-midnight versions.

Apparently, he had no idea where someone like Fort would go and mope because his attempts were futile. The night was drawing near, and Collin could feel his restlessness growing. Surreptitiously, he had grabbed the pot with the remaining barbecued meat and the sauce he had made and hidden them in the tent so that Fort would have something to eat when he came back.

Confused and worried, he entered the tent again, only to find it empty. All right, Fort was a big guy. In like, every way. If he wanted to walk to the nearest town, get drunk and watch strippers flaunting their assets, he could do that, and Collin was downright stupid for worrying. He could go and sleep under the naked sky like a true survivalist.

Or he could slip and fall, and was now in some ravine, crying for help, with no one to hear him. Maybe he was losing blood, and now even the force to shout for help was waning. Maybe --

"I had no idea someone could pace a tent in this manner."

Collin forgot everything when his eyes landed on Fort. He looked unharmed and also not depressed at all. Still, he hurried to him and grabbed him by the shoulders. "Where the hell have you been?"

Fort snorted and shrugged his touch. He moved past him and sat on his sleeping bag.

"Aren't you going to tell me?" Collin asked.

Fort took out his hiking boots, first one, then the other, gave them a small sniff, grimaced, and moved only enough so that he could throw them outside.

"Ew, man, gross," Collin protested.

“What? I put them outside. I’m surprised you would be put off by the smell of worn shoes when you would kiss a skunk.”

Collin groaned and sat on his part of the tent. The small lantern hanging in one corner, which he had brought with him, gave him enough ability to see so that he could watch Fort taking off his socks and throwing them outside, as well.

He reached inside his backpack and withdrew a pack of wipes. He threw them at Fort. For a moment, the other stared at him but then proceeded to wipe his feet.

“Actually, those were for your hands since they should be clean so you can eat.”

“I ate.”

Collin shook his head. He removed the pot with meat from the place where it was hidden and handed it to Fort, along with a towelette.

This time, there were no more questions. Fort took the food and began eating in silence.

“There’s some sauce, too. I made it.”

Fort grunted and continued to eat. Collin stood up and walked out. He saw the thrown boots and socks and picked them up to put them to one side, away from the door.

“Who made you the housewife?”

That was Fort, of course.

“No one, and I’m just doing this because your behavior can reflect badly on both of us.”

Fort offered only a small grunt. “Good food,” he said shortly.

To his surprise, Fort went behind the tent, and soon there was the sound of water running. Collin rushed to see what was going on. Calmly, Fort was brushing his teeth and washing his face, using a kind of bag he had hanging from a low branch.

“If you want to use it, go ahead,” Fort offered.

Collin just nodded. Most probably, Fort had been away to fill that bag with water.

“It can be used like a shower, too,” Fort explained as Collin returned with his brush and toothpaste.

“Handy,” he commented.

It felt good to freshen up, Collin thought as he washed his face thoroughly. “Wait, is this water safe?”

Fort chuckled. “Yeah, it is. It’s from the facilities here. All good now?”

Collin jolted when a warm hand touched the back of his neck. It felt nice.

“I was thinking,” Fort said in a soft voice. “About your bad opinion of me. And I’m going to do something.”

“Oh yeah?” Collin asked sarcastically. “Will you stop being an ass?”

“I have something else in mind,” Fort said, brushing his lips against his ear. “I need to prove that I kiss better than a skunk.”

Oh, right. He came back to that thing over and over. How exactly did he want to prove that?

Oh.

Oh.

Collin stopped, gulped, and moved away from Fort with careful steps. He didn’t have to look over his shoulder to know that he was followed closely.

Chapter Five - Deliciously Weird

His options were limited. Collin stole quick looks around, searching for an escape route. The crew had gone to sleep already, and only the sounds of nature interrupted the silence. His own breathing was annoyingly loud in his ears. Was he crazy enough to get in close quarters with a kissy-kissy monster?

That's right. If he kept ridiculing Fort in his mind, he wouldn't get scared. They didn't have to kiss. Even the thought was utterly ridiculous. Yeah, he could ridicule that idea, too. They would look so silly trying to kiss and all that. Ah, that was the solution. He would just tell Fort that he had joked before and that he was sure that his kissing skills were at least average. There was no need to put them to the test. Actually, he didn't have to do a thing. He could just brush it off as a joke and go to sleep as if he hadn't even heard Fort and what he had said just earlier.

With that decision in mind, he entered the tent and sneaked inside his sleeping bag in under two seconds.

"Good night," he said loudly.

"Waters." Fort's voice was stern, no-nonsense.

"Yes?" Collin was sure he sounded completely normal, maybe a little high pitched, which was stupid, but no, he just imagined things.

"We have unfinished business."

"We do?"

"Yeah."

Collin had turned off the lantern, and they were in almost complete darkness. Still, he could feel Fort moving about.

"I'll shout," he said the first thing that crossed his mind.

"Shout? What for?" Fort sounded amused.

"I can scream so loud --"

Collin gasped when he was caught swiftly, and a warm mouth covered his in an instant. Oh, gawd, was the only thing he could formulate as his brain sank in a sea of endorphins. Fort's tongue was inside his mouth, exploring it. The force of the kiss was making his head spin. He was lying down, but he was falling.

More dangerously, Fort's strong body was over him, pressing him down. Collin was sure he was seconds from losing consciousness for lack of air, but he couldn't care less. The nimble tongue

was darting in and out, teasing him with a promise of another, lewder move. Nothing left to lose. Collin wrapped his arms around Fort's neck and buried his hands into his hair. How much had he longed, in his honest dreams, to do that? Fort's hair was so silky, so nice to touch.

And suddenly, it was over. Fort moved away, Collin felt his arms sliding away, and he could breathe.

"So, am I better than a skunk?"

Of course, Fort was mocking him. Fuck, he was even laughing, the ass! Collin felt his cheeks on fire, but no one could see his shame.

"Well. Don't I least deserve an answer?"

"Screw you, Killin," Collin mumbled and turned on his side, as far away from his tent mate as he could.

"Is that a promise?" The teasing in Fort's voice was off the charts.

"In your dreams."

"Hmm, then I should get sleeping. Aren't you going to wish me nice dreams?"

"I wish the bedbugs will bite you," Collin threw venomously.

Fort laughed. "So, lesson learned, Waters?"

What lesson? That Fort knew exactly how to brush his lips over his partner's mouth, just right, starting little fires everywhere?

Collin pulled the sleeping bag over his head. "Yeah," he admitted with reluctance. "You're better than a skunk, and I'll never again compare you with one."

"Thank you." Fort sounded so cheerful Collin wanted to smack his face with a pillow. Too bad, he hadn't brought one.

There was a moment of silence during which Collin could hear his heart beating wildly. Could Fort hear it, too?

"Good night, Collin," Fort said softly.

Collin. Not Waters. But he wouldn't be so silly to believe that the bully wanted to bury the hatchet. No, he would be on his toes from now on because Fort Killin had obviously upgraded his bully game and was now using sophisticated methods of making fun of him.

But that kiss. Collin curled inside his sleeping bag and tentatively touched his lips. The story they could tell. He shivered. No, that wasn't right. He had been kissed before.

Not by Fort Killin, though.

No, not by him. But why was it so hard to recall any other kiss he had gotten in his life right now?

Collin groaned when demonic sounds of some hard rock tune penetrated his ears. What the hell? Had he changed his alarm and couldn't remember? But why would he --

“Rise and shine, princess.”

Collin froze when he felt clearly a slap landing on his ass. Filled with righteous indignation, he began fumbling with his sleeping bag. It took him about thirty seconds to extract himself from it, and by then, Fort was already outside, and Collin had no one to yell at.

Whatever. The ass would get an earful the soonest Collin managed to find the right moment. Now, he needed to take care of more pressing matters.

He winced as he stared at his morning wood, peeking above the waistline of his boxers. “Down, boy,” he whispered. “You’re just confused and need to take a leak.”

Relief flooded him when he noticed Fort wasn't anywhere in sight. Quickly he grabbed a pair of tracksuit pants and a t-shirt and went outside. Aware of his hair being a bird's nest, he opted for priorities nonetheless.

He hurried away from the tent, hoping for a good spot fast. As he took out his still hard cock, he groaned at the sensation of touching it. “Dude, you need to get your priorities straight. All right, just a little.”

Hopefully, he was as far as possible from their little camp, and he could do that. He only needed to think of the kiss from last night ... No, he wouldn't think of that. And he wanted to make that erection disappear, not give in to its demands. What he needed was to think of something sad, the last episode of the medical drama he was watching --

“Seriously?” He peeked at his cock, still standing proud like a ship's mast. “Not even the thought of tropical parasites can convince you to chill?”

He gave it a few more tugs, and finally, the recounting of medical tests involving exotic parasites did its work. It felt nice to piss, although the pressure was too damn high. He shook it a couple of times and pushed it back into his boxers.

“For a guy this skinny, you’ve got quite the snake there.”

Collin raised his eyes. What wasn't he even that surprised anymore? “We’re in the middle of nowhere, surrounded by trees, and I still bump into you. And were you spying on me?”

Fort shrugged. "I just happened to be around."

"Sure. Hey, did you just watch me piss?" The actual meaning behind Fort's words just hit him. "And did you check out my dick?"

Another shrug was the reply. "Don't be so pissed." A short laugh followed. "I can show you mine in exchange."

Collin rolled his eyes. "Like I'd want to see that."

"Why? Would you rather want to see a skunk's willy?"

"Killin, you missed your career, man. You could've been a standup. Such a fun act, I might just die laughing."

"I'm not joking. If you want to see my cock --"

"I wouldn't finish that sentence if I were you," Collin warned.

"What? Will you kick me or punch me?"

No, that wasn't what worried Collin. The kiss from last night was enough torture. He didn't need the image of a perfect cock to slap on the guy. Hmm, a cock slapping Fort ... preferably his face ... That was actually funny. He grinned.

"You're thinking of something dirty," Fort said.

"Am not," Collin protested and turned on his heels.

"My offer still stands," Fort called after him.

He could break into a sprint, but that wasn't dignifying. Willing his mouth to keep shut, he increased his pace. Clearly, Amanda and Frank hadn't been in the right mind to put him together with Fort. There was a small chance to end up strangling the guy for real.

Collin couldn't stop staring. It appeared that everyone had decided to find something to do and leave him to cook by himself. Well, not exactly by himself, as Fort was there, busy with stocking the fire.

The guy lacked modesty. He pranced around shirtless, in nothing but a pair of shorts. More than once, Collin had sneaked a peek to observe the bulge in front, contoured quite well by the soft fabric. Did Fort even know how he looked like?

He moved his eyes away. If there was a chance to have the lunch ready before anyone returned, he needed to stop drooling over Fort walking around half-naked.

“You never really liked sports,” Fort said, breaking the silence.

“And? Is that a crime or something?”

“You look like you work out.”

Was that a compliment? In all truth, Collin did work out because he liked looking good. Plus, he had even taken pride in his abs just the other day. Fort had even touched them. Just the thought made a small frisson course through his body. “Yeah. Like I told you.”

“It must be a pain to keep so lean.”

Were they making small conversation now? “Not really. I eat sensibly. And I don’t want to bulk up or anything. I like the way I look. I mean my boyfriend likes me like this. Henry --” He stopped abruptly. How many times in the last year had he needed to correct himself that Henry was no longer his boyfriend?

“Henry? The karate expert slash CEO?”

Ah, fuck, he wasn’t supposed to give the imaginary boyfriend a name, and now Fort thought Henry was the guy. “Yeah,” he replied. Now he had to dance to the tune he had chosen. But it was easier to remember this name rather than a random one.

“I hope he didn’t make you sign a clause that you need to keep the same weight while being together.”

Collin grunted. “I take back what I said about you having a future as a comedian. That wasn’t even remotely funny.” He took the food to the cooking station.

“You know, you’re a pretty awesome cook.”

“Thank you,” Collin said primly.

“The sauce from last night, it was pretty crazy. I’ve never eaten something like that.”

Collin’s heart swelled with pride. “It’s not difficult to make.” While he cooked, he launched into explanations and anecdotes related to his work in the kitchen. It took him a solid few minutes to realize that Fort was listening to him intently. “So, being a cook is pretty boring.”

“Aren’t you a chef?”

“Not yet, but I plan to become one. It would be good for business, too.”

“I want my own firm,” Fort said.

How come they could be so normal? Collin couldn’t believe he was so at ease around Fort.

“That’s good. I mean, to have ambitions in life.”

“I have a few of them,” Fort admitted. “One of them I hope to attain on this trip.”

Collin wanted to know more about that, his ears perking up, but the campsite suddenly flooded with the guys and girls coming back from their explorations. What could be Fort’s ambition for the trip? Suddenly, he had an ardent need to find out.

“Guys, we found the perfect site for skinny dipping,” Amanda announced to them. “We’ll all go tonight and bathe naked!”

Collin made a funny face. “Seriously? I hope you guys aren’t going to turn it into an orgy because I’ll obviously be the odd man out.”

Amanda patted his shoulder and sniffed the food. “Damn, Collin, everything that comes out of your hands is solid gold. I wouldn’t bet on you being the odd man out, though,” she quickly whispered into his ear.

“Frank, your future bride is planning an orgy,” Collin said out loud.

Amanda punched him in the shoulder. “It was supposed to be a surprise,” she joked.

Frank hugged her and lifted her high. “An orgy, darling?” he asked in a phony accent. “But we just had one last week.”

Collin smiled. They were so good together. If he could only find someone like that, to complete him, that would be everything. But he was happy for them and could barely wait for the wedding.

His thoughts pulled him back to Henry. Just loving someone wasn’t enough; it made him mad that he hadn’t realized for one moment how one-sided things had been. Next time, he would walk in into whatever new relationship he would have with his eyes wide open.

Great. He had managed to make himself sad. Forcing a smile, he began to fill up plates. Cooking always made him feel good and happy, but, apparently, he had a knack to make himself cry over spilled milk.

A warm hand touched his shoulder. “Hey, are you okay?”

Collin was surprised to find himself staring into Fort’s beautiful eyes from up close. “Yes. Sure. I mean, why wouldn’t I be?”

“You look like you’re about to cry.”

Collin bristled and moved away from the touch. “I’m not. Just take a place somewhere and play nice to the others.”

“I always do that.”

“Then why do they hate you?” Collin wished he could absorb the words back into his stupid mouth as soon as they left it.

Fort’s face fell. “Are you talking about the people here?” He looked over his shoulder.

Collin felt dread growing exponentially. “No, no, I just said something stupid. The people here love you. Yeah, they’re mad about you. Now go.” He pushed Fort gently, but the guy didn’t move. Then he tried harder, only to end digging his heels into the ground to no effect.

Fort kept looking over the others. Then he turned abruptly toward Collin. “I’m good. I can find something to eat on my own.”

All right, he had now gone and done it. Collin took off his apron, put it over Amanda’s shoulder on his way out, and stomped after Fort. Why did he have to walk so fast with his impossibly long legs? Now Collin almost broke into a sweat while running after him.

He managed to fall in line with Fort when they were no longer within earshot of the camp. “Why are you running away?”

“I’m not keen on eating side by side with people who hate me.”

“Are you going to let yourself be bullied? Stand your ground,” Collin said. Damn, keeping up with Fort was a feat of endurance.

“Ah, so you agree that they hate me.”

“No, I don’t. It’s an exaggeration, okay?”

Fort stopped suddenly. “Do you hate me, Collin?”

Oh, now that was a tough question. “I wouldn’t go that far. I mean, I don’t really like you, but hate? Come on, that’s too strong a word.”

“You let me kiss you.”

Wow. Were they going to talk about the kiss now?

“I didn’t have much of a choice, did I?” Collin said defensively. “You pushed your tongue inside my mouth --” *and it felt so good* “and then I couldn’t breathe --” *didn’t really want to* “and you just made it so ... fucking sexy --”

Had he said the last bit out loud?

“Sexy?”

Collin was so sure he was blushing right now. Could it be that the ground was merciful enough to open under his feet and swallow him up? He hoped for too much.

Fort got closer.

Collin took one step back. "Don't come near."

"Why? I'm not going to do anything to you. Anything you wouldn't want." The smirk on Fort's face said it all.

He was in trouble, deep, deep trouble. The muscles in his face were moving on their own because he was pretty damn sure that his mouth was opening, allowing Fort to do the same thing he had done last night. He staggered, although this wasn't Fort's strong attack from before, but something rather ... sweet.

Steadied by hard hands that grabbed his ass, he had no other choice but to let himself be kissed. If that were the case, then he would be in his rights to deny everything later, but he was getting involved, kissing back and tasting Fort's mouth, which, by anyone's standards, had to be pure heaven because he couldn't remember feeling anything like that in his entire life.

He gasped for air as soon as he managed to push Fort away from him. Not much since the guy still had his hands planted firmly on Collin's ass and showed no sign of wanting to let go. His eyes were glassy, and his parted lips were moist and red from kissing. It was such a good look on him that Collin felt his knees buckling under him.

"Easy," Fort whispered, blowing hot air over his face as he leaned in.

Collin managed to pull back farther. "Um, what are we doing?"

"Something ... sexy," Fort replied with a grin.

"But you're straight," Collin pointed out.

"I can't help myself if it's you."

The answer gave him pause. "Is this an elaborate ploy to bully me?"

"Bully you? No," Fort denied, and he looked hurt.

Well, Collin wouldn't fall for such a cheap act. "I won't let you."

"That's not what I'm doing." The satisfied grin from earlier was gone. In its place, a frown was growing.

Collin pushed against Fort's chest hard enough to make his intentions known. "I have no idea why you're doing this --"

"I like ... kissing you." It looked like Fort needed to gather his strength to utter a few words.

“Of course you do. I’m very kissable,” Collin retorted. “But still, it doesn’t mean we should. It’s wrong.”

“Says who?”

Collin closed his eyes. That was a legit question? Who said that it was wrong for a straight, handsome man to kiss a cute gay guy - that was him - under the circumstances? What circumstances? *This is not a frigging porn flick!* Straight guys, in real life, were just that. A headache and a ...

Perfect walking wet dream, his mind filled in the blanks as his eyes slid over Fort’s face, the full lips he had just kissed - who needed a reminder? - the muscular naked chest, all the ridges of an abdomen that was a complete waste on an accountant --

“Waters, you’re something,” Fort said through his teeth.

“I have no idea what you mean by that.”

“You’re looking at me like you want to lick me all over. It’s fucking maddening, you know?”

Collin scratched the back of his head. Fort moaned. “And stop doing that.”

“Doing what?”

“Being so frigging ... deliciously ... weird.”

“Weird? I’m weird?”

“In a good way.”

“There’s no good way to be weird. Weird is weird. You know what? Let’s chill. And come back and eat with the others. If anyone gives you a hard time, I’ll deal with them, all right?”

Fort looked impressed. “You’re going to protect me?”

“Yes,” Collin replied, completely unfazed. “You need it, clearly. You’re way too fragile. All I said was a stupid little lie, all right, an exaggeration, and you stomped away, like a kid.”

“All right then. I’ll accept your help. Will you hold my hand?”

Collin rolled his eyes, but he was happy for diverting the danger so quickly. He deserved an Oscar for his performance. Fort Killin didn’t need to know how much he enjoyed their kisses. They were addicting, and making out with a straight boy who would never be with him was the opposite of everything Collin wanted.

“No, I won’t hold your hand. You’re a big boy.” He turned on his heels.

“Yeah, you keep saying. But how can you tell if you don’t let me show you?”

“Show me what? Killin, get moving,” Collin bristled instantly. “They’re going to eat everything if we don’t hurry.”

He could swear Fort was smiling but didn’t risk looking. At this point, looking at him at all would be extremely dangerous.

Chapter Six - What You Know And What You Don't

“So, he just called me weird,” Collin concluded.

Right after the meal, he had been summoned for a briefing in Amanda's tent. Frank was grinning and sat in a corner, taking great pleasure in his predicament. Amanda played an inquisitor's role with the grace of a real-life bully, and Collin, well, he was just very uncomfortable, but he couldn't lie to his friends.

Omission wasn't lying; he convinced himself. He had said nothing about being kissed by Fort and feeling like on cloud nine because of that. He had settled for explaining that it was weird as fuck that he was the one taking Fort's side, while everyone else behaved like he had leprosy or something. So he just took care of the general harmony that was supposed to be the mark of that unique week in their lives.

“Collin, you're keeping things from us,” Amanda said and offered a sweet, cunning smile. “He didn't just call you weird. What else did he say?”

Yes, Fort had said something else, something that had definitely sounded weird. “Ah, yes. He said I was deliciously weird.”

Frank burst into laughter.

“Hey, aren't you supposed to be the good cop here?” Collin protested, surprised by his friend's reaction.

“I'm not the bad cop,” Amanda retorted. “So he called you delicious.”

“No, deliciously weird, which is a strange semantic construction but doesn't contradict the fact that he still insulted me when all I was trying to do was help. And won't you tell me already why you're all a bunch of gremlins toward him?”

Amanda waved like such details were not important. “With you, Collin, people need to do the turn around dance.”

“What's that supposed to mean? And really, have you even thought that I might just end up strangling Fort Killin on this trip when you invited him?”

“It crossed our minds,” Frank said with a cheerfulness that was quite suspect.

“But we knew you wouldn't.” When Amanda was using her motherly tone on him, something was off. “What you know is not what you don't know.”

“What's that? A riddle? Are you the Sphynx now?”

Amanda patted his shoulder. “We just love you very much. Despite the fact that you’re deliciously weird.”

Frank snickered. Collin rolled his eyes. “Is this little interrogation over? People have things to do.”

“Like getting ready for tonight?”

“You mean, the orgy by the lake?”

“Hey, we’re not switching partners, so don’t worry about the orgy aspect,” Amanda joked. “Just make sure to look the sexiest you can be.”

“Aren’t we all going to be naked? What exactly am I supposed to do to boost my sexiness?”

“Exactly.”

Clearly, Amanda had gone and had one screw unscrewed because she made little to no sense.

“What if I’m not coming? Someone has to wash the dishes after dinner,” Collin said defensively.

“No. You’re coming. Your happiness is more important than the dishes.”

“Prancing naked around a bunch of straight people is not exactly a fantasy of mine,” Collin explained.

“We’ll see about that.”

Collin narrowed his eyes. “Are you trying to set me up with Fort? Fort Killin? Amanda --”

“C,” Amanda started, and her eyes filled with fondness, “we should --”

“Let him figure it out by himself,” Frank interrupted.

Frank never interrupted Amanda. Unless, of course, he wanted her to turn into a mantis and bite his head off. Much to his surprise, Amanda said nothing. For only a moment, because the next one, she said without taking her eyes off him, “You’re right about this one.”

“I have no idea what setup you must have concocted while I was innocently preparing for this trip, but I can assure you that nothing will happen between Fort and me.”

“Did we say anything?” Amanda pinned him with an intense stare.

Right. They hadn’t said anything of the kind, so he was just letting his mouth running ahead of him. Now they probably thought he was just smitten about Fort and imagined things. “Hey, why are you spying on me then? And Fort? And why were you hoping that we kissed?”

Amanda exchanged a brief look with Frank. “You said it. You might just turn murderous on Fort, so we need to keep an eye on you.”

“Well, I won’t do anything of the kind. Could you please stop spying on me?”

Amanda was about to say something, but Frank hooked one arm over her shoulders and pulled her into a hug. Collin was almost sure that he also whispered something into her hair, too.

“You two are plotting something.”

“We just want everyone to have fun on this trip,” Amanda explained. “You’re free to go, C.”

“Ah, so I was detained,” Collin replied.

“Just shortly, and for your own good.”

He shrugged and got up from Frank’s cot. “You two are weird all right. Is it because the wedding is getting near?”

Amanda stood up and kissed his cheek. “Just have fun on this trip, C, okay?”

“Sure.”

It was an easy promise to make. However, it was harder to keep it since he couldn’t fathom why Fort liked kissing him, and his friends thought a bit of skinny dipping would make him happy. Jumbled thoughts weren’t happy thoughts. They were just like him, weird.

Deliciously weird?

No, just plain weird.

Collin crouched by the lake, pretending to have trouble with the laces on one of his kicks. Why on earth had he left himself convinced to take part in that? Everyone was already in the water, their clothes abandoned on the shore. Their white bodies emerged now and then, and laughter and cheerful shouts filled the air.

Maybe he could take part in the fun, after all. Thank God, that was no orgy, although one couldn’t always know with Frank and Amanda. They were pranksters of the worst kind, not that Collin had ever been at the receiving end of their setups.

Fort wasn’t there.

And what? Disappointed? Did you want to see his schlong or something?

Well, it had crossed his mind, and after that second kiss, the maddening, amazing second kiss they had shared, he was shaken. For the good of his sanity, he had avoided Fort's company, dreading and hoping for the moment they would both go skinny dipping with the rest of the group.

But Fort had magically disappeared, or Collin hadn't looked enough for him. And the thought that he was somewhere in the nearest town, watching strippers flaunting their goods, came to mind again.

Of course, what better way to cure bi-curiosity than watch almost naked women? There was no way in hell Fort was honest about liking to kiss him. It had to be his memory playing tricks on him. There was just no way --

"You didn't strike me as the modest type."

He had been so lost in thought that he had missed hearing Fort. Collin turned his head to offer a well-aimed reply, and his eyes came level with --

His mouth became the desert. His eyes must have tripled in size, and they were now out of his head. There, right there, the most beautiful cock he had ever seen resting on top of a pair of gorgeous --

"Take a picture, Waters. It will last longer."

Collin's eyes returned to their sockets. His mouth began secreting saliva again. And he got to his feet. "Killin, stop flaunting your cock. Have you ever thought no one wants to see your shlong like that, in their face?"

"Not really." Fort shrugged and crossed his arms over his chest.

Oh, no, he wouldn't make the mistake of staring anywhere under the chin. The evening was setting, so he couldn't see Fort's eyes well, but he had to stoically endure the temptation to stare at the naked god in front of him.

"Aren't you going to get naked, too?" Fort drawled the words as if the mere idea had to be funny, for some reason.

Collin couldn't allow Fort to intimidate him. He had gone all this way and, well, he wouldn't spoil everyone's fun. Not that they cared, he noticed as he stared at the noisy group frolicking in the water.

"Don't tell me you're scared," Fort whispered and leaned forward, blowing hot air over his face.

Collin didn't step back, not because he wanted to stand his ground, but because he couldn't move. He was, undoubtedly, under a spell. Fort Killin was a freaking wizard. All he lacked was a pointy hat. He stared at him, trying to picture him in a large robe, mumbling incantations.

No, he couldn't. It didn't work.

"I'm wondering what could be crossing your mind," Fort said. His eyes kept dropping.

Collin realized in an instant what the guy was doing. He was staring at his mouth! Boy, the guy was really into kissing. Maybe his girlfriends hadn't been keen on kissing. Maybe they preferred to kiss other parts of him, like --

He couldn't help it. His eyes moved as if they didn't belong to him as rightful vision implements. There was just so much of Fort Killin worthy of kisses.

"Waters, my eyes are up here," Fort teased.

"I know," he replied with a scowl. "You're just distracting, with your whole ... nakednes," he added with difficulty and made a rotating motion with one hand.

Fort chuckled. Collin could feel his breath growing deeper and his skin turning into goosebumps everywhere. Fort didn't need to kiss him to make him turn into a mess. He only had to chuckle, let out a little 'he-he'. How fair was that?

"Distracting? How so?" Fort asked like he didn't know.

Collin scoffed. "Like you don't know."

"I could use some enlightening. I have no idea how a guy like you thinks."

"A guy like me? Do you mean gay?"

Fort didn't appear fazed by the indignation in his voice. "Yeah, gay. Let's start with that. I thought gay guys liked seeing other guys naked. It's basically how attraction works, right?"

Collin pinched the bridge of his nose. "Just because I'm gay, you think I'd ogle anyone?"

"No," Fort replied, as steady as before. "But can you really ignore all this?"

Collin yelped when Fort grabbed his hand and placed it on his chest. "Aren't you full of yourself?" He pulled his hand away. "Now shoo. I need to undress," he added quickly.

Fort threw him a funny look. "What's with you and all this shyness? Everyone else is naked. And I bet you have a sexy body. I can tell by how the jeans stretch on that perfect butt of yours. As for your abs ... you already showed them to me. Ah, is it about your only testicle? But I saw your balls. You have two of them."

Collin wanted to open his mouth and give Fort the verbal lashing of his life, but nothing came out. His mind was overcome by words - sexy, perfect butt - and he couldn't compute whatever was that Fort was doing.

"You have five seconds to get naked," Fort gave him an ultimatum.

"Or else?" Collin dared to ask.

"Or else, I'm grabbing you as you are and throw you in the water."

All right, so he had no time to postpone more the inevitable. Collin pulled the t-shirt over his head and began unbuckling his jeans as he tried to come up with a strategy that involved him getting naked fast and into the water before he could be subjected to more teasing.

"Three," Fort announced.

"Three? What the hell happened with five and four?" Collin protested, rightfully scandalized. "And you claim to deal with numbers. Don't tell me you're into creative accounting or something."

"One," Fort said lazily as a large grin split his face.

In a last effort, Collin managed to get rid of his jeans, underwear, socks, and kicks in one swift move. Damn, just in time. He didn't want to go back to the camp in wet clothes. "Done," he said with satisfaction.

"Good job." Fort showed his teeth in an exaggerated smile and gave him a thumbs up.

Collin rolled his eyes and turned on his heels. This was the part where he rushed into the water and joined the others while he could ignore Fort and his distracting nakedness.

"So nice to watch you go like this," Fort drawled.

Collin stopped. Was this some kind of weird way of bullying someone? He wouldn't have it. Without turning, he began talking. "For your information, I'm perfectly comfortable in my own skin. And you're not my type, anyway. I mean, your body. I mean, everything." Great, now he was losing momentum on how he had started that.

"Because of the CEO boyfriend?" The teasing was no more.

"Yeah. I mean, I do have a boyfriend, so I shouldn't ogle you," Collin replied. "It's called being faithful, you know?"

A heavy arm dropped on his shoulders, making him wince and fight for a moment to keep his balance. What was with Fort and acting so casually toward him? His body was more than distracting now because it was close and warm and hard ...

Collin really needed to get a grip. He ignored Fort and looked away, but they walked side-by-side like they were the best buddies in the world.

“Just to check,” Fort asked, “kisses don’t count, right?”

“What do you mean?”

“In regards to your being faithful.” The words were laid smoothly on hidden laughter.

Collin refused to reply to that. He sprinted, releasing himself from under Fort’s arm, and rushed into the water. What he needed right now was some cold water to make him come to his senses.

It was hard to keep a conversation with anyone since it seemed like they all had the intelligence of three-year-olds all of a sudden and refused to play any game Collin came up with. He kept himself busy while trying to ignore that Fort was somewhere nearby.

Everyone else kept ignoring him, too. Maybe it was a better idea to swim toward the shore, grab his clothes, and make a run for the camp while no one was looking. He had already done everything Amanda and Frank had wanted of him. He had come, seen, and could now leave.

He swam directly into Fort as the decision took shape into his mind.

“What are you doing, Collin? Running away so soon?”

“I don’t have to explain myself to you,” Collin whispered angrily.

“You didn’t reply to my question.” Fort began pushing him slightly to one side.

Collin could do little to fight that off, so he let himself go with the flow for once. “What question was that?” he asked airily.

“About kissing. You surely kiss like no one else with a millionaire boyfriend.”

“Billionaire,” Collin corrected him.

“The word boyfriend should be more important, right?”

“Right,” Collin confirmed. “Well, I’m sorry. I shouldn’t have kissed you. It was a, um, lapse of judgement,” he added brightly, hanging on straws.

Fort circled him and suddenly wrapped his arms around him. “Do you have more of that lapse of judgement left?”

Oh, yes. He had plenty of it. “Listen,” he started.

But just like before, while Fort ignored his words, he tilted his head just at the right angle. He was vaguely conscious of his feet no longer touching the waterbed and his body floating, as strong arms kept him.

And then, again, that smooth, delicious tongue was in his mouth, making him lose the last shred of sanity. Had Fort always kissed like that? In high school, even? Many girls had used to talk about him, but Collin had an inkling that at least some of them were lying to impress the others. While ninety percent of all the girls in their high school dreamed of being Fort's girlfriend, Fort had never shown up anywhere accompanied, be it parties or whatever.

Which, of course, left him as a free for all since anyone could pretend to be his girlfriend. How many times hadn't Collin thought of jumping into that kind of conversation? If they liked to talk about fantasies, he had plenty of his own.

He opened his eyes with difficulty. Fort let go of his mouth, not without grabbing his bottom lip between his and teasing it a little more. "Fort," he whispered, "how many girlfriends have you kissed like this?"

He looked around, only to discover with surprise that they were quite at a fair distance from the group. If Fort had wanted to bring him here to torture him to his heart's content, he had thought it well. There was no way Collin would be able to cry for help.

Especially if his mouth was going to be ravished like that, making it impossible to talk or yell or anything else but kiss back.

"Why are you so curious?" Fort asked. "Do you hear me asking you endless questions about your boyfriend?"

"But," Collin started, "you shouldn't kiss a guy."

"Why?"

"It's like part of the straight guy code or something."

Fort shrugged. "I don't recall ever signing something like that."

Collin sighed. "I don't understand."

"I do." Fort was holding him with one arm wrapped around his waist. He used the other hand to rub Collin's chest and make his breathing hitch in his chest. "Kissing you feels amazing."

"This goes beyond kissing," Collin mumbled. "You're, um, playing with my --" Lost for words, he just pointed at his chest.

"Yes," Fort confirmed. His face was a frown, focused, and hard. "Touching you like this feels amazing, too."

Collin let out a small moan and then bit his lips hard. “Why am I letting you?” he complained.

Fort kissed him. “It must be because you like it, too.”

At this moment, Collin knew that he had to feel awful for cheating on his imaginary boyfriend, push Fort away and run like there was a fire under his ass. Only that the imaginary boyfriend was, obviously, imaginary, he couldn't push Fort away because he was too strong, and that fire wasn't under his ass but inside his belly. It wasn't quite a fire, either, but a delicious flame that spread its warmth throughout his body.

Fort kissed him again, and Collin found himself placing both hands on those fantastic pecs he had admired for so long, giving them a strong squeeze.

Were their cocks touching? Collin was pretty sure that, yeah, they were. There he was, in the most unimaginable situation in his entire life, in his crush's arms – yeah, he had kind of figured to stop pretending that wasn't the case – and kissing with him. And having his cock touch Fort's cock.

That was almost like having sex. Wait, were they going to?

At that precise moment, Fort dropped his hand lower on his ass and grabbed it hard. Well, that left little to the imagination about his intention.

And then, one finger squeezed between Collin's buttocks, searching for something like a home seeking missile.

Fort stopped kissing him all of a sudden. “We should go back.”

Was the dude for real? Collin wanted to scream. Was he the victim of a bully's whims now? Fort was doing nothing but tease him.

“Back?” He swallowed the other words he – not so kindly – wanted to address to that horrible handsome bastard in front of him.

“Yes. We don't want people to think I'm doing something to you, right?”

Right. Like anyone cared. What the hell was Fort thinking?

And why was he acting like some floozy, throwing himself at the guy, as soon as he was paid some attention?

Collin began swimming away from Fort as fast as possible, which was, obviously, not enough because Fort caught up with him right away.

Ugh, the night would be a long one.

Chapter Seven - Why Do You Have To Be Mad?

“Collin,” Fort called after him, as he got busy grabbing his clothes and dressing up, without bothering to wipe the cold water off his skin. “What are you doing?”

“Isn’t it obvious? I’m going back to the camp.” Much to his surprise, Fort began dressing up, too and then walking fast to keep up with him. “The question is: why are you following me?”

“I’m not following you. We sleep in the same tent.”

“And do you really need to leave on my account? You could stay and have fun with the others.”

“They don’t really care for my company, as you must have noticed. You’re the only one who does.”

Collin pursed his lips and began walking fast.

“You’re mad,” Fort pointed out.

“Am not,” Collin retorted.

“You sure are. But why?”

All right. So the asshole wanted to get on his nerves. He wanted fucking answers! After making him hot all over, putting - almost - a finger in his ass, and playing with his nipples. Ah, and kissing him! And then, calling it a night, basically! Of course he was mad!

“I’m going to tell you this just one more time. Read my lips,” Collin said as he pointed his index finger at his mouth. “I’m not mad.”

He hoped the power with which he punctuated each word was enough to get his message across.

“You are,” Fort replied in kind and stared at his lips. “Is it because of something you think?”

“Hey, shouldn’t you ask if it’s because of something you said?” Collin pushed his finger against Fort’s chest, his wonderful hard chest that was enough to give him wet dreams.

Despite the guy’s bad habits. And annoying ability to make him lose his head. Why, oh why, was he such a weakling when it came to Fort Killin? He should have forgotten about him by now, which was good, in a way, because he had to remember what an asshole Fort had been in high school.

“No,” Fort replied firmly. “You always misunderstand me.”

“No way I do that,” Collin protested. “Fine, you can come, but please no more kissing.”

“No more kissing? But why did I do?”

Collin shook his head as he continued to march on. So, Fort thought he could kiss him and then stop whenever he felt like it. And, also, he expected him, Collin, to be happy with that!

No, he wasn't happy with that. Therefore, filled with righteous anger, he would go to sleep tonight and forget all about dreaming about Fort, and his perfectly chiseled body, which he now had seen and thus was cursed to remember in the finest, knee-buckling, gut-mushing, dream-wetting ... detail. Dream-wetting? He needed to get his head checked.

Damn, Collin stopped for a moment. He hadn't gotten to look well; that meant that all sorts of details were lacking. Did Fort had checkerboards on top of that delicious six-pack? Collin remembered something vaguely when he had run his hands over --

He shook his head, sighed, and puffed his cheeks. The whole point of being mad was to forget about Fort.

"Do you know what I think?"

Collin set his jaw hard. "If I want to know that, I'll ask."

"You're mad at yourself, and it's because of that boyfriend you keep talking about."

That was right! He had the perfect escape strategy, and all at his fingertips. "Yes, you're correct," he said brightly. "I'm mad because I shouldn't be flirting with you when I have a loving boyfriend at home."

"You're lying," Fort said through his teeth.

Collin stole a sneaky look at him. For a moment, he wanted to gloat. "Look at you, mad and all. Why do you have to be mad? And I'm not lying," he added quickly. "My boyfriend is very much real." There, it had to be said.

"I wasn't talking about that," Fort replied sharply. "It would be nice if you could be honest for a moment."

Collin touched his nose. Hopefully, it hadn't started to grow. At this pace, he wouldn't be able to lead a normal life. As Pinocchio, his sex appeal would probably drop off the surface of the Earth. For sure, some divine punishment waited for him, somewhere. "I am perfectly honest with you. I don't even know why I kissed you. I told you; you're just not my type."

"You didn't kiss me. I kissed you. And you let me," Fort said in an accusing tone.

"All right, all right, let's not get into details. However, it should stop."

"All right," Fort replied in kind.

They walked in silence to the tent. Collin felt it like a burden, but it wasn't like he wanted or could strike a normal conversation. The worst part was that he felt guilty over how Fort was feeling right now.

What did he truly know of what Fort felt? He knew absolutely nothing.

And it could all be an act, anyway. But to what end?

They were still not talking. They had dried off their bodies - while Collin had tried hard not to look - and now they were each one in his sleeping bag.

And they were still not talking.

"Fort," Collin said tentatively.

"Hmm?"

There was so much aggressiveness in that simple sound - it could hardly be called a word - that Collin decided not to follow with the apology that had been on the tip of his tongue as soon as he had realized Fort was upset.

"Good night," he said quickly.

"Tell me about your boyfriend," Fort said suddenly.

The dude suffered from a severe case of selective hearing and understanding.

"All right," Collin gave in. Since he hadn't apologized - for what, exactly, he wasn't sure - he could at least indulge Fort for a little while. "What do you want to know? I told you everything worth telling."

"Worth telling? That he's a billionaire who speaks foreign languages and practices martial arts?"

"Yeah," Collin confirmed but shifted in his place. It was a no-brainer that Fort disagreed with him.

"Tell me about him as a person. Does Henry treat you right?"

Collin felt his mouth clamping shut. If he thought about it well, Henry hadn't treated him right most of the time. He had been too blind to see it. Amanda had tried to tell him a few times, but he had gotten mad. After that, she had said nothing else, and when he had insisted, she had told him that she didn't want something like that to cost them their friendship.

"No," he whispered without thinking, while the unpleasant memories flooded his mind.

“What?” He could tell by the rustling sounds that Fort was adjusting his position, too. “How come you stay with him, then?”

Great. The aggressiveness was back. Collin bristled; he wouldn't cry on Fort's shoulder about how Henry had been mean to him, would he? “Hey, how about you tell me about those girlfriends of yours instead?”

“Girlfriends?”

“Yeah, you must have had like a hundred.” Collin began to talk rapidly, wishing for a quick avoidance of the Henry topic. “Do they kiss you everywhere?”

Fort was speechless. Collin cursed inwardly. Why the hell was he letting his mouth run like that? In his desperation to make Fort forget about what he had said about Henry, he just ended up in another trap, laid out by no one else but himself.

“Do you want to kiss me everywhere, Collin?” The question was spoken quietly, and it felt as if Fort was holding his breath.

Collin pulled the sleeping bag zipper as high as he could and hid inside. “Good night.”

“Hey, am I supposed --”

“I said good night,” Collin interrupted Fort and whatever he wanted to say.

A slow chuckle followed. Collin squeezed his eyes shut. Damn that chuckle.

Through some miracle, he had managed to fall asleep. His dreams had been filled with a certain someone, sleeping one foot away, but all in all, he felt rested. He yawned and stretched and then noticed Fort.

A still sleeping Fort, whose impressive body lay there, almost completely naked. Save for a pair of shorts, he wasn't wearing anything else.

The first impulse was to look.

The second was to look closer.

The third wasn't needed. Collin was already as close as he could be without risking waking up his tent mate.

First, he needed to check those checkerboards. Oh, yes, they were right there. Fort was sleeping on his back, with his arms spread out, so Collin could stare to his heart's content. And, damn,

those abs were absolutely fantastic. He was dying to touch them, but he didn't really have a death wish.

Well, it wasn't about that. High school football player Fort would have eaten him at breakfast for something like that. Mature, accountant Fort was a different breed. But Collin wanted to err on the side of caution, just in case.

He sighed in reverence as he took in the perfect pecs and then the round shoulders and impressive biceps. Now, while he still had the chance, he could stare a little more. Like at Fort's legs. No, he didn't need to dally.

There was that perfect, juicy bulge right in front of him. Of course, it was covered by the shorts, but Collin wanted a good look, unlike the day before.

The biggest problem was how to do it without waking up the owner of the said juicy bulge. Moving slowly and trying his best not to make a sound, he searched into his backpack for a pencil.

A triumphant smile stretched his face; he could feel it. Armed with the pencil, he got close again. With infinite care, he slid the pencil under one leg of the shorts and began lifting it. Ah, he was close. Collin licked his lips. He was so close. His dreams were somewhat incomplete, and he didn't want to struggle with details.

He glimpsed the head of the snake. It looked so cute, asleep like that. And still frigging huge. Collin had to admit that Fort had a porn star's cock. That thing was the stuff dreams were made of. That kind of thing was the best to start the day with; Collin would make it his wallpaper if he could.

His wrist was suddenly caught in a vice-like grip. He yelped and dropped the pencil.

Oh, God, oh, God, he had been caught red-handed! What the hell was he going to do?

"What are you doing, Waters? Enjoying the view?"

Why did he have such a sexy voice, barely out of bed? Collin shuddered. "Hmm," he replied, trying to gain back some of the dignity lost just earlier when he had yelped like a little girl.

"Could you, please, unhand me?"

"No. I caught you in the act. Were you busy staring at my cock?"

"No! No!" Collin protested and cringed inwardly at how phony his voice sounded. "I had just lost my ... pencil?"

"You're asking me?" Fort chuckled.

Collin wanted so much to slap one hand over Fort's mouth and keep him from chuckling like that. However, he was in no position to do so. The dude wasn't kidding; he held his wrist so tightly Collin could feel his hand getting numb. "Do you mind? My blood needs to get flowing in my fingers," he pointed out.

"No, unless you apologize."

"Apologize? What for? I wasn't looking!"

"Stop being a coward and a liar. And grab my cock."

That gave Collin total pause. "Will that count as an apology?"

"Yes. Do it, and I'll let your wrist free."

It was a fair trade, although Collin could tell that he was red to the tip of his ears. With his free hand, he grabbed the snake and stared at it. Was it growing? He was fascinated with it. Fort took his other hand and put it under the other. "There. No move them up and down."

"Hmm," Collin mumbled while he began moving his hands. Until his brain finally got up with him. He let go of Fort's cock like it was hot iron. Which it was, but still. "What the hell, dude?"

"I should ask you the same thing." Fort laughed out loud.

Collin wasn't sure he could handle a conversation on that topic, so he rushed out of the tent. Mumbling under his breath, he headed over to the facilities, brushed his teeth, combed his hair, washed his face, combed his hair again, and then decided that he still needed to face Fort. In his rush out, he hadn't realized that he was in his night shorts and a t-shirt.

There was something strange. How come no one else was there, with him, washing? He hadn't overslept, either, and –

He marched outside and stared at their camp. The tents were there, part of the things people left all over the place, the cooking area ...

But, what was the most important thing, the entire camp was deserted. There was no one there. Collin blinked a few times and began going from tent to tent. Where on earth were they? When he reached Amanda's and Frank's tent, he saw a stick-it on the door. He took it, feeling unnerved. Could it be they had gotten kidnapped or something? Was that a ransom note?

"We left on a small trip to the waterfall, which some people in the area told us it's nearby. Please wait for us with dinner, C. Loves, Amanda and Frank," he read out loud. "Are you fucking kidding me?" he yelled at no one in particular.

"Where is everyone?"

He didn't have to turn to know who was talking. There were only two people left in the entire camp, he and Fort. And his best friends had had the nerve to leave him behind, without one word of explanation. He turned the note on the other side. Two words were written there – 'have fun'.

"Fuck," he said.

"Well, what's with the note?" Fort grabbed it from his hand, read it with a frown on his face, and then relaxed. "Ah, so they left us in charge."

"No," Collin said and grabbed the note back. "They left without telling me anything, and they put me in charge of dinner, the scumbags."

"Well, you seem to enjoy cooking. I doubt they meant anything by that."

Collin sometimes had this crazy wish to have a tail. Not just any tail, but a cat's tail, so that he could swing it hysterically and let others know he was pissed. "What the hell is in the water here?" he continued. "These guys turn into gremlins overnight, Amanda into the Sphynx --"

"The Sphynx?"

"Yeah, she gave me a riddle. Or said some words she believed wise. Something like that. And you," he turned into Fort, "you are suddenly bi-curious!"

Fort pointed both his hands at his chest. "Me? Bi-curious?"

"Yeah," Collin replied. "Why would a straight hottie like you want to kiss me?"

Fort grinned like the biggest idiot on earth. "Do you think I'm hot?"

Collin sighed. He was much in the business of sabotaging himself lately. "Who wouldn't think that, straight, gay, or whatever? Don't tell me you don't know that." He glared at Fort to make his point clear.

Fort moved closer, putting him on guard. "I don't know it. Please, tell me more."

Collin rolled his eyes. "Stop playing, all right?"

"Sorry, Collin, but you started it, this time. I had every intention to let you off the hook until you stared at my cock this morning."

It was easy to remain lost for words, especially since Fort, quite effortlessly, hugged him and kissed him.

Melting, melting, melting. That was everything Collin could handle. Would it take long to turn into a puddle on the ground? Like a witch, or Olaf, the snowman. None of the options were attractive, he had to say.

And he wasn't melting. He wasn't even falling because Fort held him tightly. Damn, he had to be such a fantastic lover. Collin couldn't recall Henry ever holding him like that like he was precious and fragile.

Well, at least Fort didn't think of his mouth as being something fragile. He was making a meal out of that kiss, too, and his tongue was maddening. Also, he wasn't completely mindful about his teeth, so Collin could feel small bites teasing his lips now and then.

Fort released him slowly. "It looks like we have the camp all to ourselves. How about we take care of things around here?"

Collin sobered up. "The scumbags leave us behind so they can go and explore a waterfall somewhere, and you want to tidy up after them?"

Fort shrugged. "I don't know. The situation suits me. It was too crowded anyway."

"It suits you? But --"

A finger pressed against his lips silenced him. "Hush now. Or I'll start thinking that you're afraid to be alone with me."

"Am not," Collin mumbled against Fort's finger.

Fort let him go, and Collin fought for a moment to balance himself.

"It looks like there are plenty of things to do. They really left a mess after last night."

Collin looked around. Collecting trash after his inconsiderate so-called friends wasn't high on his list of priorities right now. Asking Fort more about those kisses and if he had more where they came from was on top of that list.

It looked like he needed to wait to pop the question. Fort was already busy, picking up empty bottles and cans. With an exaggerated sigh, he followed his example.

Chapter Eight – On The Nose

They had worked for almost an hour, cleaning up and making breakfast for two. Collin didn't talk much as they ate but stole quick looks at Fort. It seemed that the guy really enjoyed eating, and Collin really liked seeing that. Words of thanks were nice, always, but when he saw people devouring the food he cooked, he found a sense of accomplishment in it that couldn't be equaled by anything else.

“What do you want to do now?” Fort asked after he washed the dishes and handed them to Collin to wipe them dry and store them away.

He took a moment to understand the question. “I don't know.”

“We need to guard the place, as it seems.”

“Well, if they worried about having important stuff stolen, they shouldn't have left,” Collin said with renewed righteous anger.

“Still, they're your friends, right?”

Collin admitted with a sigh, “Yes. Don't mind me. Hey, I've been meaning to ask. How did you end up coming on this trip? I don't recall you ever being close to Amanda and Frank.”

“I bumped into them by accident, not long ago. They asked me to come.”

Collin still felt like there was stuff he couldn't get his head wrapped around. “Just like that?”

Fort nodded. Yeah, something was up. The guy was hiding something. His eyes kept darting sideways.

“That is mighty suspicious,” Collin commented.

“Why?”

Great, those beautiful eyes were now throwing daggers at him.

“How come you're so sensitive?” Collin crossed his arms over his chest. “I have a feeling you're misinterpreting everything.”

“Really? I don't think I'm the one misinterpreting everything,” Fort retorted and mimicked his stance.

Collin tapped his foot. At least, Fort didn't follow him on that one. “I meant nothing by it,” he tried to justify himself. “I mean, by saying that I find it suspicious that Frank and Amanda wanted you on this trip.”

He could see Fort's lips twitching; he didn't know, though, whether it was because the guy wanted to start pouring a string of expletives on his head or just laugh.

"Yet, you said it," Fort pointed out. "And you told me," he added while getting close – way too close for comfort – "that everyone here hates me."

"Hey," Collin put his palms up, facing forward, "I took that back!"

"But it's what you think. That no one likes me. On the other hand, you keep ogling me, telling me that I'm hot --"

"Wow, wow, wow, there." Collin couldn't believe his ears. Was he at fault now? "You're the one who keeps kissing me."

"You're the one who keeps on provoking me, with those kissable lips."

It wasn't easy to protest against that since it was absolutely true. However, Collin decided that wasn't a reason to let Fort have his way and win the argument. "Your lips are way more kissable," he replied. "You should, like, kiss yourself in the mirror or something, if you can't resist kissing someone."

Fort was inches away. No, he was right in his face, and they were staring into each other's eyes. "Is it a competition? Are you jealous of me?"

Collin could hardly breathe. Why did he have to stand so close? And why, oh why, did he have such incredible – yes, totally kissable – lips? It wasn't fair. His eyelids dropped, his lips parted, and he leaned in.

Only to meet nothing but air. Fort had deftly moved away. Collin bit his lips in frustration. "What on earth is wrong with you?"

"It's not funny to be teased, right?"

"Teased? Are you trying to tell me I teased you?"

"Yes."

"When? How?"

"Since forever, and like this." Fort grabbed him, cutting short his struggling to comprehend what the hell he had just been told.

And, of course, he kissed him. There was no proper normal way to reason with the guy. Then he would try a different tactic. Collin wrapped his arms tightly around Fort's neck and kissed back with a vengeance.

They stopped for a moment, breathing hard.

“I’m not the one who’s curious, Waters,” Fort said harshly. “You keep on teasing me because you’re curious about how it would be to do it with me.”

“I haven’t heard a bigger --”

“You’re a liar. You make me want to kiss a liar, and that’s bad. I don’t do that kind of thing.”

“Kissing liars?”

“Yes.”

“Maybe you should start. Maybe it’s not all that bad. Wait, what the hell do you think I’m lying about? It can’t be my boyfriend--”

“You don’t admit that you’re attracted to me.”

Collin’s eyes grew wide. Was that it? Was it truly it? “Okay, fine, I’m attracted to you. I told you, anyone would be.”

“Then stop this game.” Fort was still keeping him in his arms.

“What game?”

“Come with me.”

Collin didn’t protest and didn’t reply. Fort grabbed his hand and made him walk along. It was more like run along since those giant steps were a tough act to follow.

They stumbled inside their tent and landed on Fort’s side. Collin was on top, but any pretense that he didn’t want to be there was gone. “If I admit that I like you and kiss you back,” he asked, his heart suddenly filled with apprehension as he stared into Fort’s eyes, “what happens next?”

“This,” was the reply. Collin sighed as Fort grabbed him by the back of his neck and kissed him deeply. “And this,” he added and began kissing his neck.

It was pure torture. They had to get physical. It was the only way to get rid of that itch in his pants. They were rubbing against each other while struggling to kiss as much of the other as they could.

“Wait, wait, what about my boyfriend?” Collin protested meekly.

“Be fucking honest already, Waters. You wouldn’t do this with me if you were smitten with him. Now, think of that, while I do this.”

What followed was completely unexpected. Collin was pressed on his back, and Fort Killin, Fort friggin' Killin, the guy who had been his dreams' and nightmares' main protagonist for years, was going down on him.

He couldn't recall how his shorts had been removed so fast. All he could think of was the hot mouth on his cock. There was no need for anything elaborate. He was already hard and far gone, and Fort was just sealing the deal with his mouth.

"Fuck, Fort, this is – dude, you're crazy!"

It didn't appear that his protests were considered, not even for a moment.

"Too good," Collin complained and threw one arm over his face. "Why do you have to be so good at everything?"

Fort stopped just for one moment. "I bet you're better," he said in a husky tone.

Collin didn't dare to look at him. He should have done it since his dreams still lacked a significant amount of details, but he didn't dare. "Damn, fuck," he said through his teeth as he threw his head back. "Dude, let go, or I'm gonna --"

He was lost for words, simply because he was beyond believing anything or in anything. Fort was clamping his lips down hard, milking him for what was worth, and it was so indescribable that Collin was sure new words had to be invented.

For what felt like a second or an eternity, he felt delirious with pleasure. His own breathing was loud in his ears, and his hips convulsed repeatedly while Fort held him down. Even that strength with which he was pushed into the sleeping bag blew his mind. He was at the other's mercy, and it was the most liberating sensation he had ever felt.

He kept his eyes closed as his senses began coming back to him. "That was," he managed to say.

"Yes?" There was amusement in that word, and Collin knew he didn't have to be a genius to understand why.

He held up one hand and searched for Fort. He tapped against a shoulder, limply. "You're good. Oh, God, you're good."

"I've never been called that," Fort teased.

"You should be. You're just too good."

Fort moved and aligned their bodies together. He pushed his nose against Collin's cheek playfully. "Don't I get a reward for being that good?"

"Whatever you want," Collin said breathlessly.

“Just a little bit of reciprocation will do.”

“Ah, you want me to suck you off,” Colin said matter-of-factly.

“If it’s not too much trouble.”

The courteous reply was accompanied by a chuckle, that low, sexy chuckle that now sent through Collin nothing else but small delicious shudders tasting of aftermath. “It’s not. But I must warn you. You might be disappointed in my performance after something like this. I really hope you have low standards.”

“Let me be the judge of that. With that mouth, you must be a star.”

It was nice to hear encouragements. Collin had never had any idea Fort would be like that. But truth be told, he had never really known him, he realized. He rolled over and aimed for Fort’s crotch without overthinking. Only remembering that cute snake was enough to get him going.

He gasped when he pulled the shorts away from Fort’s amazing cock. All right, so he hadn’t seen it so hard, and it was, well, daunting.

“What do you think?” Fort lay on his back, his hands under his head, and looked damned satisfied with himself.

Collin had a mind to tease him back and lie about having seen bigger ones, but he was no longer in the mood for that. “I’ve never seen anything like it in my life. Not even in porn.”

“And do you think you can manage?”

Why did Fort have to tease him all the time like that? “Yes, if it’s the last thing I do,” Collin replied with determination.

It was one thing to say something like that and another to get to work properly. Collin placed himself on his belly between Fort’s legs and began sucking on the head. It was so tasty he could die that moment and not care for a moment.

“Oh, damn, Collin, you’re so sexy,” Fort whispered.

Ha! Finally, gone was the teasing! Collin truly wanted to boast, but doing that with a full mouth was impolite, and he took pride in having impeccable table manners. He whimpered while he pushed more of that delicious monster into his mouth. Whether he wanted to believe it or not, he was getting hard again, and his cock was rubbing helplessly against the sleeping bag they lay on.

He could wing it if he tried hard enough. There was friction, but not enough, but his mind was fueled. He was doing more than everything he had ever dreamed of, and all his fantasies couldn’t hold a candle to whatever was happening right now.

Fort began caressing his head. Now that felt nice. Collin wanted to purr like a cat, but he was more like a dog in heat, so he was too busy to care for that. He held on to Fort's cock like it was a ship's mast, one made of the best candy in the world, and his head moved as much as he could.

"Fuck, you're making me lose my mind," Fort said in one last breathless whisper.

Collin didn't have to be told anything about how close Fort was. He could clearly feel it because he was in charge of that cock, and that gave him power. As the cream began pouring out, he lapped at it, savoring it all and indulging in it.

Who knew when he would get the chance to do that again? Or if ever? It was for the best to work the iron while it was hot, and damn, it was hot.

Collin opened his eyes lazily while his tongue still worked Fort's cock. They stared at each other, caught like in a trance.

And suddenly, he became overly conscious of himself. Was he losing his mind? Why on earth was he doing what he was doing?

Now get up and pretend nothing happened.

Oh, sure, now that was such a good strategy that he had to laugh.

"What's funny? Is there something weird about my cum?" Fort asked.

Collin finally pulled himself away from the cock he had worked on until a moment ago. It was a tear-filled goodbye, but only inwardly. "No, no, it's super good. I mean, normal. I mean, like anyone else's."

Fort snickered. "You got a boner. Want me to take care of that?"

Collin put his hands in front and began looking around for his shorts. "No. I think we've done enough."

"For now, at least." Fort pushed himself up and fished Collin's shorts, only to hand them to him.

Ah, so there would be other times. Well, what was he thinking? He shook his head. Fort's cum wasn't just super good; it was addictive. If he started gobbling it up like it was whip cream, he would get in big, big trouble. Maybe he would even end up fat!

"What worries you?" Fort tousled his hair as he moved around.

And flaunted his gigantic, yet cute, cock.

"Nothing," Collin replied.

"You're not regretting this, are you?"

“No, no,” Collin said quickly.

“Good, because I’m not.” Fort crouched by him and kissed him on the nose. “Your mouth is dreamy, Collin. I mean it. Whether it’s to kiss you or have your lips on my cock --”

“I get it.” Collin looked away, pretending to look for clothes. “You were good, too. Super good.”

What a fine, scarce vocabulary. It was all because of Fort and that gentle kiss on the nose. All the time while they had done those naughty things, Collin had held it all together – barely. But now, he was coming undone, and he could not let Fort see that.

Now and then, he touched his nose in a barely conscious gesture. He couldn’t, just couldn’t, take it out of his head how naturally Fort had kissed him like that. It was, strangely enough, a lot more intimate than what they had done earlier. Just thinking of it, in capital letters, was enough to make him blush.

A few feet away, Fort was sunbathing. He had a secretive smile on his face, and Collin wanted so much to sneak closer, grab him, and ask him what reason he had to grin like that. Seriously, he was like a tomcat after visiting the tastiest cream bowl. Which wasn’t that far from the truth, but still.

That wasn’t the most disconcerting aspect, though. Fort had decided that it would be of no consequence if he did that completely naked. He had a thing for no lines tan.

“Are you sure you don’t want to join me?” Fort didn’t open his eyes as he spoke.

Collin looked away. “I’m not good friends with the sun.” It was a lie.

“You look like you’re a bit tanned. It doesn’t look like the kind you get in a tanning booth.”

“Well, yeah, that was before the sun and I got into a fight.”

Fort opened one eye lazily and stared at him. Collin could only think of his plump lips. They looked so yummy, and he was too close. “Don’t be such a sourpuss. Get rid of those clothes and come here.”

“But I’ll be naked,” Collin protested.

“That’s the idea. And I’ve already seen you.”

“And you’re not impressed, I bet,” Collin said tersely.

Fort opened both eyes. This time, the serious look he trained on Collin was no longer playful. “Come here, and I’ll tell you what I think of your body.”

He could protest and run away, but he was curious. What did Fort really think of him? Reluctantly and taking his time, Collin removed his t-shirt. A raised brow and a pointed look let him know that he had to get rid of the shorts, too. With a sigh, he obeyed all the way and then lay on the blanket spread by Fort on the ground, making sure not to make contact.

Naked skin on skin contact. What was he thinking? He casually rested one hand over his cock and placed the other under his head, pretending to be comfortable, and surely failing. For good measure, he decided to keep his eyes closed.

A finger touching his chin gently startled him. “You see,” Fort began speaking slowly, “I think you have the sexiest body I’ve ever seen.”

“And I call bullshit on this one,” Collin replied. Small butterflies were trapped inside his belly, and they were doing a mad hula-hoop dance.

“Here,” Fort said while his finger dropped lower and caressed his neck.

Damn, everywhere Fort touched him, he could feel fire spreading. He had to say something, make him stop, but his mind was empty and dry, just like his lips. He licked them and let out a small exhale in the process.

“You’re so pretty here.” Fort brushed rough fingers over Collin’s nipples.

“Pretty.” Collin snorted. “Where were you when they taught that lesson about guys never liking to be called ‘pretty’?”

“I must have skipped that one.” The airy tone was enough to let him know that there would be no getting through with this dude. “They look so nice. I kid you not, Collin, I’ve never seen prettier ones in my life. I could suck on them all day long.”

Collin shuddered. “You must have made hundreds of girls crazy with this kind of talk.”

“You would be surprised.”

Surprised? By what? Weren’t they hundreds? They were ...what? Thousands? No, he hoped that wasn’t the case unless Fort had suddenly decided after high school to make up for the lost time and hop from one girlfriend to another.

“And then, these,” Fort continued both his speech and his inspection. He caressed Collin’s abs. “They do look like you worked hard to get them.”

“It wasn’t easy,” Collin replied, just for the sake of making conversation, and not being on cloud nine, with no intention to stare down and get height sickness.

“I think your body is amazing,” Fort said, and he seemed honest. “There’s also this fellow down here.”

Collin tried to bat away Fort's hand, but he lost the battle fast. His cock was caught and played with, something he should have planned for, the moment he had decided to join Fort on the blanket.

"Not that I don't like your whole body, but this inventory has already made me like this. Forgive me if I skip to the main dish."

Collin risked opening one eye. "Like this, how?"

Fort offered him a smile. Then, he took his hand and placed it between his legs. Collin whimpered as his fingers wrapped around the hard thing there.

"Don't tell you don't like it. I can tolerate some lies, but not when it comes to this," Fort warned.

"I like it," Collin admitted with a defeated sigh.

"You don't have to start crying about it," Fort said and laughed. "Just come here. Let me comfort you."

How on earth had they ended up in that position? Collin could only blame his friends for it. They had left him behind with Fort, and he couldn't control himself. This time, he didn't even bother to protest. He wrapped his arms around Fort's neck and responded to the kiss with all the pent-up desire from the last eight years or so.

Chapter Nine – Fishnet

Their bodies were slick with sweat. The sound of their kisses was arousing as if they needed more of that. Collin wondered briefly if Fort felt the same, the sensations growing from teasing each other. Their cocks were in perfect alignment, which was strange since Collin was pretty sure his endowment couldn't match, by far, that of the guy pressing him down with his incredible body. Yet, still, somehow, those two understood each other.

And the pressure was so damned impossible to bear. Not in a bad way, and he had to doubt that anything Fort did could be taken like that, but still, hard to deal with, pun totally intended.

He wished for more, but he didn't dare to ask. So he settled for letting himself humped like a human sex doll. He was doing as much humping as he could, too, but it was a feat to do so since he was underneath.

Lost in his own thoughts and the sensations triggered by the constant assault of Fort's lips on his, he missed how he must have sounded.

"I won't fuck you," Fort whispered. "Don't worry."

What? Collin's mind struggled to resurface from the ocean of endorphins it was slowly drowning in.

Ah, so the straight boy didn't want to fuck him! Just fool around!

Wait, he reconsidered, maybe it was because they didn't have any condoms.

However, he insisted, Fort could mean something else by that.

The best solution was to ask. He fought to free his lips that were ravaged once more. "Why?"

Fort didn't look happy with the interruption. "Do you need to ask? You got a boyfriend?"

Of all the explanations in the world, Collin had expected that the least, for no other reason but that he had forgotten about his imaginary boyfriend. Strangely enough, he hadn't thought one iota of Henry, either, although his ex had been a fixture on his mind and a constant presence in his mental tribulations and tortures ever since their breakup.

"Ah, that," he replied, his voice flat and unassuming.

"Yeah? Did you forget about him?"

Wasn't it grand of Fort to judge him when he had been the frigging initiator all this time? Collin felt rightfully annoyed. He pushed against Fort's granite chest until he freed himself. "Well, you seem to have no issue fooling around with me, straight boy. I bet you have at least a dozen girlfriends at home. And yet, you're here, torturing me."

“There are no girlfriends. There isn’t even one,” Fort retorted, but he didn’t do anything to stop Collin from moving away.

“There must be because you’re all judgmental and stuff.”

“I’m not judging you. I’m just not going to fuck you until you’re free. Maybe you should call your boyfriend and tell him you met someone else.”

Fort was basically offering him an easy way out of his lie, but Collin still felt annoyed. Who threw a relationship away just because a hot dude was, suddenly, all over him?

That was not him, he decided, so he had to protect his imaginary boyfriend. If he split with him, it would be on his own terms and wouldn’t include imaginary phone calls. “You’re something, Fort Killin. I’m not going to break up with my boyfriend over you.”

“Why not?” Fort had straightened up, and his eyes were filled with fire.

And his naked body was just as distracting as before. Collin was sure his eyes would get sore only from trying to pull away from that handsome man. “Well,” he started, not really knowing what he wanted to say. “It’s obvious.”

“Is it? How about you enlighten me?” Fort grabbed his knees with his arms, so at least his cock was out of the way.

Collin felt his neurons starting to get back to normal after their earlier endorphin bath. “I’ve been with him for a while now.”

“How long?”

“Three years,” he replied at random.

“I see.” Fort frowned. “And how many mergers have you ruined during this time?”

Collin narrowed his eyes. Was that a trick question? It was definitely a trick question. “None,” he replied.

Fort’s smile was crooked. “So each time your boyfriend had something important to do at work, he sent you away? Is that what you’re saying?”

Fuck. It had been a trick question! “No.” He scowled. “We spend plenty of time together.”

“And yet, the moment I touch you, your cock gets hard like it’s been neglected for years.”

“I’m young,” Collin protested. “My cock gets hard if I bump into the kitchen furniture the wrong way.”

That seemed to tick off Fort. With brusque moves, he got up and walked past Collin, not forgetting to drive his shoulder into him, like the bully he was.

That was it! Collin pressed his lips hard and turned on his heels. “How come you had no problem with my being a cheater until we rubbed our cocks together?”

Fort stopped for a moment. “If you pulled your head out of your ass, you would know what I’m talking about. But I won’t put words in your mouth. This game’s gonna get played the way you want it.”

What was that even supposed to mean? Collin wanted to shout in frustration. First, Amanda, and not Fort, believed themselves riddle makers. “Whatever,” he replied, for lack of having anything wise to say.

Anyway, it was a bad idea to get involved with Fort. It was hallucinating only to think that just minutes earlier, they had done something unthinkable. It was unthinkable because he didn’t want to think of it, not even for a moment.

Lost in the meandering ways of his mind, he missed Fort making himself scarce. That meant he would have to focus on preparing dinner. There were still hours until the traitorous group of friends he had would come back, but he needed something to occupy his mind.

“What are you making?”

He was not that all surprised to hear Fort. Where could he have been all that time? Collin wanted to ask, but it didn’t mean that he would ask. Instead, he shrugged. “Food.”

“Yeah, I can see that. What kind of food?”

“Just food, and don’t worry, I won’t poison you.”

“I’m not thinking of that.”

“What are you thinking of, then?”

“How to apologize to you without losing too much face.”

Collin turned and almost dropped his ladle into the pot. With the skill of a magician, he caught it right in time. “Apologize? What for?”

Fort grabbed the back of his neck and rubbed it while his eyes darted downward. He looked embarrassed, all right. Also, yummy, but that was a secondary thought, and it had to remain that way.

“I went all out on you when I promised to myself I wouldn’t do that. I liked what we did today.”

Collin turned toward his pot, only because he wanted to hide his face. The unthinkable from earlier was taking his mind by storm now, and it wasn’t good. And Fort apologizing was kryptonite, even if he hadn’t clearly apologized, and he had only mentioned that he would have to –

“I’m sorry, Collin. I have no right to tell you what you should do about your boyfriend. That’s totally your decision to make.”

He should have been happy with those words. After all, he had longed to hear them, right? But, as things stood, he wasn’t that sure that he felt any trace of happiness. Actually, he liked it when Fort went all possessive. Even if it was wrong, he was a proud, independent gay guy who didn’t want anyone to tell him what to do.

This apology meant that Fort was taking one step back.

“It’s okay. I mean, you were in your rights to tell me ... whatever, let’s not talk about it.”

“So, what are you making?” Fort came from behind and placed his chin directly on Collin’s shoulder.

These small intimate gestures were making him go insane a little. He could feel Fort so close, the smell of his skin invading and pleasing, an elixir for his senses, and he knew that all those years he had lied to himself. As much as Fort, that Fort from high school, with fists closed, and pursed lips, eyes bleeding fire, had been in his nightmares, he had been in his dreams, too, and that meant only one thing.

He was the worst glutton for punishment in the entire world. Once, because who in their right mind would have a crush on a frigging bully, and two, because he knew that getting entangled in that incredible, unique experience of fooling around with a straight boy could bring nothing good.

Whatever happened to him, he had it coming. With a small sigh, he began explaining to Fort what he was making. It was like he was conversing with a friend, and like they hadn’t done those naughty things together only earlier that day.

“I can’t believe you guys left without me,” Collin protested, the moment he remained alone with Frank and Amanda.

“Someone had to stay behind and cook,” Amanda said with a shrug.

Collin turned toward Frank. “Would you be terribly mad if I strangled your soon to be wife? Just for a bit.”

Frank offered a grin. “Your face is glowing, C. Isn’t it?” he asked Amanda, completely ignoring Collin’s question.

“Yes, definitely. Something good must have happened while we’ve been away.”

“Nothing happened,” Collin said quickly. Was he really glowing? No, that was just a way for his two best friends to change the topic so that they didn’t have to apologize for their behavior. “And, seriously, I didn’t know you wanted to get rid of me that badly.”

“Well, we suspected that you wouldn’t like the idea of leaving Fort behind, all alone. Plus, he might not know how to cook. At all.”

Collin paused. “Guys, give it to me straight. Why don’t you like Fort? And why invite him on this trip if you think so badly of him? He told me that you guys bumped into him and popped the question.”

“He looked really miserable,” Amanda said promptly. “We thought this trip might cheer him up.”

Collin pinched the bridge of his nose. “Cheer him up by making him feel excluded? What kind of refined torture is that? And I know you, guys. You’re much, much better than this.”

“We cannot tell you anything more,” Amanda insisted. She patted him on the shoulder and began guiding him out of their tent. “And we were right to leave you, guys, alone. You both look like you had a good time.”

Collin shook his head. So, they honestly thought that he would hook up with Fort, for some reason. Maybe they believed so highly of his seductive skills that not even someone like Fort could resist. There was no other explanation he could come up with at this point.

Yet, still, that theory had holes in it, and it looked like his friends had no intention to fill them up. Therefore, Collin needed to use that fishnet to make sense of everything.

They were back in their tent, lying on their backs, in the darkness. It wasn’t exactly a comfortable type of silence, either. After everyone had returned and had their meal together, he and Fort had not had one moment alone. The others’ presence seemed to be enough to tear that magical veil that had stretched between them throughout the day.

It made Collin think of whether he hadn’t imagined everything. “Fort,” he asked tentatively, “can I ask you something?”

“Shoot.”

“Why did you ... why did we ... um, do that?”

“That?”

“You know what I mean. Was it like a fluke or --”

“I think it’s called a blowjob, Waters,” Fort replied with a chuckle.

“I know that. But why would you, um, blow me?”

“It felt nice, didn’t it?”

“Yeah.”

“I liked it when you blew me, too.”

“I bet,” Collin said and snorted. “So, was it just pleasure for pleasure’s sake? Nothing else?”

“I lost my head a little,” Fort replied. “I promised myself that I would take things slow, but it looks like I scared you off.”

“Take things slow? For what?”

“I can’t tell you,” Fort replied.

“Ah, I think I get it,” Collin said. “You are, after all, bi-curious. And you want to see how it would feel like. Am I right?”

“You couldn’t be further from the truth if you were on the moon right now.” Fort sounded a bit irritated.

That had to be because Collin had it all figured out. And it made sense. The straight dude wanted to see how it felt. He had to give it to Fort for being truly into it since he had gone as far as to put his mouth – that hot, amazing mouth – on a dude’s cock, and that said something.

“Don’t be pissed at me for outing you on your secret. I won’t let anyone know about it. I promise.”

“Waters, sometimes, I feel like you would look good with your neck properly wrung.”

Collin grinned. Strangely enough, he wasn’t scared of that statement. “Go ahead and try it.”

“Don’t provoke me. I’d wreck you.”

Under any other circumstances, Collin would have felt at least a bit apprehensive at that, but now he felt something completely different. Fantasies from long ago, with Fort crushing him with his

large body, came to him, and his entire body went lax with imagined pleasure, except for one point of his body, which, of course, had to be stubborn and go against the flow.

“And you would feel good,” Fort added in a low, seductive whisper.

Collin could feel the smallest hair on his body stand up to attention. “Good night, Killin.”

“Good night, Waters. Sweet dreams.”

The asshole. He said those last two words like he knew Collin would dream of him. That was a lost battle anyway. Plus, it was a pleasure to use him in his fantasies. After all, it looked like he was asking for it.

Chapter Ten – This Isn't Cheating, Right?

He had slept so well, he didn't want to leave the bed just yet. It was with much difficulty that he managed to open his eyes, look around, and realize that he wasn't in his bed, at home, but on the hard ground, with just a sleeping bag under him.

The reason why he felt so good right now was no longer inside the tent. Collin wondered where Fort could go all the time. If the others didn't like him much, it was also because he didn't put any effort into being liked.

He crawled out of the sleeping bag and went outside. The weather was nice, and the sun was up, which meant that Fort had finally been considerate of his sleeping patterns and no longer used that terrible alarm.

"Today is a day for explorations," Amanda announced to him as soon as they crossed paths.

"Explorations? Didn't you do enough of that yesterday?" Collin was still a bit salty over his friends' behavior from the day before.

"We need to map the grounds a little. We already chose the teams."

"Let me guess. I'll have to stay behind and cook. And what's with mapping the grounds, all of a sudden?"

"You won't stay behind and cook," Amanda said promptly. "Since you and Fort didn't get the chance to visit the waterfall yesterday, that's where you two are going."

"And who else?"

"No one else."

Collin stopped for a moment. Well, Amanda was pushing him into Fort's arms for real. It was either that, or she really didn't like Fort and thought of saddling Collin with the task of keeping him away from everyone else. He put his hands on his hips and measured his friend up and down with an accusing look.

It seemed that he could not determine Amanda to feel guilty about her behavior. His accusing look fell flat.

"Why do you keep pushing Fort down my throat?"

Amanda's eyes grew wide. "Did you guys get to that point?"

"What point?" Collin's irritation turned into amazement. "Since when is your mind so kinky? You used to be such a good girl, Amanda."

She shrugged as if such things had never crossed her mind. “You seem to be perfectly capable of dealing with him. And no one else wants to team up with him.”

“That’s because you are all such a bunch of bullies,” Collin retorted.

“You’ll thank us later,” Amanda said airily. “And you have no say in this. You’ll go to see the waterfall with Fort. I already gave him the itinerary. He’ll lead the way, without a problem.”

“I have no say in this? What if I don’t want to go?”

“And make Fort feel excluded? Come on, C, be a good boy. You know that’s who you are,” she said sweetly.

She was playing him so badly, and he couldn’t protest too much, for no other reason than that he felt guilty. He would get another chance to spend an entire day with Fort, alone, which meant that a bunch of pleasant things could happen. Also, if he insisted against it too much, Amanda might believe him and pair Fort with someone else.

No way could he let that happen. Therefore, he needed to accept his fate with grace and understanding. “Fine. If that’s what you want,” he said, feigning reluctance.

Amanda patted his shoulder. “Of course. We only want to see you happy.”

Great. So Amanda and Frank really suspected that he was doing naughty things with Fort, and it even showed on his face. But, what they didn’t know was that Fort was just a little bi-curious. And Collin, for some unfathomable reason, was letting him satisfy that bi-curiosity.

The real question that troubled him right now was: where the heck was Fort? If he didn’t appear anytime soon, Collin would find himself saddled with kitchen duty once more. “Who’s going to remain behind?” he asked, to hide his sudden anxiety at that thought.

“That would be Frank and I,” Amanda replied. “Yes, we won’t make the same great food you do, and we cannot dream of equaling your mastery, but I think we will manage.”

Collin barely held in a grimace.

Amanda pointed a finger at him. “I know what you’re thinking. But we’ll be fine.”

“I could stick with you, guys,” Collin offered. Fort was nowhere in sight, and he needed an option.

“No way. You’re forbidden.”

“But Fort’s not here, so --”

“You’re not getting out of it,” Amanda said quickly. “There he is.”

Collin turned to find Fort only a few feet away. He seemed ready for their trip.

“It looks like we need to go and see that waterfall,” Collin started, trying to sound bored and cool.

“Yes. I have everything we need in the backpack,” Fort said.

“I bet you packed some bland sandwiches.”

“It’s still food. You will survive with me, Waters, don’t worry. Let’s go.”

Collin wasn’t crazy about the idea of going on that trip empty-handed. “Wait. I need to grab my backpack, too.”

“No. Let’s go now,” Fort said in a tone that brooked no contradiction. “Unless you need your teddy with you.”

“Did you bring Wendy along?” Amanda asked.

“Wendy?” Fort turned and threw Collin an amused look.

Amanda knew about Wendy because they were friends and shared a lot of stuff, even the kind that seemed a little questionable. That didn’t mean that she could talk about Wendy out loud.

“She’s my lucky charm,” Collin said tersely. “It’s just a little superstition. I’m not sleeping with her.”

“I surely hope so.” Fort’s grin spread ear to ear. It was so annoying, Collin wanted to smack it off his face. “But if she’s your lucky charm, let’s go get her.”

“No way. You two made fun of me already.”

“I’m not making fun of you,” Amanda protested. “Go get Wendy.”

“There’s plenty of room for her in my backpack,” Fort pointed out.

“I’m not going to let her travel with you,” Collin replied, filled with rightful indignation.

“I promise I’ll treat her like a lady,” Fort promised. He moved his finger over his left pec. “Cross my heart.”

Collin rolled his eyes. He could sit there and argue all day, but there was no fun in that. “Fine,” he said through his teeth. “But I won’t tolerate any jokes.”

“What jokes?” Fort asked, feigning complete innocence.

Who did he think he was fooling? Collin marched toward the tent, with Fort on his heels. He rummaged through his backpack, debated for a moment if it wasn't for the better to grab the entire thing, just in case, but eventually settled for taking Wendy out. "Sorry, girl," he whispered.

Without another word, he handed her to Fort but avoided looking at him.

"Hi, Wendy. I'm glad I can finally meet you under normal circumstances."

Collin pursed his lips and then bit them. It was hard to keep from laughing while Fort conversed politely with his teddy bear. Wait, the joke was still on him. He cleared his throat. "Stop putting on a show, Killin. Teddy bears don't talk back."

"Which is quite convenient," Fort replied promptly. He took off his backpack and put Wendy gently inside.

That kind of attention was almost touching, but Collin didn't plan on letting himself fooled, definitely not by a handsome, sexy dude who could crush him if he wanted.

"Let's go." Fort gestured with his chin and walked outside.

Collin followed. It was weird to be the only one with nothing to carry, but Fort wanted to be the man, with capital letters. A man with a teddy bear in his backpack. He began snickering.

Fort turned and threw him a sidelong glance. "What's funny?"

"Nothing." Collin schooled his face quickly into something unreadable.

"I wasn't accusing you of anything. I was just curious."

Funny, not. When he frowned, Fort looked ready to land a killing blow. He didn't even have to frown. That was his face, always. Still, after spending a few days with him, Collin was no longer fearful of him, like in the past. After all, the same guy had given him a heavenly blowjob, and no one you trusted to be so close to your cock could be too bad.

"Have you ever been curious before, Fort?" Collin asked as he hurried after him.

They were already leaving the camp behind them. Fort walked like he was in a hurry, his pace sustained at a tempo that Collin had to put in the effort to keep up with.

"Bi-curious, you mean?" Fort asked.

"Yeah. I mean --"

"No. All this bi-curious thing is only in your head."

It seemed like Fort didn't like talking about it. Of course, Collin thought, if he was still in denial over his sudden attraction toward men, it couldn't be easy, and the people around him needed to be considerate.

"Okay," he agreed.

Fort didn't say another word. Collin walked behind him, his head filled with questions he didn't dare to ask. Had Fort been bi-curious before? With how many men? Had that made him more or less curious?

"It looks like you know exactly where we're going," he said, for the sake of breaking the silence. "Amanda told me she gave you the itinerary or something."

"I don't need it. I know where we're going."

"Just like that? Have you been here before?"

"No, but I like to get the lay of the land everywhere I go."

"Ah," Collin realized, "that's why you disappear for hours."

"Yes," Fort confirmed.

That was the sign of a very cautious person. While in high school, Collin had settled for a feeling of animosity between him and Fort. That meant that they had barely spoken during those times, and now was the time to get to know each other.

What he was learning of Fort didn't fit the image he had used to have of him at all. First of all, he was an accountant. An accountant! Second, he was bi-curious, regardless of what he was saying. And third, he appeared to be more the type who accepted to be bullied, instead of the other way around.

Surely, that didn't mean that Fort hadn't been an insufferable ass in high school. Just that, right now, he seemed a different person, and everyone had the right to become whatever they wanted. From that point of view, Collin could only admire the guy.

"If you need water or a snack, don't hesitate to ask." Fort was the first to break the silence this time.

"I'm good, thanks," Collin replied.

He felt a bit awkward now, after feeling hopeful earlier that something would happen between them on their little trip.

"Is it far?"

“Not that far. We should be there in about half an hour.”

They had been walking for the same amount of time, so Collin felt his rightful pissiness growing again. “So, those guys were just one hour away from us yesterday, but preferred to leave in a hurry? What for?”

“I don’t know,” Fort replied with a shrug. “But it worked for me.”

“It did, huh?” Collin mumbled. Was something going to happen between them again or not? It wasn’t fair of Fort to get his hopes high with words like those.

“Sure did,” Fort confirmed cheerfully.

Collin was dying to ask. Was it because of the blowjob, or was it something else? Maybe Fort just liked spending time alone, and it worked best for him if everyone was leaving him to his own designs.

“I got to spend some time with you,” Fort interrupted his train of thought. “Just in case you didn’t know why I said that.”

Was he a mind reader, now? Collin pouted. This dance, between them, wasn’t too fair. He couldn’t tell what Fort was thinking, but the guy looked like he knew precisely what was crossing his mind.

So not fair.

“Then you must be over the moon that Amanda sent us together on this trip,” Collin said wryly.

“I am,” Fort replied and sounded perfectly honest.

So, some things would happen! Collin could feel his chest filling with an unfamiliar sensation. Those simple words meant that Fort liked him. Even if it was just physical attraction, it meant something.

It was okay to cheat on his imaginary boyfriend, Collin decided. Just for a moment, because the next, he began to give himself an internal lashing.

“We’re almost there,” Fort announced.

Collin had been too busy berating himself for being a cheater that he had missed the change in scenery. He stopped dead in his tracks and stared at the natural beauty in front of him. The waterfall didn’t rush down from a high point, but the sound of rushing water was invigorating. To the side, a small natural pool had formed. Collin sat on the edge and stared, trying to gauge how deep it was.

“It’s not very deep. Perfect if you want to cool yourself.”

Collin knelt by the water, cupped one hand, and brought the water over the back of his neck. He sighed in undisguised pleasure. "It's awesome."

He turned to find Fort laying down a blanket, a small picnic basket, and Wendy. It was such a domestic scene that a feeling of profound gentleness flooded him. Only for a moment, because Fort decided to pull his t-shirt over his head and then ditch the shorts and his trekking shoes, too.

Collin gasped. "Fort!"

"What? You've seen me already, right?"

"I did, but Wendy didn't," Collin opted for the lamest excuse ever.

"Oh, sorry." Fort turned Wendy away from him and then gave Collin the biggest, sunniest smile in the universe.

His heart was melting again. Would he be able to put it back together once this trip was over? Collin wasn't sure. There were other, more important reasons than an imaginary boyfriend to keep from fooling around with Fort. The only problem was that Collin couldn't be sure he was capable of fighting against himself when it came to that.

Fort moved past him and sank into the water with a satisfied groan. His eyes were luminous, or Collin just imagined things because suddenly, he was overly aware of how much summer was around them, how his entire body longed to dip into that natural pool, and how his fingers itched and his lips trembled only looking at the guy.

"Do you need a formal invitation, Waters?" Fort moved one arm through the water fast and splashed Collin.

It was unmanly to yelp, but it was difficult to help it when he was teased like that. "I didn't know I would need swimming shorts."

"You don't need them. Don't tell me you're shy again. I've seen it all, remember?"

It was futile to resist, but Collin tried to postpone it as much as he could, in the hope that some brilliant idea would come to him. Nope, brilliant ideas didn't care much about visiting his brain lately.

Therefore, there was no escape. He turned and began undressing while mumbling to himself.

"You're doing a poor job if you think this makes me less aroused. You have the hottest ass in existence, Waters."

Collin closed his eyes and breathed in and out for a few moments. How would he survive the day? Let alone the day; how would he survive the next minute? He pretended to be in complete charge of himself and finally turned. His legs were like wood as he got into the water and

decided to sit at a reasonable distance from Fort, who behaved like he was in his private pool, at home.

He pretended not to be aware of the little waves created by a body, a hot sexy body, moving through the water, closer and closer to him. It was only when Fort was too close to ignore that he spoke up. “What?”

“You keep asking the wrong questions,” Fort whispered, right against his cheek.

Maybe he could ignore that, but he couldn’t ignore the solid body mass crowding his space. The water was cool and pleasant, but it could be boiling hot, for all Collin knew.

It wasn’t even a surprise that a kiss followed. And he forgot about protesting, complaining, talking about imaginary boyfriends, or even thinking at all. Fort was holding him gently, not forcing him at all, and he just obeyed. His head tilted back, he allowed the kiss. Even more, he kissed back. Each new kiss they shared was sweeter than the last one. Fort moved his tongue slowly inside Collin’s mouth, and soon, they were in a competition for who kissed more, more fiercely, more hungrily, more demanding.

“You make me lose my head,” Fort breathed out as their lips parted for one moment.

“Don’t blame it on me,” Collin mumbled.

“You’re right, but just because you have no idea what you’re doing to me.”

“I shouldn’t,” Collin protested meekly. “I have a boyfriend.”

“But this isn’t cheating, right?”

No, in their small portion of the universe, it wasn’t. And Collin could go and lie to himself about it as much as he wanted, as long as they didn’t leave that place. Real life had no room in the fantasy he was living.

Chapter Eleven – Riddle Maker

Eventually, they had taken things out of the water and onto the blanket Fort had spread on the ground earlier. All they did was kissing, but it was enough to drive Collin mad with pleasure. Fort had been clear about not wanting to fuck him, but there were surely other things they could do.

Their lips didn't want to part, and their bodies, neither. Therefore, a lot of exploration happened. Collin recalled idly Amanda's words about mapping the grounds, yet the only thing he was interested in mapping right now was Fort's body and all his pleasure points. He was tentative, at first, keeping his palms flat on the other's pecs, not daring to do anything more.

But Fort was leading by example, so it wasn't all that hard to see what he could do to satisfy his curiosities. Slowly, he began moving his hands downward, indulging in caressing the hard abdomen that flexed under his fingers. At the same time, Fort gasped.

"Do you have a sensitive belly or something?" Collin asked and laughed.

"It's no laughing matter," Fort replied and pulled him back into the kiss.

He wouldn't insist. After all, he wanted to get Fort all hot and bothered, not ticklish. There was no other way than down, so he continued and ran his fingers through the rough, wiry hair above Fort's sex. Collin liked to keep himself all smooth, but that wasn't a preference for his partners, too. He decided to veer away from the main course for now and moved his hands to the sides, brushing his fingers against Fort's balls, but only in passing.

He took great pleasure in running his hands over the thick muscular thighs next. It was damned difficult to wrap his head around what could have made Fort give up on football. His body was made for athletic endeavors. But Collin couldn't be too disappointed; after all, it was all for the better that Fort wasn't the victim of his tenth concussion or married to a supermodel interested in getting a divorce that would make her rich.

Risk-averse Fort, the guy who liked to get the lay of the land wherever he went, wouldn't put himself in that position. However, seeing how he was now actively engaged in kissing a dude and caressing him all over, it looked like he didn't mind certain risks.

He was safe, Collin decided. If he were to be tortured, he wouldn't tell on Fort and how bi-curious he was. So, all in all, the situation wasn't that risky.

What could count as risky, nonetheless, was how one of the guy's hands was bent on exploring Collin's ass. Fort seemed to enjoy squeezing and kneading one of his buttocks without going further. If he didn't start to finger him anytime soon, Collin feared that he would lose his mind a smidge.

He grabbed Fort by the cock, decided to take things into his own hands. His buttock was squeezed harder in response.

“I cannot fuck you,” Fort whispered, but his tone was regretful, not determined like before.

“No problem,” Collin replied, although he couldn’t hide his disappointment well. “We don’t have any condoms, anyway.”

That was the easy way out for both of them. This way, they didn’t have to talk about uncomfortable topics such as imaginary boyfriends.

Fort climbed on top of him and pressed him into the ground. Above, his eyes were burning. Collin stared, partly because he was simply fascinated with Fort and his handsome face, and second because he was no longer afraid.

“Will this do?” Fort began to move slowly, making their cocks rub against each other.

“According to any sex dictionary, yes,” Collin said breathlessly.

“Let’s try make it better.”

Collin gasped when his legs were hiked up, and Fort’s cock pressed harder against his balls, too, this time. They were pretty much in a mating press position, only that there was no mating involved.

He could feel his ass twitch in anticipation.

Sorry, dude, it’s not going to happen.

“I bet you feel so good inside,” Fort whispered.

“You’re not helping,” Collin protested and gasped.

All that humping had to do, but it wasn’t enough. After torturing both of them for a while, Fort appeared to reach the same conclusion. He freed Collin and pushed himself back. Then, with a focused look on his face, he grabbed Collin’s cock with one hand and used the other to give himself the good old rub.

Collin moaned and thrashed as Fort held him in his grasp. That was the best they could do, and there was nothing else to hope for. Seeing how little he had been satisfied in life, in general, that was an improvement. Henry liked to have him on top and do mostly nothing. At least, Fort looked like he cared that he came, too.

Which he did without much preamble. “Oh, fuck, this is so good,” he whimpered.

His balls twitched when something warm began falling on them. That had to be so hot. Too bad he couldn't take a picture. He opened his eyes and met Fort's burning gaze. It was safer to close them back, but his eyelids were stubborn, and he quickly realized he was in no mood to do that, anyway.

Fort surprised him by sliding on top of him again and giving him a deep kiss. Usually, after the deed, guys weren't into kissing more and cuddling. That was Collin's meager expertise. He had only been with Henry, after all.

"I don't ever want to stop kissing you," Fort whispered into his ear. He pushed himself down from Collin's body but kept him close.

And he fell asleep like that. For a second, Collin considered pushing him away and making a joke, but only for a second of lucidity. Right at this moment, there was no reason for him to be lucid unless he planned some lucid dreaming. Yeah, right. Even his brain wanted to snort at that.

Fort was cuddling with him. It was a simple, astonishing truth. Collin sighed in satisfaction. His eyes fell on Wendy, who stood slightly turned from them. "Sorry you had to hear all that, girl."

Wendy wouldn't judge him. There was no better lucky charm than her on the planet. She was there, and he and Fort were cuddling. What more could he ask for?

"I cannot believe we slept so much," Collin said as he stretched and yawned.

Fort was busy laying out what looked like a sandwich-based meal. Just as he had thought, the guy wasn't creative when it came to food. However, all food deserved respect, especially when it was made by someone he held dear. Wait, was Fort someone dear to him now?

He steadied himself in a comfortable position and accepted the sandwich Fort gave him. There was a suspect silence between them, and the usual insecurities came flooding back. Was that the moment when they began to pretend that nothing had happened between them? Maybe it was a good idea to put some clothes on. Fort was already dressed, and besides clothes, he also wore his signature angry scowl.

They ate without saying anything. Collin couldn't bear it for long. "Just for the record, if you say nothing happened today, it didn't happen. Or the day before."

Fort threw him a strange glance. "Waters, you're a piece of work."

Was that even supposed to mean? "What's that supposed to mean?" Far from him not to speak his mind.

Fort stared him in the eyes. "Today happened. Yesterday, too."

“Okay,” Collin said slowly. “But what version?”

Now, Fort looked at him like he was some sort of lunatic. “The one containing the truth, obviously.”

“Ah, good. I mean, you were so silent and angry, I had to check.”

Fort appeared taken aback by Collin’s words. “Angry? I wasn’t angry.”

“Really? Because, seriously, my dude, you look like someone who could find extreme satisfaction in strangling someone. I don’t want to be that someone.”

Fort relaxed an inch. “Okay, maybe I was a little, but not for the reasons you think.”

“Are you a mind reader? ‘Cause I don’t see how you could be capable of knowing what I think otherwise.”

“You’re pretty much an open book, Waters.”

Wasn’t this guy fool of himself?

“No shit,” he said wryly.

His protest amused Fort. A grin replaced the scowl.

“The ball is in your court,” Fort said as he stood up. “Make a move or leave it at that. It’s up to you.”

Fucking riddle maker. Collin was getting tired of that game. “How about giving it to me straight, for a change, Killin? What do you mean by that?”

Fort shrugged, but his grin grew wide. “You’ll know when you’re ready.”

Hmph, more riddles. Whatever, they needed to head back anyway.

“Can I, at least, carry the backpack on our way back?”

“No,” Fort refused him shortly. “That’s the least I can do.”

What did he mean by that? He was already doing everything. But Collin didn’t want to argue. He stood up and followed Fort obediently without another word.

Collin couldn’t quite put his finger on it, but the people at the camp were acting pretty strangely. They stole glances at them and then looked away. They always seemed to be busy with

something and were weirdly cheerful whenever he talked to them. Was it written all over him and Fort that they had spent their day fooling around? It couldn't be, right?

“So, how was it?” Amanda approached him.

The question was directed at him, as Fort chose to make himself scarce, right that moment.

“Nice waterfall,” Collin offered in the voice of an overpaid tourist guide. Gosh, whatever these guys had, it was rubbing on him, too.

“That's all?”

Collin stood in front of his friend and couldn't understand her question. “Yeah, sure. You've been there. Do you really need my opinion or --”

“Damn it, Collin, you're so annoying,” Amanda said and rolled her eyes to high heavens.

It looked like the high heavens didn't have the answers she was looking for.

Of course, she was asking about him and Fort, but he wouldn't out the guy for a bit of bi-curiosity. After all, there had been no penetration. What the hell was he thinking? Was he really finding excuses, now?

“I don't see how I'm annoying. You are,” Collin shot back.

“All right, all right,” Amanda said, but it looked like the words were directed at herself. “Just go on your way. Just know that I'm not finished with you.”

Collin didn't need to be told twice. There was something unnerving about being grilled by Amanda. She would make a fine inquisitor; too bad for her, but luckily for humankind, torturing people was illegal.

The dinner and rest of the evening went by. Collin congratulated Frank and Amanda on the food they prepared and had to insist that they take his words at face value. In the end, they looked happy to hear that and even proud, which made Collin feel happy.

It was easy not to think of Fort when they were surrounded by people. Not that he forgot about him or anything, but he could pretend he was taken with other things.

It made him way too happy to think about Fort, and especially what they did. But they were on vacation, in a place away from their everyday lives, and somehow in the mood to experiment. Once the week was up, they would be back to their usual selves, and all that would be forgotten.

The thought alone was making him sad. No, he wouldn't think of such things, even if, after all this, Fort would return to his job and his probably many girlfriends he kept denying they existed, and Collin, to his imaginary boyfriend.

That was downright depressing. A heavy arm thrown over his shoulders woke him from his dark thoughts.

"Hey, what are you doing?" he whispered and threw nervous looks around. "There are still people awake."

"And?" Fort asked. "What's that got to do with anything?"

"We don't want them to think we're together or something, right?"

Fort frowned. "Chill, Waters. Don't tell me now we can't act like buddies."

"It's for your own good," Collin retorted. "You know, your reputation."

"Right," came the dry reply. "Well, let me worry about that."

"Suit yourself. But don't come crying at me once they start thinking that you switched teams."

"As I told you, Waters. Let me worry about that."

Whatever. If he was this stubborn, he deserved everything that was coming to him. There was no way Collin could do anything about it. Except, maybe, keep his hands to himself when they were in public, unlike Fort.

Whose hand dropped lower and squeezed his pec. Collin scoffed to show his disapproval.

"Don't worry. It's dark already. Now let's just get inside and sleep."

Just get inside and sleep, Collin mimicked Fort's words from earlier, trying to make him sound funny and annoying at the same time. Who could sleep under the circumstances?

While being among other people, he had managed to keep the memories of the day at bay, but now they were at home in his brain and kept him from sleeping.

"Having trouble falling asleep?"

Like he had to ask. Collin knew Fort a little better now, so he could read the amusement accompanying that statement.

"No," he replied, acutely aware of the petulance in his voice.

“You can cuddle with Wendy. I won’t judge.”

“Hey, I’m not cuddling with her. That would be creepy.”

“Because she’s a girl?”

All right. The asshole was totally pulling his leg. “No, of course not.”

“So you would sleep with a girl, given the chance?”

“Killin, are you trying to ask me how gay I am? Just for the record, I’m as gay as blueberry pie.”

“I didn’t know pies could have sexual preferences.”

“Ugh, you’re so annoying. It was just a line from a song. I’m very gay, I can assure you. And I don’t need or want to cuddle with Wendy. Is that clear?”

“Crystal. What about cuddling with me?”

Ah, so that was the real question. There was no more amusement in Fort’s tone. If he listened closely, Collin was sure the guy sounded ...

Hopeful?

Chapter Twelve – A Game Of Cards, Kisses And The Truth

If he had had trouble falling asleep earlier, now it was worse. For who knew what reason, he had told Fort that it was all right to cuddle, and he was currently in the impossible position of being cuddled! Maybe it wasn't clear who was doing the cuddling and who received it, but he was the little spoon, and it looked like Fort had no issues with holding him close like Collin was some plushy toy!

He sighed to express his true feelings, but Fort just pulled him close and tighter than before. How was he supposed to sleep like that? A small, chaste peck on his ear took him by surprise.

“If you still cannot sleep, I can tell you a story.”

“No way, that would be weird.”

“Why? It's only the two of us here.”

“Still.”

“Then we can choose a bit more adult entertainment.”

The thought was alluring, but Collin was wasted. He bet Fort had to be, too, although it could be that the guy had better stamina. “We should sleep.”

Fort sneaked one hand under Collin's t-shirt and began caressing his nipples slowly. Ah, damn it, why did he have to be so good at this? “For the record, this isn't cuddling anymore.”

“Sure it is.” Fort teased Collin's ear, biting it softly. “It has, you know, a bit of flavor.”

“Sure, flavor.” Collin gasped as Fort became bolder in his ministrations. “If you keep up like this --”

“I'm sure you'll manage,” Fort completed his sentence.

“That wasn't what I was trying to say.”

“Hmm,” Fort purred and tipped his chin, making his head turn.

Their lips met, and that was the end of the conversation. Collin wasn't even surprised anymore that Fort tended to dominate any conversation by doing that. He was extremely good at that, and frankly, there was no reason to complain.

Their kisses turned into fumbles in the dark. Fort's hands were everywhere on him, suddenly multiplied, and Collin was a trembling mess. He met Fort's determination with his own and struggled to get his full from that incredible body to the best of his abilities.

“Do you want it like today, or maybe we should suck each other off?”

Ah, so someone still had a part of the brain available for thinking about logistics. Collin needed a bit of time to think of the right answer to that question. “Let’s trade blowjobs.”

“Let’s do it together.”

And that was how they ended on a sixty-nine on the side since Fort was, apparently, very apt of manipulating his large body in such a way that his cock became level with Collin’s mouth in record time.

There was no time to waste as Fort was quickly hard at work, pulling Collin’s cock free and pushing it all into his mouth. If that were a competition, Collin wouldn’t lose, he decided and gobbled up Fort’s cock as far down his throat as he could.

He choked a little, but even choking felt sexy under the circumstances. Point taken, he should never forget about how large his bed partner’s cute snake truly was. He settled for licking the head and giving it his all and didn’t rush anymore.

After all, he had the world’s tastiest lollipop in front of him, and it was no good to try to devour it too quickly. It was challenging to focus on doing things the correct way or investing in some techniques that would make his blowjob one to remember, but that didn’t mean that he wasn’t trying his best.

Fort was clearly bent on making him come first, and his technique was deserving of a special award. Collin had to remember to offer him at least a symbolic prize later on.

It was just too good, and it wasn’t only Fort’s fault. His impeccable technique had only partly a role in how aroused Collin felt. It was definitely true what people said about the brain being the biggest sex organ, for the simple fact that it was just the idea that he was doing those things with Fort that was sending him over the moon.

That was quite the euphemism for how hard he came. Fort, like before, didn’t hesitate a moment and ate everything like a good boy, which gave Collin quite the thrill and also made it hard for him to focus as he should on the task at hand. His mouth and hand moved erratically and not at all in sync, but his sloppy job didn’t seem to bother Fort at all. Warm cum fell on his cheeks and lips while he struggled to capture all the drops.

Fort took things into his own hands and used his cock to spread the cum more on Collin’s face. Usually, he wasn’t a big fan of facials – in the sense of cosmetic treatments – but this was something he could live with.

“Damn, I bet you look so hot with your face covered in my cum,” Fort whispered. “We’ll have to try that in daylight.”

“Swallowing is fun,” Collin replied, trying to sound as casual as he could with his breath catching.

So, Fort was planning on doing naughty things in the future, too. Of course, they still had a couple of days before their departing date, which could just as well represent the future the guy was talking about.

If they didn't speak of this again after their return, it would still count as a fantastic experience. Yet, Collin realized as his heart squeezed painfully in his chest, that would be quite sad, and he would have just a high standard to compare any other guy with that he would most probably be condemned to a life alone until he was old and grey.

Fort moved and faced him. It was hard to tell what he thought as they stood in the dark like that.

"Can we cuddle now? I promise I won't do anything else to jeopardize our sleep," Fort promised.

"Sure," Collin replied and turned his back.

They needed to talk, but it couldn't be tonight. He had to bid his time and also find a way to explain the presence of an imaginary boyfriend. Was that even correct? Not quite. But that wasn't the point.

What if Fort found it convenient to fool around with Collin only because he knew he would be safe from complications? After all, if Collin needed to get back to his boyfriend after all this, it would be fine, right? For a guy with bi-curiosity, of course.

Still, Fort had told him, point-blank, that he should break up with his boyfriend. Nah, maybe he hadn't meant anything by that. Therefore, Collin had to think things through before he ended up hurt and losing face.

They would see what the next day would bring. Tonight, they were cuddling, and this time, Collin didn't experience any trouble falling asleep.

Throughout the next day, Collin and Fort participated in the games organized by Amanda and Frank. He couldn't tell anyone, but he was excited over how Fort was good at anything. He wasn't the type to boast, but he wanted to congratulate Fort on being the best.

"I see that we have a champion on our hands. But could it be that you're as lucky as you are physically fit?" Amanda provoked Fort directly.

Collin watched her, wondering, as usual, these days, what could she mean by that.

"Our tent, a game of poker, between the four of us. The loser gets punished," Amanda threw over her shoulder.

Collin winced. He was either inept at playing that game or just someone who made looking at the moon through a glass a goal in life. In other words, when it came to poker, he was absolutely useless.

To his surprise, Fort was already walking after her. "Are you coming?" he asked.

Collin hurried to catch up with him. "Listen to me. It's a trap. Amanda is a frigging poker star or something. I bet she wants to take us to the cleaners."

Fort shrugged. "Did you bring a lot of money on this trip?"

"Not really since there wouldn't be much to buy around here, but still."

"Then maybe it's all a game for the fun of it."

"Amanda doesn't do things without having a purpose. Trust me. I know her."

"Are you afraid of a girl, Waters?"

Collin stopped for a moment to contemplate how he could put Fort in place for pulling his leg. "That is no girl. Don't let yourself fooled. She's a demon."

"Ah, that's not a nice way to talk about your friend, now, is it?"

"Don't worry. She knows my opinion of her and is even proud about it. Can't we just skip this?"

"These guys are getting married soon. I don't think it would be too bad to do what they want when they ask nicely."

Collin moaned. "Did that sound like asking nicely to you? She is going to wreck us."

"I feel lucky lately," Fort said mysteriously and offered a big smile.

"Okay. It's your funeral. I mean, ours."

"A joint funeral. How cute. Ouch!"

Collin rightfully considered that Fort needed to be put in place with a punch in the shoulder.

"I didn't know you could hit that well," Fort complained as he rubbed his shoulder.

"Oh, stop crying already. I'm sure you had it worse when you were playing football."

"I guess. But when you hit me, it hurts in more ways than one."

Such a comedian. Collin entered Amanda's tent first, followed by Fort. Amanda and Frank were already setting the place for their game. By the focused look on their faces, Collin could tell they meant business.

“You lose again.”

Collin wanted to strangle Amanda a little. She was so damned satisfied! The only surprise had been not his unlucky streak but the punishment he had received every time.

“And now kiss Fort. On the lips. With tongue.”

“Are you kidding me?” Collin protested meekly. His lips were numb from kissing Fort for what seemed like dozens of times. “You’re embarrassing a straight dude here if you didn’t notice.”

“I’m not embarrassed,” Frank said.

Of course, why didn’t it surprise him that Frank would be in this with his soon-to-be-bride?

“I wasn’t talking about you,” Collin said in a tone he hoped that sounded cutting enough.

The biggest surprise was, however, that Fort didn’t protest at all. He appeared quite chill and didn’t seem to care that Collin kissed him in front of his best friends like that. At a closer look, he almost smiled. Almost, because Collin wasn’t sure at all that he had what it took to stare at Fort too much, given the circumstances.

“I think I took enough beating for one day.”

Fort stood up with him.

“C, stay back a little. We want to talk to you about something,” Amanda stopped him.

Fort patted him on the back. “I’ll be at the tent.”

It was like he was saying that he would be home, waiting for him. That sounded nice, but they were still here, in a bubble outside the real world, so he needed to keep his head where it belonged, on his shoulders, and attached to a body with feet firm on the ground and not up in the clouds.

“Sure,” he mumbled. He turned toward Amanda as soon as Fort was out of earshot. “What do you want from me, Torquemada?”

Frank snickered but shut it off as soon as Amanda glared at him. He looked away, pretending to be interested in the look of the tent canvas.

“C, it looks like you need a little nudge so that you finally move in the right direction.”

“What do you mean?” He had a clear idea of what she meant, but that didn’t mean that he was ready for that conversation.

“Fort likes you,” Frank said bluntly.

“Ah, damn it,” Amanda complained and turned toward her fiancé. “Why did you have to sweep in and steal my glory?”

“Stop treating Collin like he’s made of glass. He smooched Fort for an hour in front of us. Even a denier like him has to admit it.”

“A denier like me?” Collin revolted. “What do you mean by that?”

Amanda took his hand. She seemed to measure her next words carefully. “C, we love you, but when an idea gets into your head, no one is capable of telling you otherwise.”

“Really? I haven’t noticed,” Collin said wryly.

“You must have, and I know that you know.”

It was true, and a character flaw Collin was a bit aware of. For half a year, he had tried to convince himself that putting rosemary in the chicken soup was something he liked. No, he didn’t, but he had done it once, presented the recipe as something cool and a bit wicked in his book, only to regret it later.

“All right,” he admitted it, somewhat vexed, “but what’s that got to do with anything?”

“Not anything, but Fort. C’mon, what guy would have stood there, getting kiss after kiss from a guy he didn’t like? Just admit it already.”

It was Collin’s turn to measure his words carefully. “Well, we did experiment a bit. But no butt fucking,” he added quickly.

Frank snickered again, and this time, Amanda joined in. “Well, I guess that begs the question. Why not?”

“We don’t have any condoms,” Collin said promptly.

“Ah, I see.” Amanda’s smile was so bright he needed a pair of shades. “We should ask around, see if anyone brought some.”

“No,” Collin hurried to stop her. “I don’t want everyone to know. Plus, everyone’s with their partner since forever. I doubt anyone uses rubber around here.” He just didn’t want to get into an argument about his inventing of an imaginary boyfriend right now with Amanda.

“All right,” Amanda conceded. “I see you happy, C. And Fort does look at you like he’s totally smitten.”

“I wouldn’t say smitten,” Collin said defensively. “I mean, it would be too much of a leap of faith, wouldn’t it?”

“What leap of faith? It’s visible from the moon that you two are into each other.”

“Yeah, but he used to be such a big bully when we were in high school. I mean, suddenly, he’s into dudes?”

Amanda shook her head and smiled gently. She looked at Frank and received a nod of approval. “C, Fort wasn’t a bully in high school.”

Collin snorted. “Yeah, right. Come on, he totally was.”

Frank intervened this time. “Name one time when he did anything to you.”

Collin scoffed, thought for a moment, and began. “That one time, when they were all laughing, and some dude asked me if I started wearing dresses --”

“Who asked you that? Was it Fort?” Amanda set her eyes on him and didn’t blink anymore.

Collin frowned. “No, but it was someone from his group of jocks. They all laughed.”

“Fort didn’t.” That was Frank again. Collin could say Amanda didn’t remember things right, but Frank had the memory of an elephant.

“All right,” he admitted begrudgingly, “maybe you’re right. But he was totally one of them.”

Amanda rolled her eyes. “So you’re making him responsible for what other people did, although he didn’t laugh at that stupid joke. What other time did he bully you, Collin?”

Closed fists. Pursed lips. Wild eyes. Collin could think of that as much as he wanted now, but those memories were getting muddied by what he knew of Fort now. “They locked that kid in the laundry room that one time.”

“So, it didn’t happen to you, and Fort was actually the one who got him out.”

“Well, he said he did it, as far as I know,” Collin replied, now irritated by Amanda’s logic.

“He wouldn’t snitch on his teammates. That doesn’t make him a bully.”

“All right, but he looked at me funny.”

“Funny?” Great, now both Frank and Amanda were looking at him funny.

“Yeah. Like he wanted to beat the shit out of me. I was scared to go to school!”

Amanda wanted to argue some more, but Frank got in the way. “C, you need to figure this one out on your own. I suppose you know Fort a little better now. How about you go and ask him about all this stuff? I bet he has some interesting answers for you.”

“He does?” Collin now wanted to hear his friends saying what they thought because he knew what he knew. Fort Killin had wanted at least to see his ass whooped in high school, even if he hadn’t done anything. He had looked so damned angry back then. Like Collin had been someone in the way of his happiness.

But maybe, just maybe, Amanda was right, and it would do him good to ask. Maybe Fort had had his reasons to act that way, although he still had his doubts. If he thought too much of those times, he would feel a little chill coursing through his veins.

Amanda accompanied him to his tent, only so that she could nag him more on the same topic. Collin didn’t mind as much, though.

“I can really tell you’re happy when you’re around him, and he around you. You are glowing, C, I mean it.” They stopped in front of the tent. Amanda took both his hands and held them. “And not even once, all this trip, you spoke of Henry.”

“Yeah,” Collin admitted. “I truly didn’t think of Henry much. I guess I was a bit distracted,” he joked.

Amanda let go of his hands, only so that she could hug him. “That’s good to know,” she joked back.

Collin was still grinning as he entered the tent. Amanda and Frank had a point. And maybe, just maybe, he had a chance in the real world with Fort if he dared to hope.

Fort was inside, as promised, and a small jolt of happiness made Collin’s grin grow wider. The light was on, so they could see each other quite well.

Fort looked at him, and, in a moment, Collin was taken back to those high school years, when he had felt so vulnerable. The same angry eyes were there, and there could be no mistake. The guy was pissed.

“So, there is a Henry, after all?” The question came out rough and unrefined.

Chapter Thirteen – It Takes A Village

Collin tried to reign in the knee jerk reaction at seeing Fort mad. “Yes, there is a Henry,” he tried to sound light, “but --”

Fort put one hand up. “It’s okay. That’s the only thing I wanted to know.”

“Fort, listen, he’s just ...” Okay, what did he want to say? “He’s not a CEO, or a martial arts aficionado or anything,” he began.

“I’m telling you it’s all right. And I kind of suspected all that. This is the only thing I need to know, if he’s real.”

There was something akin to an ultimate in how Fort spoke, but Collin felt like he couldn’t do anything to wrench open the door closing on him. “Yeah, he’s real, but--”

“No need to justify yourself to me,” Fort interrupted him again.

“Hey, what’s with the attitude?” Collin placed his hands on his hips. “So you eavesdropped on me and Amanda--”

“I told you I would be right here. I didn’t know I should have covered my ears the moment I heard you two talking.”

Collin pursed his lips. “That’s not what I meant.”

“Yes, you did. And it’s totally fine.” Fort waved like it was the opposite of fine. He looked so damned pissed that Collin wanted to grab something and throw it at him.

But maybe that was it. That was a moment as good as any to call it quits on whatever had happened between them, because, after all, what had it been except for some fooling around? Fort took this Henry thing and blew it out of proportions because he needed a way out. It was an ugly way out, but it was what it was.

Collin set his chin high and then dropped on his sleeping bag. “I knew it had to be too good to be true.”

“What?” Fort asked, and his aggressive tone was getting so much on Collin’s nerves that throwing a punch was not completely out of the question.

“Yeah,” Collin said, this time feeling emboldened by righteousness. “It would have been a frigging miraculous week for you to change into a gay loving dude.”

“A gay loving dude? What’s that even supposed to mean? Do you mean to ask if I turned gay?”

“No. There is no such thing as turning gay,” Collin said just as aggressively as Fort. “You either are or not. So that’s why I hope you, at least, would be someone who tolerates gay people.”

He risked a look at Fort. The guy looked like someone had just dropped something on his head. Yeah, he was totally like a caveman from a cartoon, Collin tried to convince himself, but this time, his internal attempt at comical relief fell flat.

Fort shook his head as soon as his consternation began to dissipate. “Tolerate gay people? Do you mean you?”

“Yeah, me,” Collin spat back. “Well, I hope you had fun because whatever weird things we’ve done so far, they are totally out of the question from this moment forward. Indefinitely,” he added for good measure.

“Fine by me.” Fort slid into his sleeping bag and turned his back on him. “I didn’t have the slightest intention to continue.”

“Just as I imagined,” Collin shot, without hiding his bitterness. “Thank God there are only two nights left.”

He turned his back, too, and squeezed his eyes as hard as he could. After all, he had been right, regardless of everyone’s good intentions.

There were no good night exchanges, no cuddling, and no other things. Those belonged to the past already, and Collin needed to make sure that they remained in their freshly dug grave. Yeah, he was melodramatic, but Fort’s attitude really hurt.

And he had known about Henry, even if not exactly what he truly was, before, when they had done all those things. Suddenly, he was no longer okay with that?

What a frigging ass.

Collin woke up to an empty tent. Fort was no longer there, but that wasn’t it. Gone were his luggage and sleeping bag, and everything. It looked like the straight dude had chosen to run away like a coward, after all.

But, there was no one to blame for himself. What in the world had he thought it would happen? That, suddenly, Fort Killin had transformed into a different person, yeah, one who tolerated gay people, and that he wanted to get all cuddly, and blowjob-y, and maybe other things, with someone like him?

What a big fat lie he had told himself. But, at least, they had been together only for a few days, so it wasn't that big a deal. Collin ran his hands over his face. Who was he lying to, now? He was a mess.

Good thing, there was little left of the trip, and he would be back home. For now, he needed to get up, wash his face, see about breakfast, and smile like nothing happened.

With that decision in mind, Collin stood up and began dressing. It was a new day, and he had many things to do, starting with not feeling sorry for himself. It was a tough job, but someone had to do it. Plus, there was no one else but himself who could do that, and that task couldn't be outsourced.

The light was so bright when he walked out of the tent that he wanted to take it as a personal offense. After all, the sun seemed to be mocking him. His heart was bleeding, and the sun had the nerve to shine!

He brushed his teeth with a vengeance and washed his face three times. When he turned on his heels, he almost crashed into Amanda.

"Oh, no," he said out loud.

By how his friend was staring at him, he must have looked like a mess. Okay, maybe, just maybe, he had cried himself to sleep the previous night, but only a little.

"What happened to you?" Amanda shouted.

"Hey, hush," Collin whispered.

"Your eyes are red, you look puffy, and you don't glow anymore," Amanda continued in the same manner.

"Well, people cannot glow all the time. It's not their frigging job," Collin retorted. "And will you keep it quiet? I don't want everyone to know that I had a bad night."

Good luck with that because it looked like the entire camp was gathered around them, and everywhere he looked, he met compassionate eyes.

"Hey, guys," he started, "what's with the long faces? No one died."

Amanda took him by the arm. "Where is Fort?"

Collin looked around, alarmed, as everyone else followed, hanging on their every word. "Am I on reality TV? What's with everyone? Guys, why are you looking at me like this?"

"Everyone knows, C, stop getting your panties in a twist," Amanda said.

“Everybody know?! What do you mean by that? Hey, what the hell do you, guys, know?” he addressed the group.

Christine was the one to speak. “That you and Fort are in love.”

“In love?” Collin was in such a huge shock that he could only manage to find himself repeating the same words he heard, like a parakeet.

“Yes, we know,” Mary intervened. “But Fort is nowhere to be seen, and Grant here swears that when he went out last night to take a leak --”

“Really, Mary, too much info,” Collin protested.

“Yeah, sorry,” Mary replied. “But Grant swears he saw someone leaving the camp.”

“Yeah, it’s totally true,” Grant said and put one arm around his girlfriend’s shoulders. “And that guy looked totally like Fort. He’s not exactly easy to mistake for someone else.”

“Of course, my sleepy bear,” Mary added but drove her elbow not exactly in a friendly fashion into her boyfriend’s ribs, “didn’t realize it was the kind of situation that required sounding the alarm, so we missed the opportunity to stop him.”

“Stop him?” He really needed to stop that. Collin was getting annoyed with himself, but also with everyone else, because it seemed like, all of a sudden, they were aware of everything that had happened to him – all right, maybe not everything – and now were all over him to ...

To what?

“Did you two have a fight?” Amanda asked.

“No, no,” Collin protested. “And wait, weren’t you all gremlins?”

“Gremlins?”

Great. It was contagious. Now Christine was repeating words he said.

“You were all bent on making Fort feel like crap,” Collin explained.

Christine’s face lit up with understanding. “Ah, that. That was only so that we could make you take his side.”

Collin stopped, making Amanda stop with him. “Were you all in this together?”

Amanda made him walk again. “Of course we were. And we are. You know that saying about how it takes a village?”

“To raise a child!” Collin exclaimed. “That’s how the saying goes. What’s that got to do with me?”

“Well, we made an adaptation of that. We consider that it takes a village to help our foolish friend realize that he’s in love.”

“Oh, you don’t say. For the record, nothing happened.”

“Come on, C, you have to admit it. Not only something did happen, but something big happen.”

Collin stopped for a moment. He could go on and pretend that everything was fine, that nothing happened, and that he didn’t break on the inside because Fort had left, but it would just be a lie. “All right. We ... I mean, he ... All right.” It was hard to find the right words. “He decided to leave. I don’t think he wanted the same thing, um, I wanted.”

Amanda took him by the shoulders and then hugged him. Then she pushed him back a little and looked him in the eyes. “C, you’re one of the most amazing people I know.”

Murmurs of agreement followed. Collin’s heart began to warm.

“But, seriously, when it comes to love, you are so damned blind that I want to strangle you,” Amanda added.

Again, the murmurs of agreement multiplied. Now, that wasn’t called for, was it?

“The feeling’s mutual,” Collin replied. “I mean, I want to strangle you once in a while, too. And that’s a valid point for all of you,” he addressed the others. “You truly played me.”

“Because we had to,” Amanda explained. “We did it with love.”

Collin sighed. He couldn’t be mad at them for trying to do something with good intentions. “Thank you, guys, but really, you were wrong about Fort. I mean, I think you were right when you were acting like the bullies against him – I mean, not that it’s good to be a bully, but --”

Amanda pressed one finger against his lips. “C, honey, we know exactly what goes through your big head. Don’t worry about anything. We will bring Fort back to you.”

“No, no,” Collin protested. “Please, don’t do that. He will think that I put you up to it --”

“And we’ll tell him that you didn’t,” Amanda said like it was a completely natural thing to say.

“He will just think that I’m begging for him to come back. Wait, what am I even saying? It’s not like we were together or anything. We just blew each other – oh, fuck, now I’m sharing way too much info.”

Amanda rubbed his shoulders and then smacked them hard. “Everything is going to be fine. I am completely sure that between you being a complete airhead, and Fort being insecure --”

“Fort, insecure?” Collin snorted. “Amanda, are you sure we’re talking about the same dude? Because that’s surely not Fort you’re thinking of. What reason would he had to be insecure?”

Amanda took one deep breath. “All right, so this wasn’t a piece of info that I wanted to share with you, but we invited Fort on this trip with us exactly so that he could take his chances with you.”

Collin opened his mouth, and his jaw turned slack. Oh, so that was new.

“Yes,” Amanda continued. “We met him by accident as he was just walking out of a gay bar.”

His jaw grew slacker if that was possible.

Amanda didn’t leave him any time to process that bit of info. “He was embarrassed to see us --”

“Of course he was, imagine, a straight dude walking out of a gay bar, and out of nowhere, meeting you two --”

“Just shut up and listen. I was so hoping I could let you discover everything on your own, but it looks like you and Fort need a translator so that you two can communicate about your feelings. Now,” she said, “one thing led to another, and Fort asked us about you. So we realized right away why he was asking, and we told him you were in-between relationships. His face lit up like a frigging street lamp, I swear.”

Collin grimaced. “Weird choice of words, but okay. Why the hell did he lit up for?”

“Isn’t it obvious? He’s interested in your sexy ass,” Amanda replied. “So, we immediately asked him to come on this trip with us.”

“And arranged for me to sleep with him in the same tent.”

“Yes.”

“And then, you all acted like a bunch of gremlins --”

“Seriously, C, you’re the only guy who’s watching weird old movies like that one.”

“What are those, gremlins?” Christine asked.

“I’ll tell you later,” Amanda said. “So, yeah, we’re guilty as charged, we all pushed you two toward one another, and it worked.”

Collin ran one hand through his hair. He had no idea what to say. Everyone around him seemed to think the same thing as Amanda, that he needed help with his love life. And, truth be told, he needed. Only that he needed to set everyone straight, despite them all being all straight, already.

“Guys, I appreciate that you thought of me so much. But the problem is, Fort doesn’t like me as much as you think. He got mad about Henry last night, and that’s why he left.”

“Mad about Henry? But why?” Amanda asked.

“Well, it was an easy way out for him,” Collin explained. “He overheard as we talked about Henry, and he immediately asked me if he were real. I told him ‘yes’, and he got really pissed. And I told him that he’s not a CEO, and not a karate expert --”

“Wait, what? I mean, I know Henry is none of these things, but that’s not the most important thing he’s not, right? CEO? Where the hell did that come from?”

Shit. His mouth was running in front, away from him. Collin scratched his head. “Um, well --”

“Collin,” Amanda stopped him, “did you tell Fort Henry is no longer your boyfriend?”

He groaned. “I didn’t get a chance to do that.” A murmur of realization came from everyone around him. As he looked around, he noticed someone was missing. “Hey, where is Frank?”

“He’s currently trying to catch up with your boyfriend on the loose.”

“He’s not my boyfriend,” Collin protested.

“Not yet, but if we can help it --” Amanda let that phrase hang.

“Guys, I’m really afraid you’re wrong. Fort won’t come with Frank because he doesn’t want to.”

Just as he was saying those words, the gals and guys began to turn their heads.

“Hey, guys,” Frank shouted at them and waved.

Collin followed everyone and looked at his friend, his heart fluttering with anticipation. And then, his hopes sank because Frank was alone.

Amanda hurried toward her fiancé. “Where is Fort?”

Frank shook his head. “I missed him. He took an early train. And I can’t seem to get him on the phone.”

Collin could feel his shoulders slumping. Of course, what good was it to hope?

“Then we’ll take an early leave, too,” Amanda said promptly.

Collin put a hand on her shoulder. “No, please, don’t do that. Come on, guys, this is your week of freedom, right? Don’t bother for me.”

Amanda sighed and hugged him. “We won’t leave things like this. I assure you that we will find that man, collar him, and bring him to you in a sexy getup.”

Collin smiled, regardless of how he felt inside. “I really appreciate the thought, but I know what I know. And if you dare to leave early because of me, I’m never talking to you again.”

By how Amanda’s eyes were darting sideways, it looked like his friend was already communicating in a non-language method with her soon to be husband. Collin was sure they were already plotting something, but he decided that it was futile to contradict them. For now, it was his main goal to make them decide not to leave early on his account.

As for Fort, he already belonged to the past, and he needed to work hard to get over him.

Epilogue

“C, you’re the absolute best. Your cake was a real success,” Amanda said and kissed him on both cheeks.

“I know,” Collin said brightly. “I’m never modest when it comes to my culinary skills. And you deserved an awesome cake on your wedding day.”

“And you shouldn’t be modest about neither of your great points, and you have so many of them.”

“Are you buttering me up because you want something from me?” Collin asked.

Amanda laughed. “I just want you to line up with everyone for the bouquet toss.”

Collin disentangled his arm from Amanda’s squeeze. “Oh, no, I love you, but no. I really want to steer clear of anything resembling romance in the remotest form. I won’t trample my lady friends while struggling to catch the elusive idea of love in the shape of the loveliest bouquet I’ve ever seen.”

Amanda took a look at the bouquet in her hand. “It is lovely, isn’t it?”

Collin rolled his eyes. “Like you didn’t know. Anyhow, just so that you are not disappointed, I’ll go as far away as possible. Don’t even think of throwing it in my direction, you hear me? Our friendship is at stake, just so you know.”

Amanda shrugged. “For the record, C, you’ve threatened me with that shit so many times before that it kind of lost its shine. But, fine, I won’t throw it in your direction.”

“Good girl,” Collin said and kissed her on both cheeks. “Now go and toss the bouquet so that you can finally leave on your honeymoon.”

Amanda stopped for a moment like she was overcome with emotion. Then she hugged him tightly. “Be happy, C, okay?”

“Hey, hey,” Collin patted her on the back, “let’s not go crazy here. You and Frank will only be gone for like two weeks, right? I mean, what’s the point of calling it a honeymoon – all right, so I’m rambling, and you should stop me. The point is, nothing will happen while you’re gone. And I’m happy when I’m cooking anyway, so rest assured, that your wish for me to be happy will be granted.”

Amanda smiled and seemed to rein in her emotions. She kissed Collin once, shortly, on the cheek. “Then off I go to toss this thing.”

“Go, girl,” Collin encouraged him.

She was barely turned from him that he hurried in the opposite direction. He knew Amanda too well not to be aware that she would still toss that thing at him. Therefore, he needed to stay true to his word and be as far as possible from her throwing range, which was, to his relief, reasonably small.

He slid inside the small pavilion and watched the scene from afar. Amanda searched for him with her eyes and waved at him. He waved back and smiled. Let her try to throw that far.

Amanda turned. For a moment, she looked over her shoulder, but not at Collin. From where he stood, he couldn't tell where she was looking. Probably at Frank, who had happily drunken one too many. It was all right, it wasn't his wedding day every day. But probably Amanda would have to carry him to the hotel room and probably strategizing how to torture him on their honeymoon.

What was he thinking? They loved each other. Collin was really happy for them, so Amanda didn't have to worry about how he felt. After all, he wasn't thinking of Fort much. He took breaks now and then, like when he slept.

Amanda brought her hands, holding the bouquet above her head. Collin straightened up and then cursed under his breath. He had told her specifically that he wasn't interested in that, so what was he doing?

Still, she better not toss that thing at him.

And she didn't. The bouquet traveled through the air, to the side where Amanda had looked moments before, and someone caught it deftly, much to the chagrin, loudly expressed, by the group of girls waiting to catch it.

Collin straightened up again, but this time, for a different reason. Without a doubt, the lucky catcher was a guy.

A handsome guy dressed to the nines, his hair brushed back ...

And walking toward him now, with the lovely bouquet in his hand.

Collin gasped. He could make a run for it. No, he would be caught. He could pretend he couldn't see him. No, what, did he turn blind overnight?

That was silly.

Or he could be an adult, say hello, exchange a few pleasantries – oh, how are you? Fine, thanks, me, too – and then casually be on his way.

“This is for you.”

Of all the things Fort could say, while looking good enough to eat, in that sharp suit, his wavy hair made to behave, he said the stupidest in existence. He was holding the bouquet, offering it to Collin, like it was a perfectly natural thing.

“Um, I don’t think so,” Collin said petulantly.

Great. All that remained now was for him to slap Fort’s hand and make him drop the bouquet.

“Amanda told me you should have it.”

Ah, of course, she needed to appeal to strangers to make him heed. With a wooden hand, he took it, his fingers brushing against Fort’s by accident, a simple gesture enough to send eddies of warmth up his arm. “Thanks,” he said, acutely aware of how his voice sounded.

Which was terribly hopeful. Which was wrong!

Fort moved and entered the pavilion. Like everywhere else, he filled the place. Collin felt so stupid, with the bridal bouquet in his hand, sickly in love.

“I didn’t know you were coming,” he said, aching to fill the silence.

“Would you have still come if you knew?” Fort asked.

“Of course. Frank and Amanda are my besties.”

Fort was looking at him with burning eyes. “Then that’s just my luck.”

Collin’s throat went dry. If his life depended on it, he couldn’t bring himself to squeeze a drop of saliva. What did he mean? Why was he staring like that?

“I owe you an apology,” Fort continued and took one step toward Collin.

Each time he moved, Collin felt the need to react to his actions. Not in a bad way. No, in a bad way, because he wanted to move closer, too.

“No need. I mean, it’s all in the past, now.”

“Sorry, but that’s not what I want.”

“Huh?”

Fort smiled. He rubbed his neck and looked away. “I should have let you tell me Henry was your ex. From like a year ago.”

“How do you know?” Collin asked although he knew the answer already.

“Frank hunted me down and smacked some sense into me,” Fort explained.

“Ah, it figures.” Why the hell was his voice getting so annoying low? He barely whispered now.

“You see,” Fort continued, “I was so afraid that you didn’t like me that I sabotaged myself. I could just be honest with you and told you that I’ve always been in love with you. Ah, damn, how could I be --”

“Wait, wait, wait,” Collin finally found his voice. “What did you just say?”

“That I was afraid --”

“No, after that.”

“That I could be honest --”

“Go further.”

“I’ve always been in love with you?”

“Why are you asking me?” Collin threw the bouquet at Fort so hard that petals flew everywhere. It was quite a pity to ruin that lovely thing, but he was so annoyed that he couldn’t stop himself. “Is this the kind of thing to be followed by a question mark?”

To his surprise, Fort started laughing. He picked up the bouquet and handed it back to Collin. “All right, point taken. I’ve always been in love with you.”

Collin narrowed his eyes. “What does always mean?”

“What kind of question is that? Always means always. Ever since I knew you.”

“Do you mean, since high school? But we barely talked!”

“Yeah, because I was a coward, and I didn’t know how to approach you.”

“Really? I was so afraid of you! I mean, each time we passed each other in the hallways, you looked like you wanted to murder me!”

Fort stared at him, his eyes wide in disbelief. “I didn’t want anything like that! I just wanted to have the courage to walk up to you and say hello.”

“Are you fucking kidding me?” Collin wanted to turn that innocent bouquet into a weapon he could use to beat Fort with him. “Have I really got it wrong all this time?”

Fort sighed. “I’m to blame.”

“Yeah, you totally are.”

“Can you forgive me?”

Collin felt his belligerent intentions being washed away by that simple question. “Yes, of course. And you should have listened to me about Henry.”

“You were babbling about him not being a CEO,” Fort replied defensively. “I just thought you wanted to admit to those blatant lies, and nothing else. The moment I heard from you that he was real, my hopes sank. I felt, damn, it’s stupid but it’s true, yes, I felt devastated.”

“Because you thought I was a cheater?”

Fort stared at him for a moment and then bit his lips. “No, because I thought I had no chance with you. Amanda and Frank told me you went through a nasty breakup, but they didn’t tell me the asshole’s name. They were quite sure you were single at the time I spoke to them the first time, but that didn’t mean that things couldn’t change.”

“Ah, about that. What was that about you coming out of a gay bar? Amanda told me,” Collin added quickly.

Fort shrugged and offered his most disarming smile. “I guess I was looking for you.”

“You don’t say.”

“All right, you caught me. I was looking for someone. But as much as I tried, I was always out of luck.”

Collin shook his head. “I can hardly believe that. Everyone would be all over you. In throngs.”

“Like those girlfriends you kept pushing on me,” Fort said with a sly smile. “But no, the problem wasn’t with the others, but with me. No one was you, and I was just growing frustrated. I tried a few times, but it never worked.”

“So, you had boyfriends? Even in high school?”

“No, that happened much, much later. In high school if I hadn’t been such a coward and gathered the courage to ask a guy out, it would have been you.”

Collin groaned, closed his eyes, counted to five, and then opened them again. “You’re still here.”

Fort’s face morphed into an expression of unhidden pain. “Do you want me gone?”

“No, no, damn, so sorry. I thought I must be hallucinating. That’s what I meant.”

Fort relaxed. “You know, I’m baring my soul out here. So, I’m going to take a leap of faith here and ask: do you feel anything for me? Do you think we could try to be boyfriends?”

“Do I feel anything for you?” Collin didn’t know the right words. “All these years, I’ve thought of you. Okay, not all the time, and I tried to make things work with Henry, but he wanted a skinny dude, and I got fat --”

“You’re sexy as you are. You’re not fat,” Fort interrupted him, and his eyes were shooting lightning. “You could even gain some weight if you wanted, but only if that’s what you wish.”

Collin was used to that aggression already. It wasn’t directed at him. “The point is, sorry for rambling about a stupid ex, that I think I’ve always been in love with you, too.”

Fort seemed taken aback by his confession. “Really?”

Collin exhaled. “Yeah. Oh my God, I feel like there’s a weight lifting off my chest. Yes, this is the one and only truth. Even when I was afraid of you --”

“You don’t have to be. It’s just my resting asshole face, I guess.”

Collin laughed. “Resting asshole face, yeah, good one. I’m going to use it.”

Fort came closer. “Collin, I don’t think I can bear talking like this much longer. Do you think I can kiss you?”

“Yeah, totally. I mean, I talk way too much anyway.”

And there was no better way than to be shut up with a kiss.

He took Fort home right away. No words were spoken, no questions were asked, but clothes were removed, hands roamed over bodies, and now they were at the point they had been waiting – apparently – ever since they knew each other.

Collin rolled all naked on top of Fort. “I believe I must warn you. Despite my bubbling personality, my expertise and experience are quite limited. I guess Amanda must have told you that I used to cruise the bars for cock --”

“Amanda told me you were lonely and miserable, and most probably in much need of a partner who would treat you right, the way you deserve.”

“What a traitor,” Collin moaned. “Well, since I’m not capable of fooling everyone, this is the naked truth. I don’t know a lot about love making, except for what I did with my ex. I just need you to keep your expectations low, okay?”

Fort managed to make him roll on his back, and he was on top now. “My only expectations is for you to lie on your back --”

“And think of England?”

“Collin, I need to tell you. I much like your sense of humor, but now’s not the time. What I want to say is that I’ll do everything to make you feel good.”

“Ah, so you have the needed experience and expertise. I’m so jealous,” Collin complained. “Just how many guys --”

Fort shut him up and snuck one maddening tongue inside his mouth. Collin forgot what he wanted to say. What mattered was how easily their bodies fit together. Slick fingers were at his backdoor, and he shivered when he felt something much bigger pressing against it.

Well, it was time for that giant leap of faith, as it seemed. He focused on his breathing as Fort penetrated him excruciatingly slow.

“Oh, God, you’re big,” he whispered.

“Sorry about that,” Fort murmured and stopped.

“No, no, no, please, don’t stop. I’ll take your cock if it’s the last thing I do.”

“I’ve always thought you were brave.”

“Really? Thanks.”

“Yeah, you had the courage to be out when I couldn’t work up the guts to talk to you.”

Collin smiled. “Please, give it to me like you mean it, Fort. You kind of drove me mad on that trip when you told me you wouldn’t fuck me.”

“I wanted you to admit first that you didn’t have a boyfriend. I guess I’m old-fashioned like that. I wanted you to be single.”

“Oh, so old-fashioned.” Collin grunted as Fort pushed in a little more. “Oh, fuck, this feels so awesome. It still hurts, but it’s so awesome.”

“I will really give your ass a workout, so please, keep that thought.” Fort seemed at his wit’s end, so Collin grabbed him and pulled him into a kiss.

He maybe didn’t know a lot about fucking, due to his meager expertise, but he was pretty sure things would change. Fort moved inside him, and then he knew why he had wanted this guy, this particular guy, all this time.

Despite all their misunderstandings, they fit. Even with that difference in size, they still fit. And the cute snake was getting well acquainted with what Collin wanted to think it was a lovely hole, capable of handling him and squeezing him dry.

“Oh, it’s so good the way you milk my cock, fuck,” Fort whispered in his ear. “Will you forgive me if I’m too fast the first time?”

“What? You’re already coming?” Collin wanted to bite his tongue. Maybe his hole was that good.

“No, but I just wanted to warn you that I might not be able to impress you with a forty-minute straight out fucking from the first time.”

“Forty minutes? All right, I guess you should hurry then,” Collin joked.

“Thank you,” Fort replied and smiled. “I’ll try.”

The bed was squeaking and totally not made for this. Collin would think about renovations later. For now, all he could do was follow Fort’s words from earlier. He felt good, no, awesome, no, fantastic, oh, fuck, was he already coming?

“Wow, so fast,” Fort teased him and slowed down.

“Oh, shut up, I’ve been waiting eight years to be fucked like this.”

“I haven’t even done much yet. Let me try to convince you more that I’m boyfriend material.”

Collin couldn’t argue with that. And not with how Fort made him come a second and a third time, hitting that amazing spot over and over, and making so good use of his snake that Collin couldn’t even think straight anymore.

“Where should I come?” Fort asked him in a whisper.

They had to use the rubber, but anywhere else but in his ass was a go. Collin remembered Fort’s wish from the time spent on the trip. “Maybe finish on my face?”

Fort kissed him quickly. “So sexy.” He pulled out, removed the condom, and straddled Collin’s chest. “Oh, fuck, you are just so beautiful,” he whispered as he exploded.

Good thing he closed his eyes. That was why those were called facials. Collin was sure he got quite the coverage, and he didn’t complain one bit.

He snickered as Fort used a damp cloth to clean his face. “Sorry about this. I don’t think I can handle shooting on your face too well. You make me lose my head a little.”

“No, that’s what you do by talking to me like this.”

Fort hugged him and kept him close. “I still cannot wrap my head around being here, with you. I’m not dreaming, right?”

“I could pinch you, but I’ll just kiss you instead.” Collin indulged in kissing Fort for a good solid minute. “Now let’s cuddle a little, okay?”

“I thought you’d never ask,” Fort joked.

Collin sighed in contentment as he took Fort’s arms and wrapped them around him. His eyes fell on the bouquet he dropped on the nightstand. “Amanda and Frank will go crazy when they find out.”

There was only silence on the other end. Had Fort fallen asleep already? He turned his head, only to be met by guilty eyes.

“They already know,” Fort admitted.

“What? How?”

“When you were fumbling with the door key, I sent them a quick text.”

“No way. You’re stealing my besties!”

“Hey, we’re a couple now, share your besties!”

Collin laughed. “Yeah, you’re right. They’re our besties now.”

“That bouquet means something, right?” Fort asked after a short moment of silence.

“Yeah. I mean, since you caught it – wait, what do you mean?”

“Nothing,” Fort said airily.

“Right, nothing.”

“Hey, I’m not going to pressure you or anything. I’ll give you time to realize I’m the right guy for you.”

“If that’s the case, the answer is ‘yes’,” Collin said without bothering to beat around the bush.

“Yes? You said ‘yes’? But I didn’t even get to pop the question!”

“Exactly.” Collin was glad he wasn’t facing Fort because he was grinning like a mad person. “I know exactly what you’re thinking.”

“Mind reader much?”

“I guess.”

“Good. Then my answer is ‘yes’, too.”

“But I didn’t ask – right. Good. Because if it hadn’t been ‘yes’, I would have had to find ways to keep you in here against your will.”

“Keep me here,” Fort whispered in his ear.

“You can bet I’ll do that,” Collin replied and pulled Fort’s arms around him closer.

THE END