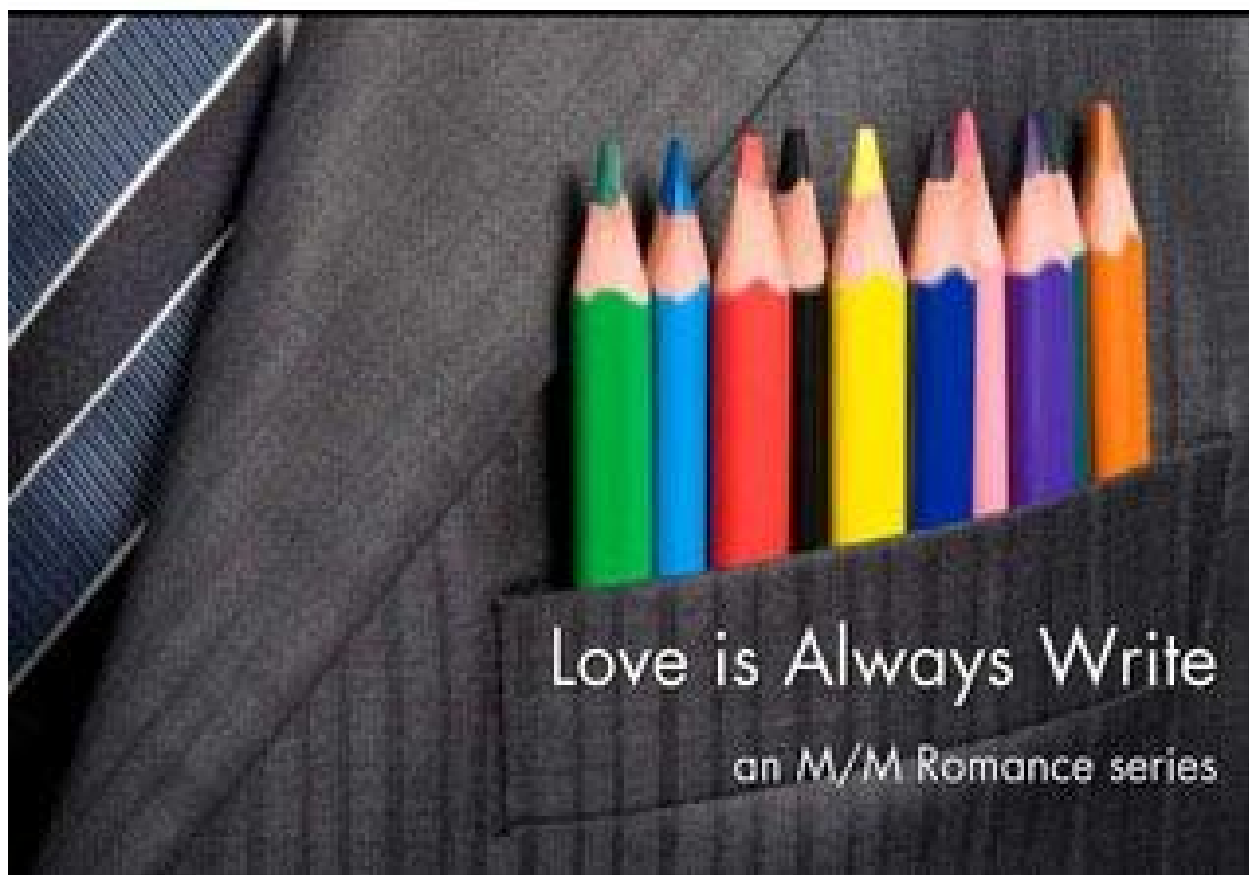




Pillow Talk

J.H. Knight



Pillow Talk
by J.H. Knight

Free Short Fiction

Word count: 22,436

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Content warning: This work contains sexually explicit scenes and adult language and may be considered offensive to some readers.

This story was written as a part of the Goodreads M/M Romance group's *Love is Always Write* event. For more free stories and to view the original request letter and photo for this story, please feel free to join the Goodreads M/M Romance group and visit the discussion section titled "Love Is Always Write."

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Content warnings: none

PILLOW TALK
BY J.H. KNIGHT

Smacking his dry lips together, his tongue feeling like he'd licked the carpet in his sleep, Scott wasn't quite ready to blink open his crusty eyes. He silently began piecing together the night before. Copious amounts of alcohol, loud music, the apartment full of friends and more than a few friendly strangers. He vaguely remembered a quick handjob in the bathroom from some guy Jimmy had introduced him to, but the rest was a blur.

When he felt safe that his head wasn't on the verge of exploding, Scott opened one eye. The warmth against his back and the comfortable weight of an arm slung over his waist told him he wasn't alone, but the familiar little snore against ear was what made him smile and dare to lift his head.

Jimmy. The man was wrapped around him from behind, their jean-clad legs tangled together, t-shirts twisted, socks half-kicked off. They wound up like that too often for Scott to be surprised. "Wake up, dipshit, you're drooling on my shoulder." Scott nudged back against his best friend, but Jimmy just tightened his arm and snuffled into Scott's hair. "Christ," he muttered to himself with a huff of laughter, trying to disentangle from the other man.

They had been best friends and roommates for over four years, inseparable since being randomly assigned to a dorm room together. They both got their bachelor's degrees and when Jimmy started med school less than a year ago, Scott started his PhD program and the two of them got this little place off campus together. It was small, but clean and cheap.

Voice rough from sleep, and probably more than a few hits off the bong that was passed around the night before, Jimmy muttered, "Time is it?"

Scott was just getting himself up, glancing at the clock, "Nearly noon," he said over his shoulder, running a hand through his sandy-blond hair.

"What time is Ruby getting in?"

"Plane lands in an hour."

Spreading out on the bed and stretching his long, strong arms over his broad shoulders, "We should've told her to come out on Monday so we could've recovered from last night." Jimmy grumbled, his words nearly lost on a yawn. If Scott let himself think about it—and he never did let himself think about it—he'd have to admit that Jimmy was picture perfect, straight out of a magazine perfect.

Still sitting on the side of the bed with his elbows resting on his knees, Scott looked like he might roll over and go back to sleep, only grunting in agreement with Jimmy's comment.

“Get your big gay ass moving, sweet cheeks.” Jimmy told him, finally getting to his feet and stretching again.

He shot Jimmy an affronted look as the man came to stand in front of him, “My ass may be gay, but it is *not* big.” Giving a backhanded tap to Jimmy’s stomach where his shirt was riding up. “It’s one of my best features.” Scott added petulantly.

“So I’ve been told, princess. Now, let’s see the damage out there before we go get little sis.”

Scott snorted another laugh but he stood up, shifting his clothes and straightening himself out before tripping over one of Jimmy’s enormous shoes that were abandoned in the floor. “I don’t know how you can call her that considering you hit on her the first time you met her.”

“I did not! I was just being friendly.” Jimmy defended. It was an old argument, one that they laughed over every time Ruby’s name was even mentioned. “You’d already told her all sorts of shit about me; I was just living up to her expectations. She would’ve been offended if I hadn’t pretended to try.”

“Right...”

“And you lied to the girl.”

“Lied, my ass.” Scott was already making his way past the mountain that was his best friend, Jimmy topping him by a few inches and several more pounds of muscle.

“Yes, lied. I don’t mark notches in my bedpost.”

Scott arched a brow, “Since getting out of high school.” he added as they made their way to the living room.

“Yeah, well. You made it sound like I still do that. I’ve...matured since then.”

Scott couldn’t help but laugh, shaking his head, “Yes, we’re both pillars of maturity and decorum.”

“Practically saints.” Jimmy agreed, dropping his arm around Scott’s shoulder.

They both stopped as if they’d walked into a wall. Their tiny living room/dining room/kitchenette was buried under a pile of beer cans, pizza boxes, and clothing.

“It looks like a strip club exploded in here.” Jimmy was great for stating the obvious.

“Maybe... Maybe it’s not as bad as it looks. I mean...”

Taking an optimistic sniff, Jimmy said hopefully, “I don’t smell anything too foul at least,”

As they began throwing everything into two giant trash bags—one for recycle and one for unidentifiable filth—Scott turned to Jimmy in alarm, “Did what’s-her-name sleep over?”

“Who’s what’s-her-name?”

“Sharon...Cheryl... whatever her name was.”

“Oh, Christ,” Jimmy muttered, stalking down the hall to his own bedroom. When he returned a moment later he was laughing. “She slept over, but, uh, so did Benny and Mark...”

Scott was grinning at him, “Jesus, maybe you should marry her. She’s the girl version of *you*.”

“Makes my head hurt to think of the logistics of what went on in my room last night. There’s barely enough room for me in that bed.”

Pausing as he dropped another beer can into the recycle bag, Scott narrowed his eyes, “I know,” he said pointedly, “I’ve walked in on more than one of your little love-ins on the couch. Or *my* bed.”

“Well...your bed is bigger.” Jimmy told him as they resumed their slap and dash cleaning, “And it’s not like I don’t invite you to join us...” he added with a winning smile.

“One of these days I’m gonna take you up on it just to see the look of shock on your face. I bet your dick would shrink to the size of a peanut.” They were both laughing, Scott picking up a stray pair of pink satin panties and flinging them at Jimmy.

“They’d look better on you, sweetheart.” Teasing Scott and tossing them back at him. When Scott’s face flushed a pink to match the panties, Jimmy’s grin turned evil, “Oh-*ho*! Have we found a kink for baby?”

“*No*.” he said firmly, adding the panties to a pile of lost and found clothing on the couch. “They’re just...soft.”

“One of the nice things about girls,” Jimmy told him, “You should try it sometime, just to see.”

“Yeah, well.”

Jimmy stopped in mid-motion then, staring at his friend, “*What?*”

Looking guilty, Scott continued what he was doing, unable to make eye contact, “Not one of my finer moments, okay?”

“Okay, but we’re resuming this conversation in the car.” Glancing at his watch, Jimmy looked around the room as if deciding it wasn’t great but it would do, “We better hit the road; we’re gonna be late as it is.”

“Better get your room cleared out first.” Scott reminded him, heading to his own room to find his keys and phone.

It took a few minutes to take out the trash and make sure the apartment was free of vagrants, but they were finally trapped in the small confines of Scott’s little hybrid and pulling out onto the main road toward I-5. Jimmy was scrunched up in the front seat next to Scott, fiddling with the settings and trying to make room for his (in Scott’s opinion) excessively long legs. “If you hate my car so much, why didn’t you drive?”

“Yours gets better gas mileage.” Jimmy muttered, hitting the wrong button and ending up nearly flat on his back, his knees still up against the dash.

Scott took pity on him, laughing as he stopped at a traffic light and leaning over the man, finding the right switch and gliding the man’s seat back to a comfortable position for him. “You say that like it’s just random luck, like we don’t *choose* our cars, like it’s luck of the draw or something. You could’ve picked a car that was easy on gas and the environment but you *chose* a car that was all...testosterone...*look at my giant dick with wheels* instead. “

Jimmy snorted and batted the back of Scott’s head as they turned at the corner, “My car is *hot*.”

“It is,” Scott agreed, not adding that he wagered Jimmy’s dick was pretty damn hot too.

“And, you’re just avoiding our predetermined topic of discussion by insulting my hot car.”

Scott scowled and gripped the wheel a little tighter, “I am not. It was a perfectly valid point.”

“The one about you having slept with a girl?” Jimmy asked, one cheek dimpling as he flashed his brightest smile.

Huffing and rolling his eyes, “Once, okay? One time in high school, that’s it. And Epic Fail doesn’t even begin to cover it.”

“And...” Jimmy prompted, reaching a hand over, fingers playing in Scott’s hair as he drove.

“You really are a bastard, ya know that?”

“My mother would disagree.”

“Fine. We dated for over a year and I kept telling her we should wait, she was too young, if we got caught...the church wouldn’t approve—“ Scott had to stop for Jimmy’s burst of laughter there.

“The *church*? You used *God* as a reason not to sleep with a girl?”

“Yeah, well. He made me this way; I figured I could turn the joke on Him.”

“Fair enough,” Jimmy agreed, still snickering, his hand having dropped to Scott’s shoulder, a comforting weight, warm and secure there. “So, what happened?”

“I don’t know, at a certain point, telling her we were too young didn’t really cut it, ya know? I think she was the only virgin left in our class. And, she kinda realized that using my unshakable faith wasn’t really an option since I hadn’t been to services since we’d started dating...” Having to pause for a breath, Scott went on, feeling a little ashamed still, despite the fact that it was over five years ago, “Homecoming, I got us a hotel room, got myself good and drunk, bought some condoms and...”

“And...?” Scott mumbled something under his breath, his face flushing to a deep crimson on his pale skin. Jimmy seemed to sense that he was struggling and his grip on Scott’s shoulder tightened a little, fingers stroking his neck, “You don’t have to tell me if you really don’t wanna, bro. It’s all good.”

Maybe it was the sincerity in Jimmy’s voice, the lack of teasing that was always there, but Scott swallowed hard and raised his head a little, still focused on the road, but glancing at his friend, “No, it’s just... Do you have any idea how hard it is to... With a virgin, I mean, when you’re only half-hard at *best*?”

Jimmy was truly a good friend because he did his very best—really!—not to laugh at that, his grin killing him as it tried to escape. “No, I, uh, can’t say that I do, but...I can imagine...”

Stopping at the next light, Scott rested his forehead on the steering wheel, “Or how humiliating it is for a *guy* to fake an orgasm.”

“I...no, I don’t know what that’s like.” He couldn’t help it. He really tried. But the laughter just burst out of him. “That must’ve sucked.” he added, trying to regain his sobriety as Scott looked at him with a hint of bitterness in his amber colored eyes.

“It did.” he told Jimmy, glaring at the road ahead as the light changed. “Rhonda was the first person I came out to because I couldn’t let her think it was *her* when it was actually *me*. Well, more to the point, that she wasn’t Martin Rhodes who was the tight end on our football team. And, I swear to God, Jimmy, you make a tight end joke now, I’m dropping you off on the side of the freeway.” Scott warned as he merged onto said freeway.

“I wasn’t gonna make a joke.” Jimmy told him, reaching again to try and comfort his friend.

“Seriously? You didn’t have a joke ready?”

“Three, actually,” Jimmy confessed, his smile not as cocky as usual, but just as disarming, “But I wasn’t gonna use them.”

“Three in as many seconds? I’m impressed...”

“You should be. At my quick wit *and* my restraint.”

“Agreed. Good man.” Scott told him, only a trace of sarcasm in his voice.

“Who was next?” Jimmy asked, seemingly out of the blue.

“Next what? Just the one girl; I told ya that.”

“No, who’d you come out to next?”

“Oh, Ruby and Ma the next day. Ruby just cocked her little head and smiled and said, ‘Figured,’ and Ma hugged me and told me she was proud of me for finally telling her.”

“That’s it?”

“I think she’d wondered for a while, I mean, yeah, I had a girlfriend and played football and baseball and all that, but I took ballroom dance and watched Golden Girl reruns with her too...”

Feeling like it was safe to laugh again, Jimmy let himself, “That would’ve been a toss-up.” he said, grinning again as they started the winding curves into the airport.

“Not really; I got into sports for the locker room.” Scott’s phone buzzed in his pocket as he was trying to merge into the arrivals lane. “Can ya get that for me?” he asked, lifting his hips up a little so Jimmy could fit his hand into Scott’s impossibly tight jean pocket.

“Do I get to feel ya up too?” the other man teased as he dug out Scott’s phone.

“Maybe later, doll.” Scott drawled, rolling his eyes as he scanned the signs for Ruby’s airline.

“It’s baby sis, she says—and I quote—‘*You’re late, asshole. I hope you’re at least getting laid.*’ Want me to respond to that?” Jimmy asked, beaming and already thumbing a message back.

“Oh, Christ, what did you say?”

“I told her I was blowing you in the parking deck but we’d be there in a minute.”

“Asshole,” Scott said under a laugh, rolling his eyes again.

“So, what’s the deal with her and this guy?”

“Engaged and planning to tie the knot this summer. I think Ma’s hoping I can talk her out of it while she’s here.”

“She’s not even twenty-one, I can’t blame your mother.”

“Almost twenty-two, but Ma’s a little gunshy about marriage in general, so...”

“Well, marry a lying sack of shit and that’s bound to happen.”

“Too true.”

Scott’s phone buzzed again and Jimmy flipped it open without hesitation, laughing out loud after reading the message, “She says it’s about damn time I gave you some. She also called me a prick tease.”

“You are a prick tease, bitch.”

“You love it. Also, I could say the same to you. You weren’t even willing to give me a hand that one time...”

“Oh, God, that again? You were shitfaced, falling over and about to pass out.”

“Yeah, see? I actually did need a hand.”

Scott pulled up to the lane for picking up arrivals and looked at Jimmy, “I’d never take advantage of you and you know it.” He was totally serious, but Jimmy, of course, made a joke.

Batting his eyelashes at Scott, the man asked, “Even if I begged you to, angel?”

Scott was saved from having to respond when Ruby knocked on the window, the two men getting out and greeting her.

“Fucking hell, I’ve been here over a half hour,” Ruby told Jimmy as the man squeezed the air from her lungs, hugging her tightly. “Did you two have to get rid of last night’s himbos and bimbos?” she asked, grinning against Jimmy’s shoulder as he lifted her off the ground.

“Yeah, but for once neither of the himbos were for Scott.” Jimmy told her, setting her down again and ruffling her hair like she was still in grade school.

Ruby could probably pass for a grade schooler if she didn’t open her mouth. Her petite frame only came to Scott’s shoulder and somewhere in the middle of Jimmy’s chest. Her blonde hair was a natural mass of ringlets that shined like spun gold when the sun hit. “Did you finally start playing for the other team or just switch hitting?” she asked, beaming up into Jimmy’s face.

“Neither. Until your brother makes an honest man outta me, I’m sticking with the ladies.” Jimmy told her, laughing with her as he ran his hands down her sides, flirting and playful as always, “You look incredible, by the way.”

Narrowing his eyes, Scott reached a hand up and smacked Jimmy on the back of his head,

“Hands off, Don Juan.”

Jimmy hopped back a little and reached to smooth his dark hair down where Scott had just tapped him, “Well, if I can’t have *you*...”

It was Ruby’s turn to give him a playful slap then, “Did you just call me your second choice, shit head?”

“I’ll get your luggage.” Jimmy said, laughing as he backed away from the two siblings.

“Hello, gorgeous,” Scott said with affection as he scooped his sister into his arms and swung her around. “God, it’s been too long.” he added, squeezing her good before setting her down again.

“I didn’t tell ya to move two thousand miles from home...” she murmured, giving him a small kiss on the cheek before rubbing the bright red lipstick print off with her thumb.

“Yeah, well, Seattle has two things going for it that Rouses Point *doesn’t*. Less than a foot of snow a year and more than one gay guy.”

“And me!” Jimmy added from the back of the car, stuffing Ruby’s large suitcase into the trunk.

“Yes, and Jimmy. Though, sometimes I can’t decide if that goes under the plus or minus side.”

“You love me and you know it.” Jimmy told him, knowing it was true and that it went both ways.

“More often than not.” Scott agreed, but he was beaming at the man as Jimmy walked back to them and slung his arm around Scott’s shoulder.

“More like always.” Jimmy countered, dropping a little kiss into Scott’s hair before giving him a small shove to get into the car.

“You two really should just get married, Jesus.” Ruby muttered, rolling her eyes at the two as she clamored into the backseat of Scott’s tiny car.

“If we make it through June without it getting pushed to the November ballot, I’ll marry ya, baby.” Jimmy told him, laughing as he scrunched himself back into the car.

“We could do the Pride pub crawl for our honeymoon.”

“You two do the Pride pub crawls every year anyway.” Ruby pointed out, and Scott could hear the amusement in her tone. “Gayest straight man on the planet.” she added, patting Jimmy on the top of his head.

“That’s right,” Jimmy agreed, “I’m as happy as they come.”

Ruby’s little giggle sounded like a very unladylike snort, “Don’t you mean you’re happy as long

as you come?”

“That too.”

“Okay, mom,” Jimmy said into his phone, pacing around the small living room where Scott and Ruby watched him from the couch, “No, I will. Yes, I promise. Yes, okay, yes, do that. No he won’t mind, I swear.” He rolled his eyes and made a little talking motion with his hand as he moved into the kitchenette, rattling a small pot on the stove, “Mom, okay, but I gotta go or dinner’s gonna burn. Love you too. Yes. Yeah, okay. Yeah. Tell dad hi for me. Okay. Yes, I’ll tell her too. Okay, bye mom, boiling over here, gotta go!” And he snapped his phone shut, turning the ringer off. “Oh, my God, I swear she likes you better than me.” he told Scott as he came back into the living room.

“Of course she does. I never took her six thousand dollar show dog and dyed it purple.” Scott agreed, laughing as he stretched out on the couch, Ruby flipping channels and curled up next to him. “Or borrowed her Versace micro dress for a Halloween costume.”

“The dog was for the costume too. I don’t think I should get dinged twice for that...”

“Whatever you say, baby, but I’m pretty sure she doesn’t see it that way. “

Jimmy made a frustrated growling noise in his throat as he flopped down on the other end of the couch, putting Ruby between himself and Scott. “She wants me to tell you hello, Rubes. And *you*,” reaching over the girl and tugging lightly at Scott’s hair, “She told me to tell you we’re spending the first two weeks of summer with them.”

Scott let his head fall back and relaxed into Jimmy’s touch, turning his face to see the man. “Sounds good. Palm trees and a private pool. Guy could get used to that.”

“She’s springing for the tickets too, said she’d message you on Facebook about the details.”

“Gotta love the way she spoils us.”

“No, she spoils *you*. Before we moved in together, I had to buy my own ride home every break. And, tell me again when you added my *mother* to your Facebook?”

“When she sent me a request...”

“Good Christ.”

“Such a pain in the ass when your best friend gets along with your family, isn’t it?” Scott asked with a bright grin, glancing between Jimmy and Ruby, the girl now curled up against Jimmy with her feet in Scott’s lap.

“Yeah, well. I’m adding your mom on mine, see how you like it.”

“You’ll have to make her an account first.” Ruby muttered, “Now shut up so I can watch *The Voice*. I can’t hear a damn thing over you two hens.”

Jimmy tugged at her hair for that, but he quieted down for her, reaching back across the couch to Scott, finding the man’s neck and gently kneading it, an absentminded touch, his hands, his body always seeming to gravitate toward Scott.

Sighing and leaning a little closer into the touch, Scott didn’t take his eyes off the screen, didn’t move his hands from Ruby’s little feet in his lap, but he let himself smile at the familial picture they made, loving the way they all fell into rhythm together, the way Jimmy was the same day or night, regardless of who else was around.

After another hour of television and a few beers, Ruby was yawning and stretching, sitting up from between the two men. “Okay, am I on the couch or one of your rooms this time?” she asked, already getting to her feet so she could get changed for bed, feeling the jetlag more than she would like to admit.

“You can have my room, lovey, I’ll bunk with Scott.”

“Figures.” she said, rolling her eyes fondly as she leaned down to drop a kiss on Jimmy’s forehead and then Scott’s. “I was pissed the first time I woke up on this piece of shit couch and found *your* bed empty...”

“His bed is always empty. He can’t fit another person in there with him and he doesn’t like to sleep alone.”

“Good excuse, I’ll have to remember that.” she told them, laughing as she gathered her things and headed for the bathroom.

Jimmy waited until she had turned down the hall before flopping over and resting his head in Scott’s lap. “You didn’t even mention the fiancé thing.”

“Yeah, but neither did she, maybe she’s not all that serious?”

“Or maybe she’s waiting to see if you say something...”

“Christ, I don’t even know what to tell her. I met Roger and he seems like a nice guy, but...”

“But, she’s still a baby, even if she talks like a sailor and runs around with an *Abortion on demand and without apology* button on her field jacket.”

“Exactly. And, like...I don’t know, hell, I’m older than her and I don’t feel ready for that kind of thing, ya know?”

“Yeah, I hear ya.” Scott started to shift under Jimmy, readying to get up, “I’m too tired to go to bed, Scott, carry me.” Jimmy whined playfully, batting his long dark lashes at his friend.

“Lose about fifty pounds and six inches, then ask me to do that for ya.”

“*Hey*, this is all muscle.”

“Which is heavier than fat, or haven’t you gotten that far in your book learnin’, doc?”

Jimmy stuck his tongue out at Scott, but he sat up, groaning a little. “You’re mean.”

“Tough love. You need anything outta your room before Ruby stakes her claim?”

“Nah, I’m good.”

“You’re wearing underwear this time?”

“Yes, mother.”

“Don’t ‘*yes, mother*’ me. That was an alarming way to wake up.”

“By alarming, I hope you mean tempting as hell.” Jimmy told him, his grin firmly in place, straight white teeth and all, as he dropped his arm over Scott’s shoulder and steered him towards the bedroom.

“Yes, yes, tempting as hell. Lucky me to have a best friend that’s God’s gift. I can’t imagine how I seem to forget it so often.”

“You just block it out so you don’t have to pine for me.”

“That must be it.” Scott answered dryly, shutting the door behind them as they made their way to bed. They both stripped off their clothes quickly, backs to each other. Scott caught a glance of Jimmy’s bare shoulders as the man tossed his shirt into the floor, but he closed his eyes for a moment to erase the image.

“I get to be the big spoon tonight.” Jimmy told him, already slipping under the covers, plumping a pillow.

“You always get to be the big spoon.” Scott grumbled, pulling on a pair of sleep pants and cinching the waist in a little with the drawstring.

“That’s because I *am* bigger. You are, by nature, the little spoon. It’s not my fault; blame genetics.”

“That’s like saying because I’m short, I have to be a bottom.” Scowling playfully, Scott climbed into bed, snuggling up with Jimmy.

“No, you’re a bottom because you like taking it up the ass.”

“How do you know?”

“Thin walls. You think I don’t hear you? ‘*Yes, God, fuck me harder*’ tends to carry when the apartment is quiet...”

Scott felt his face flush with the heat of embarrassment, “Oh, God.”

Jimmy’s soft breath moved through Scott’s hair, his laughter gentle as he tightened his arms around his friend. “It’s alright, princess, better you than me.”

“Don’t knock it till ya try it.”

“Fair point,” Jimmy murmured, his tone thoughtful. “Hey, how come you never wanted to try anything with me?” he asked suddenly, whispering in the darkened room as the shadows from the lights outside played against the walls.

“I...” Scott was lost for an answer for a moment, not sure how to respond. In truth, the first time he set eyes on Jimmy he wanted to be pressed up against a wall by the guy, but then they got to know each other, and he realized the man was a few notches past straight, but also the best friend he could have hoped for and anything more seemed like a useless fantasy compared to what he got from Jimmy every day.

Turning so he could face his friend, Scott tangled their feet together under the covers, slipping a hand over Jimmy’s hip. “I don’t know, it’s like...” Taking a breath as he chose his words, “I think of you in a totally non-sexual way, ya know? Like... I love you, we take care of each other, always there for each other, but... It’s like a dog, I mean... Some people love their dogs more than the people in their lives, but they don’t think of them in that light.”

“Well, some people—“

“Oh, Jesus, you’re such a sicko.”

“I didn’t say I would!”

Both of them laughing, Scott put his hand over Jimmy’s mouth, “Shh, Ruby’s trying to sleep.”

Jimmy nudged Scott’s hand until the man let it slip from his mouth, the two looking at each other in the shadows, “So, you’re telling me I’m like your *dog*?”

“Only in that non-sexual love way.” Scott answered seriously even as Jimmy was biting back his grin. The man looked at him for a long moment and Scott knew he should prepare himself for something, just not sure what. He could feel Jimmy’s bare chest against his own, feel the rise and fall as Jimmy took a breath. The man’s arms tightened around him slightly before Jimmy let his

smile shine through and leaned forward, licking Scott's cheek. "You are so gross."

"Woof."

Scott turned back over then, laughing with Jimmy. "Better knock it off or you're getting kibble for breakfast."

Waking slowly and pressing back slightly against the nudge of a warm morning erection through layers of flannel and cotton, Scott was still half-asleep, his own cock stirring as he nestled closer to Jimmy, letting himself pretend it was still a dream. The soft moan and grinding of Jimmy's hips had Scott fully awake, though, his eyes popping open as he tried to shift away from the man. He knew Jimmy was still asleep and couldn't allow himself to enjoy it anymore.

Jimmy's arms tightened around Scott, pulling him closer again, "C'mere," he muttered, talking in his sleep, voice a warm rumble against the back of Scott's neck. As Jimmy's hand started to drift lower over Scott's stomach, a small bolt of panic rose in his throat, wanting to let the man continue, and at the same time knowing how awkward things could turn if he did. No matter how much Jimmy joked and teased and flirted, he knew the man was straight and—in Scott's experience—straight guys could get weird after dipping a toe or two in the gay end of the pool.

Stopping the progress of Jimmy's hand, Scott held his wrist, shifting his elbow back into Jimmy's ribs at the same time, "Wake up, I think Ruby's burning the kitchen down." he whispered, sniffing into the air and coming away with the scent of scorched meat-substitute.

Jimmy seemed to wake up then, sliding his hand back a little, lacing his fingers with Scott's, "Oh, Jesus, how in the name of God did you two survive? Your mother worked fifteen hours a day and neither one of you can boil water without setting off the smoke alarm."

"Sandwiches." Scott told him, pulling away with a laugh, trying to will his own erection down.

"She's not still on that vegan kick is she?"

"Far as I know. Meat is still murder, according to Ruby."

"Delicious and nutritious murder." Jimmy offered, running his hand through his hair that was sticking out at odd angles, making him look boyish and unassuming.

They made their way out of bed, elbows bumping each other, shoulders brushing, as they walked together into the kitchen. "What did you do?" Scott asked his sister, looking around the small kitchen where it seemed every dish they owned was out and dirty.

"Breakfast. Kind of." Her own brow creased as she looked around the disaster area. "It's kinda burnt, but, um..." Pointing with the oven mitt she had been using to wave the smoke out the little

kitchen window, “Soy bacon, egg-substitute scramble, whole wheat toast...that’s probably not edible anymore, though.” She poked the black toast with a fingertip, a corner of it chipping off under the slight pressure.

“Probably?” Jimmy teased, coming around and dropping a kiss to the top of Ruby’s head as he reached over her into the cupboard and pulled out a box of cereal. “You have other talents, Rubes. Explore them. Cooking, not so much.”

“See if I try to do something nice for you again.” Ruby told him, reaching for a bowl to join him in the cereal. “Walked to the store, lugged groceries in, washed dishes before I could even cook, made a healthy breakfast...”

“I’m pretty sure that much carbon can’t be considered part of a healthy diet...” Scott told her, laughing as he got out juice and the soy milk for Ruby, joining them.

“Lots of people take charcoal caps every day.” Jimmy offered helpfully, his mouth full, milk dripping down his chin.

Scott leaned over and swiped the milk from Jimmy’s face with a napkin, not even realizing he’d done it, but Ruby watched, her brow arching as she observed the two going through their morning rituals. Jimmy poured cereal for Scott, Scott poured orange juice into a glass for Jimmy who pulled out the morning newspaper and handed Scott the world news section while Jimmy rummaged for the sports, setting sale papers in the middle so they could look at them together.

“Could you pass me the—“ Scott didn’t have to finish because Jimmy was already passing the little sugar bowl over to him without even looking up from the paper.

“Sacramento lost by three last night.” Jimmy announced, still scanning the paper.

“How much did you lose?”

“Only a twenty, but it’s still annoying. I hate it when Gary wins; he’s such an arrogant prick.”

“Hello pot, meet kettle...”

Jimmy put his paper down to shoot Scott a glare for that, “There’s a difference between some well-earned gloating and doing a chicken dance while sticking a twenty dollar bill to your forehead.”

Laughing, Scott conceded, “Fair enough. You’re an arrogant prick when you win but Gary is a prize A jackass.”

“Yeah, alright, that sounds more accurate.” Jimmy was laughing with him as he got up to put his own bowl and Scott’s into the sink. “Who gets first shower?” he asked, rinsing the dishes and leaving them in the soapy water.

“Had mine.” Ruby told them, the first thing she’d said for several moments, still watching her brother and his best friend.

“Just you and me, sweetheart.” Jimmy told Scott, doing the worst Humphrey Bogart impression of all time. The man had come to stand behind Scott and was rubbing his shoulders lightly as he looked at the paper Scott still held.

Scott’s head dropped back, resting on Jimmy’s stomach as he looked up at his friend, “Who’re you supposed to be this morning? The Godfather?”

Jimmy narrowed his eyes playfully, “Just for that, I’m not gonna to let you share my shower.”

Scott tried to look wounded, but he laughed instead, “Just save me some hot water.”

“Not a chance. You want hot water, you better join me.”

“You just said I couldn’t...”

Jimmy considered for a moment, “And that is your punishment. A cold, lonely shower.”

Scott just shook his head and laughed as Jimmy gave a little pat to his shoulder and trotted off down the hall.

Ruby watched her brother for another long moment, waiting for the sound of running water to come from down the hall. “Hey, um, Scott?”

Setting his paper aside, Scott got up to get a cup of coffee, casting a curious glance at his sister.

“Are you sure...I mean, I know Jimmy likes to...but...”

“Spit it out Ruby, you’re gonna develop a stammer.”

“Well, I mean...” She scrunched up her nose and tilted her head, as if trying to choose her words carefully then just blurted her question out, “You sure Jimmy’s like, really *really* straight?”

He had to laugh. Scott had been hearing that same question since the first time Jimmy pulled Scott down into his lap in the commons and planted a sloppy kiss to his cheek. For a while there he thought he’d never get another date as long as he hung out with Jimmy; everyone assuming they were a couple. “I’m pretty sure the entire cheer squad can’t be wrong.”

“There are guys on your cheer squad...” Ruby pointed out, both of them laughing that time.

“The female portion of our cheer team.”

Helping clean up the breakfast debacle, Ruby shook her head a little, looking a lot like her brother in the moment, “If you say so, but... Do you guys really take showers together? I

mean...”

Snorting a laugh, “Sometimes, but only if we’re both in a hurry. It’s not as hot as it sounds.”

“I just think he—“

“He just likes to play around, and he likes to shock people. Hell, his own mother wonders. She even asked me the first time I met her.”

“Seriously?”

“Yeah, she pulled me aside and said, ‘I’m so glad my son has a friend like you now.’ Emphasis on the word friend. Then she asked how long we’d been together. I had to swear up and down that it wasn’t like that and we really weren’t euphemism friends. I still don’t think she fully believes me.”

“Well, I can’t blame her, I mean...”

As if Ruby had called Jimmy out to illustrate her point, the man sauntered in with only a white towel slung low on his hips, his body glistening with water, skin flushed a rosy-golden hue from the warmth of his shower. His hair hung straighter when it was damp and it fell into his eyes, hiding them and at the same time showing off his square jaw and Roman nose. Scott had to bite his own lip, trying not to think about the fact that the man looked like a wet dream as he settled back against him, Jimmy stepping up behind Scott and wrapping his arms around his waist.

“I changed my mind.” Jimmy told him in a playful, husky rumble.

“Decided to vote Republican just to piss off your parents?” Scott asked, laughing, “Becoming a nurse instead of a doctor? You’ve been lying to me all these years and you’re really a cat person?”

Jimmy grinned as he leaned in and laid a soft bite against Scott’s neck. The sensation sent a wave of shivers over the surface of Scott’s skin, but he suppressed it like he always did. “About your shower. I left you some hot water after all.”

“My hero.” Scott drawled, nudging Jimmy with an elbow until the man let him go. He held his hands in front of himself as he walked down the hall, trying to hide the slight tent of his sleep pants.

Coming out of his shower, Scott paused in the hall, he could hear Jimmy and Ruby talking from the living room, the two of them laughing about something—probably a joke Jimmy had just made about Scott.

“Seriously, though, you’re gonna give your brother an ulcer over Roger.”

“I only told Ma I was gonna marry him because she still...”

“Treats you like a baby?” Jimmy asked, Scott biting his lip around a smile as he eavesdropped.

“Exactly. I mean, Jesus, while I was packing to come out here, she actually stood at the foot of my bed and said, ‘*you’re not really going to wear that, are you?*’ Like...I’m not even capable of dressing myself or something.”

“She’s your mom, kiddo, it’s probably a hard habit to break.”

“I know, but it’s fucking annoying.”

Jimmy’s laugh drifted through the apartment and Scott was sure the man was pulling Ruby into a hug, “Time to move out on your own, sweetie.”

Ruby’s sigh was heavy, “I know. I like the free rent, though.”

“Not really free if you’re crazy because of it.”

“There is that.”

Scott was about to turn and go into his bedroom when Jimmy called out, “You don’t have to hide in the hall, darling; we’re not swapping secrets about you!”

He thought about pretending he didn’t hear, but that was pointless. Coming around the corner with a guilty smile, Scott asked, “So you’re not actually engaged?”

Ruby rolled her eyes, “You think I’m an idiot?”

“I was starting to wonder,” he teased, squeezing himself down onto the couch between Jimmy and his sister, forcing them to move for him. “So Ma’s getting on your nerves and, rather than get a job and move out, you decided to make up an engagement to...what? Get on her nerves right back?”

Pausing for a moment, Ruby laughed, “Basically. I guess it worked.”

“Too well. Ma’s probably putting a hit out on Roger as we speak.”

Reaching around Scott’s shoulder, Jimmy tugged at the girl’s hair, “That’s okay, little Ruby is worth life and limb.”

Scott pressed a kiss to her temple, earning a faint blush from his sister and then an elbow to his ribs, “Don’t I know it.”

It rained for most of her visit, Seattle deciding to show its true colors for a few days with angry looking gray clouds and drizzle hovering over emerald green. That didn't stop them from long drives to the peninsula or walks along the waterfront. Ruby flirted with the fish throwers in the market and gave her coins to street performers. She got pulled up on stage when Scott and Jimmy took her to a little burlesque hall and lied, telling the manager it was her birthday. She giggled and blushed and then swore a blue streak at them when she sat back down at their table.

"That is going on YouTube as we speak." Jimmy told her, laughing himself stupid as he leaned away from her, trying to hit send before she could take his phone from him.

Smacking his shoulder and ordering a double from the waiter, "Dinner's on you."

"Don't pout, it's not pretty."

Scott was laughing so hard watching them, he had tears in his eyes, "You two better knock it off or they're gonna kick us out. We just got our privileges back."

Ruby stopped trying to get the phone from Jimmy, asking, "Privileges?"

Nodding as he motioned for another drink himself, Scott laughed, "Jimmy got us banned for a whole year."

"Why am I not surprised?"

"It wasn't *just* me!"

"You're the one that did the little table dance..."

"At your request."

"I didn't tell you to take your pants down."

Sitting up a little straighter, Jimmy gave an indignant huff, "I had more clothes on than the dancers."

Giggling as she leaned against her brother, "Oh, Jesus, why didn't *that* end up on YouTube."

Scott beamed at her, "It did. *Someone* reported it and it was removed."

The next day, Scott and Jimmy stood outside Scott's car, hugging Ruby and making sure she had her boarding pass, her ID, and all the other little things the girl was prone to forget. "Love you, sis." Scott told her, hugging her tightly. "Don't go six months without another visit again. Hate that." His lips were pursed like he was working himself up for a good pout, but he kissed her

cheek and held her another minute.

“Same to you. Come home this summer, don’t make Ma come all the way out here again. She misses having you home, okay?”

“Promise,” he whispered, letting her go so Jimmy could give her a little kiss and a good hug too.

“Take care of my dumb ass brother,” she told Jimmy, kissing the man’s cheek, “Don’t—“ Stopping herself from what she was going to say, Ruby hugged Jimmy tighter, “Don’t let him get his heart broken.”

“You can count on it.” Jimmy smiled at her, giving her one more squeeze before letting her go.

They stood and watched her for another moment, Scott leaning against the car, pressing against Jimmy’s side as the man wrapped an arm around him. All their friends, but Jimmy especially, knew what Ruby meant to Scott, how close he was to her, how much he loved her and how hard it always was when he had to say goodbye to her.

“Alright, Little Boy Blue. You get to pick the movie tonight, even one of those old black and whites I pretend to hate. And if you’re really good and don’t cry, I’ll stop and get you a lolly on the way home.”

Scott pinched him for that, but he laughed. “I don’t want a lollypop, I want—“

“White chocolate raspberry truffle ice cream. And cuddles. I know.”

“And pizza.”

“I know that too.” Jimmy told him, smiling down at Scott before ruffling his hair, “Let me get back into your clown car and we can hit the video store.”

“You got a deal, Bozo.” Scott teased, barely dodging Jimmy’s hand as it reached out to smack him.

“Hurry up, you’re gonna miss the beginning!” The room was small enough that Scott really didn’t have to yell, but he did anyway, bouncing on the couch a little, a throw blanket over his lap and a pint of ice cream chilling his fingers.

Pulling the pizza out of the oven and grabbing some napkins and a cutter, Jimmy told him, “Hey, it’s not my fault you wanted this fancy Tuscan chicken take and bake shit. I was just gonna order delivery.” There was already beer and soda on the coffee table, popcorn and chips. Jimmy teased Scott for being a comfort eater all the time and tonight was no different, “Don’t let yourself get fat, baby. I’m taking you to the gym tomorrow.”

“I am not *fat*. You keep saying that and I’m gonna get a complex. Once a month binging isn’t going to hurt me.”

Jimmy opened his mouth to protest that comment but Scott shut him up with a sharp shush as the credits started to play across the screen, Scott looking like he might start to clap when Cary Grant’s name flashed across. “Did I tell you he was my first star crush?”

“No shit? I thought it was Ricky Martin.”

Scott shook his head, setting the ice cream down and reaching for a slice of pizza as Jimmy spread the blanket out over both their laps, “Nah, he was later, like, junior high or so. But Cary Grant... When I was really little, like, I don’t know, six or so, Ma would let me stay up on the weekend with her and watch the late show and they always played these old movies. First time I saw Cary Grant I couldn’t decide if I wanted to be just like him or kiss him.”

Teasing, “Lucky for me ya got a type, I guess.”

“You, sir, are no Cary Grant.” Scott told him sternly, taking a huge bite of his pizza.

“I’m hurt.” Jimmy sniffed, looking playfully affronted.

“You are not.”

“No, really. That is probably the meanest thing you’ve ever said to me. No Cary Grant. One of these days I’ll show you how Cary Grant I can be.”

“If it’s as good as your Bogart, I’m in for a real treat. Or a real laugh, at any rate.”

Jimmy flicked his ear, but he settled down, leaning back to watch the film, knowing it was one of Scott’s favorites.

Scott was glad the movie had started and they were focused on something else. He let his gaze drift to the side every time Jimmy leaned forward and was grateful he didn’t have to admit aloud that Jimmy had always reminded him a little of the man on the screen. Maybe just around the eyes. And the mouth. And hair. And the shoulders. And, well, the whole build really. If Cary Grant had spent half his life working his abs until they looked they were carved out of stone. Damn it.

They fell asleep before the second film was over, Jimmy leaning back against the arm of the couch, Scott sleeping soundly, curled up on the man’s chest.

With only one weekend left of their break, Jimmy decided they needed to spend some quality time at a few of their favorite bars before burying themselves under course books again.

The two got ready in their separate bedrooms, but Jimmy was ready before Scott, as usual. The man wore tight black jeans and a dark blue button-down as he leaned against the frame of Scott's door, watching him pull his faded Levi's on. Scott jumped and whipped around when he heard a wolf whistle. "Jesus, wear squeaky shoes or something; you scared the shit outta me."

Jimmy laughed, grinning, "I'd say I'm sorry, but..."

"Yeah, yeah." Scott rolled his eyes, buttoning up his jeans and pulling on an old Smiths t-shirt that was two sizes too small, but clung nicely.

"You look like you're planning on getting laid tonight." Jimmy told him, still watching while Scott found his Chucks from under his bed and pulled those on too.

He could feel his cheeks pinkening a little, glancing up at Jimmy from tying his shoes. "Maybe." Scott answered, "At least a blowjob..."

"As long as I'm the one you come home with." Jimmy joked, stepping into the room finally, reaching over to Scott's nightstand and pulling the drawer open. "And as long as you're safe." he added, still teasing even as he grabbed a strip of condoms out and tossed them to Scott.

"Same to you, sweetheart."

They were both staggering drunk, just after two in the morning, as they stumbled their way up the three steps that led to their door. It was a short cab ride home, but Scott was sure the driver was glad to be rid of them, laughing at Jimmy who was grinning and waving after the sound of gravel spitting up from under the tires of the cab.

They'd started in a small pub, shooting some pool and playing some darts, then went down the road to another that had better music and stronger drinks, and then ended up at Scott's favorite dance club. Instead of finding some friends there like they normally would, Scott and Jimmy stuck together, dancing under the flashing lights and pounding rhythm.

Jimmy kept Scott pressed against him the entire time, his hips grinding, hands even more adventurous than normal. It was the alcohol, Scott told himself, and the fact that they were both letting off a little steam before buckling back down to full time courses and part time jobs.

"You know what would be really good?" Scott said, kicking his shoes off as he groped for the light switch on the wall.

"Sex?" Jimmy asked him, a hint of laughter in his voice even as he wrapped his arms around Scott's hips and ground against him from behind like they were still on the dance floor. Scott could feel the hard length of the man pressed against him and it made his own pulse quicken.

"Yes. Always." Scott told him, laughing, trying to keep his voice light and, at the same time,

trying to pull away from Jimmy. “But, I was thinking more like a really good cheeseburger. And fries. From Dick’s. Why didn’t we make the cabby stop at Dick’s?”

“Because we’re idiots. “

It didn’t matter that Scott was trying to pull away because the man was glued to his back. It was like wearing a really big, warm Jimmy-suit. With hands that kept traveling south. “That we are.” he agreed, laughing as he caught one of Jimmy’s wrists, fingers encircling and holding firmly to keep him from drifting any lower.

“Hey,” An actual giggle from Jimmy told Scott that he was plastered, “I have a dick...”

“Yes.”

“You have a dick...”

“...Yes.”

“So, between us...”

Laughing as he caught the lame joke, “Our dicks don’t serve the best fries on the planet.”

Jimmy’s hold tightened on him and Scott had to catch his breath, his heartbeat kicking out a tattoo against his ribcage. It turned to a heavy thud when Jimmy’s touch became more meaningful, the air in the room feeling charged as Scott picked up on the intention behind the small strokes of the man’s fingers and the heavy press of Jimmy’s cock against his ass. Every muscle in his body tightened when Jimmy whispered against his ear, “Let’s go to bed, Scott.”

“I, uh...” It was a bad idea. Beyond bad ideas. It was quickly nose-diving into Tragic Disaster and Scott knew it. He knew that pressing back against Jimmy was a mistake, knew that if he let go of Jimmy’s hands and let them drift over his lean body and skim the planes and hollows of his stomach and hips, that he would regret it sooner or later. He knew that by morning Jimmy wouldn’t look at him the same way anymore, knew that whatever the man said, whatever excuses they chose to accept and whatever joke they tried to make out of it, it would all come to a horrible, ugly end. They would never be able to sit down and watch a movie or fall asleep together again, they would never be able to tease and call each other sweetheart or darling or whatever other idiotic endearments they shared.

So, despite the fact that his cock was rigid against his button fly and despite the fact that it had been months since he’d gotten anything more than a blowjob, Scott cleared his throat and tried again to pull away. “I think we should get some food and some aspirin and some water in us first.” He tried to make his voice steady, but it cracked a little, his throat closing around the words as if his body was disagreeing and not willing to let his mouth mess it up for the rest of him.

The apartment was still dim, just the entryway light glowing softly from the door and Scott

stubbed his toe on the coffee table as he took another step with Jimmy right on his heel. “Shit,” he muttered, falling down onto the couch. Jimmy stood for a moment, his body silhouetted and Scott cursed himself for thinking so clearly, for turning down this chance, probably the only real one he’d ever get with Jimmy.

“Couch it is.” Jimmy said, ignoring Scott’s comment about water and food. He leaned closer, arm sliding over the back of the couch and Scott thought he could identify with rabbits that have been hunted by cats. Jimmy was all sleek and smooth, hand gliding closer, body shifting and inching toward him.

His mouth went dry, having to swallow hard before he choked. Looking down at his foot, “My toe hurts.” he said feebly, grasping for anything that might distract Jimmy.

“Want me to kiss it better?” Jimmy offered with a bright grin, his breath brushing against Scott’s skin, the tip of the man’s nose just touching his cheek. Jimmy had moved quickly, stealthily, as Scott was looking away and now the man was right against him, rising up on his knees and pushing Scott back onto the arm of the couch. “Or we could kiss other stuff...” he suggested, still sounding playful as he leaned in again, dipping his head, his eyes gleaming in the reflection of moonlight coming through the living room window.

For a split second or ten, Scott was tempted. He felt his body relax just a notch, his hips rocking up against Jimmy and his hands sliding up Jimmy’s broad chest, feeling the muscles and the smooth skin where the man’s shirt was open just below his collarbone. They’d touched each other before, sat close, wrapped around each other, but never like this. Scott had never rested beneath Jimmy; wanting to spread his thighs and grind against the man like this. He’d never seen such a vulnerable expression on Jimmy’s face; part predatory and part disbelief, all of it shadowed with a hint of fear. It was the fear that reined Scott in. He didn’t know what exactly put that look in Jimmy’s eyes, but he knew what his own fears were and they weren’t worth the risk for a drunken tumble in the dark.

Scott forced himself to say, “Or we could get some water and pass out.”

Pausing for a beat too long, too many emotions thundering over Jimmy’s face for Scott to catch them all, Jimmy sat back, “Yeah, probably a good idea.” he said, shifting back onto his heels, running his palms down his thighs before climbing to his feet.

Jimmy went to the kitchen to get some water, taking longer than he normally would, and Scott took the opportunity to pretend to pass out. Jimmy slept in his own bed.

Sometime near dawn, Scott drifted into a restless sleep. He’d been awake for hours, his neck stiff, head pounding, afraid to even shift on the couch, as if he could hide where he was if he was just quiet enough.

When he awoke, the first thing he noticed was a blanket draped over him. Opening his eyes

slowly, he glanced around the quiet apartment. No sign of Jimmy. His eyes focused on a glass of water in front of him on the coffee table, two little ibuprofen tablets next to it and a small sticky note with one word written in Jimmy's bold block letters: Gym.

Scott sighed. What went on the night before was still bothering Jimmy or he would have been woken up to the man crawling on him and snuffling into his hair and tickling his ribs. Or he would've woken up over the man's shoulder while being fireman-carried to his bed and dumped in an untidy heap and told the couch would kill him.

His chest felt tight and his head was throbbing as he sat up, wrapping the blanket around his shoulders and wishing he could curl up next to his best friend. He took the pills and drank the entire glass of water in two big gulps, but he couldn't force himself to stand up.

Still sitting in the darkened room nearly an hour later, Scott was letting his emotions roil through him, worrying a lip between his teeth and wishing he could fix it all, or turn back time twenty four hours and change the course of their night.

Hearing keys in the door and a quiet thud as Jimmy's gym bag hit the floor, Scott turned to look at him. The man smiled, same bright grin, but it didn't quite meet Jimmy's eyes.

"You look like shit." he told Scott, coming in and pulling the curtains back to let some light in. "Should get some food in you..." he added, walking into the small kitchen and pulling out a skillet, turning on the coffee pot.

"You look like you feel fine." Scott muttered, stretching and groaning as he stood, still trying to read Jimmy's mood. He *seemed* fine, seemed like everything was back into place, but it still felt a little off to Scott.

"Felt like a walking headache when I got up, but I sweat it out at the gym. Good as new." Jimmy told him, offering a triumphant grin. "I'd have pulled your ass with me, but you looked pretty dead to the world." he added quietly.

"I was, yeah." Scott agreed, coming around the little island that divided the kitchen from the living room, watching as Jimmy cracked two eggs into the skillet and reached for the bread, popping two slices into the toaster.

"You need protein," Jimmy told him, adding with a nod to the coffee pot, "and caffeine."

Scott snorted a laugh, "Doctor's orders?"

"That's right," Jimmy nodded again, still smiling but not adding a stupid joke about the delivery method of the protein or giving Scott a nudge with his elbow.

He served the eggs up with the toast, and got down a coffee cup for Scott. "I'm gonna hit the shower while you eat, then we can figure out what to do with the rest of the day." Jimmy told him, reaching a hand out to ruffle Scott's hair. He beamed at Jimmy for that, feeling like they

were getting over the little divide that the previous night had created.

“You got it, doc.” Still smiling, Scott poured himself a cup of coffee, watching Jimmy pad barefoot across the floor, his gym shorts hanging low on his hips, tank top hugging his torso and riding up a little on one side. He had to force himself to turn his back on the man, pushing down all the thoughts that wanted to run wild through him.

Within a couple of weeks they were back into the swing of things. Everything had worked itself out between them, Scott and Jimmy falling easily back into their patterns of life together. Scott tried not to notice that Jimmy spent fewer nights sharing his bed, but that was the only difference and he figured he could live with it.

Working as a busboy at the small café down the street wasn’t the best job, but the hours were easy on his schedule and the tips were a nice addition to the minimal wages he made as a TA helping useless undergrads muddle their way through world history. Jimmy was working as an orderly a few hours a week down at the hospital, his father insisting that his son see the hospital from the bottom up just as he had. They, at least, footed the bill for his schooling, and Jimmy’s mother sent him money every month to help, but Jimmy swore up and down that the deposits in his bank account didn’t start showing up until he’d introduced his family to Scott.

Scott was taking his apron off and hanging it on the little hook behind the kitchen door, glad his day was over, glad it was Thursday night and that meant no class and no shifts for three days. He could sleep in, correct the nightmare stack of papers for the professor he worked with, study quietly, get his own paper finished, and maybe even have a little fun.

“See ya, Rachel,” he said to the barista behind the counter, glancing at the front door when he heard the chimes ring out as it opened. Jimmy was there, still wearing his scrubs from the hospital, and looking like he needed a few days off just as badly as Scott did.

Grinning as he ambled in, running a hand through the mess of dark, wavy hair that was falling into his eyes, “My timing is perfect, I can see.” Jimmy told him as he gave Scott a little pat on his ass and walked over to the counter, offering Rachel a wolfish grin as he leaned in a little, “Double tall—“

“Latte, make the little heart with the foam. I know...” she told him, shaking her head with a laugh as she went to work at the espresso machine. “You’re lucky I haven’t cleaned up yet or you’d be getting burnt coffee and an old cookie.” she added, pouring the steamed milk into the paper cup as the espresso finished brewing.

“I’ll take your old cookies anytime.” Jimmy told her, waggling his eyebrows at her. The man flirted with everyone he encountered, and seemed to favor Rachel because she flirted right back.

“My cookies are hot and fresh, I’ll have you know.”

“I’ll have to sample those sometime...”

Rachel cast a glance at Scott who was watching the two, looking amused and rolling his eyes at their banter. “You wish,” she informed him, adding with a grin, “And my fiancé might not appreciate that...”

“No shit? He finally popped the question?”

Rachel bit her lip around another grin, nodding as she showed off her small diamond ring, “Last weekend.”

“About damn time.” Jimmy told her, laughing as he leaned in, kissing her cheek, “Congratulations, sweetheart.”

“Thanks, Jimmy.” Still smiling, she swirled the foam over the top of his latte, making two hearts this time and sprinkling it with nutmeg and cinnamon before sliding the cup across to him, letting him look before he snapped a lid over it.

“Can’t believe you didn’t tell me.” he accused Scott.

“Just found out this afternoon, jeez.”

“Fine, you’re forgiven.”

They batted at each other and laughed, Rachel watching them as they headed for the door, “Have a good weekend, guys!” she called happily as they went out into the warm spring evening.

Scott was settled in the floor with four different books opened on the coffee table next to his laptop, making notes on his paper as he drew seemingly unrelated information together to form a coherent point. It took him a moment to hear the soft knock on their front door. Getting to his feet, he opened it and paused for a minute. Standing there with a backpack slung over one shoulder was a man he’d never seen before. Hot didn’t really cover it. The guy was easily as tall as Jimmy and nearly as broad, but his hair was golden blond and cut short, eyes a piercing blue.

“Um...” Scott couldn’t think for a moment, “Hi?”

The guy’s grin was brilliant, a slight flush painting his high cheekbones, “Hey, uh, Jimmy around?”

“Oh, he just ran to the store, should be back in a minute if you wanna wait.” Scott offered, his feet automatically shifting back to let the stranger in.

“Cool, thanks,” Stepping in close enough to brush against Scott, “I’m Rob, by the way.” The man offered a hand for Scott to shake and he took it, fingers strong and warm as they wrapped around

Scott's.

"Good to meet ya, I... I'm Scott." He felt like an idiot, coming off like he never encountered new people. "Have a seat."

Rob just smiled again, his eyes raking over Scott for a beat before striding casually to the couch and settling down on it.

"Can I get ya anything?"

"Nah, I'm good. I mean, really just here to drop off some books Jimmy let me borrow, but I have a question about our notes, so..."

"Gotcha," Scott stood for a moment, not wanting to ignore the guy and go back to his paper, at the same time not sure what to do with himself. Leaning over a little, Rob glanced at Scott's document and grimaced. "Masters or Doctorate?" he asked.

"Doctorate, but I just started the program; I keep changing my mind on which fields..." Scott trailed off, settling on the other end of the couch, running nervous fingers through his hair.

Rob just nodded, leaning a little closer to Scott as he shifted to get comfortable. "How long have you and Jimmy been roommates?" he asked.

"Since freshman year." At the look of surprise on Rob's face, Scott asked, "How long have you known Jimmy?"

"About a year now, got a couple classes together, shoot some hoops together every now and then."

Scott took that in, surprised that Jimmy had never mentioned the man, given that Jimmy introduced him to anyone with a hard on who wasn't completely straight. He noticed the way Rob looked him over again, feeling a little awkward suddenly as he realized that if they were at a club, they'd be nodding and heading to the bathroom together about now.

"Hey, listen," Rob said, edging in another fraction of an inch, "What are you doing tomorrow night?" he asked, arching a brow as his lips turned up in a half-smile.

"Uh...just..."

"No, I mean, you wanna go out? Get some dinner and maybe hit the dance floor or somethin'?"

Scott knew his mouth was hanging open slightly and snapped it shut, nodding as his cheeks flushed, "Sure, sounds good."

"I mean...I'm not wrong, yeah?"

“No, I...”

Rob laughed then, “Can’t believe Jimmy didn’t tell me he had a hot roommate.”

The man himself walked in the door then, stopping dead as he looked over at the couch and saw Rob and Scott there.

“Yeah, he’s full of surprises.” Scott said, eyes narrowing a little.

“So, where’s he taking you?” Jimmy asked, fidgeting with a pen, looking at one of his text books but not seeming to pay much attention.

Things were awkward after Rob left the afternoon before, Jimmy totally unsettled by the visit and even more uncomfortable after Scott told him they had plans to go out. Scott had never seen his normally unflappable friend so flustered and edgy.

“Not sure,” Scott told him, walking in from his bedroom as he pulled a light blue sweater over his head. “Dinner somewhere, maybe go out dancing after.”

“Fabulous,” Jimmy muttered and Scott couldn’t help but sigh.

“If I’m lucky.” Scott said from behind Jimmy, a little annoyed that the man wouldn’t even look at him. He wasn’t sure, but he didn’t think Jimmy had looked him in the eye since Rob had dropped off the books and left. “Look, Jimmy,” Scott wanted to turn the man around and shake him by the shoulders, “Is there something... I mean...is there something *wrong* with Rob? Closet meth-head or...into scat, or...?”

Jimmy finally did look at him, laughing despite his mood, “God, I hope so.” he told Scott, flashing a grin that held all his charms but didn’t warm his face up or catch in his eyes like normal. He started to say something else but paused, sighing and looking serious, “He’s a good guy; you go have fun, sweet pea.”

“K, you just seem...”

“Just stressed out; got a lotta work to get done before Monday is all. Go, have a good time.”

“Sure, but—“

Scott was cut off by a knock at the door, turning his head to look at it as if he were considering not answering.

“Go,” Jimmy told him sternly, “Take condoms and keep it down if you bring him back here.” He laughed again, but he’d turned away from Scott and was staring at his gross anatomy book again.

His arguments died on his lips and he went to the door. Rob was there, looking incredible in a Hugo Boss leather jacket and tight t-shirt tucked into even tighter Black Levi's. Scott's mouth went a little dry, but he grinned, "Hey,"

"Hey yourself," Rob said, handing Scott a six pack of imported beer. "You didn't strike me as the kind of guy that would appreciate flowers, so..." They both laughed, Scott blushing furiously as he took the small case.

"Thanks," he murmured, leaning close with one hand on the cardboard carrier as he brushed a small kiss against Rob's cheek, "I'll go fill a vase with ice," he joked lamely, turning the corner into the small kitchen and putting the beer in the fridge.

Jimmy turned to glance at Rob, offering him a smile and an almost-wave, "Don't keep him out past midnight and mind your manners," he teased.

"Yes sir, I'll even keep my hands to myself," Rob joined in the joke, waiting just inside the door while Scott grabbed his keys and tucked his wallet into the back pocket of his jeans.

"See that ya do," Jimmy said with another game laugh, adding in a dark mutter that only Scott could hear as he passed, "I know where to hide the body."

Rob admitted he didn't even own a car, having decided when he first moved to the city that he would take advantage of the public transportation. Scott drove and, on the way to the restaurant, explained that he needed a car because he and Jimmy sometimes volunteered for the local gay and lesbian center, delivering food and other necessities to house-bound community members in the area. They also liked taking short trips out to the peninsula or down the coast or to the Oregon beaches. He told Rob about the ski trip they'd taken in January, about the visit they were planning down to Palm Springs as soon as the semester was over, about Ruby's visit and how well Jimmy got along with his mother and sister.

Scott hadn't realized how much he'd talked about Jimmy until half way through dinner when Rob asked, "So, you and Jimmy, are you two...?"

Scott laughed, shaking his head, "No, he's straight, just friends."

"But you wish he weren't?" Rob's tone was light and friendly and he didn't seem bothered by the idea, more curious than anything.

At a loss for a moment, Scott nearly stammered his response, "No, uh, it's not that. I mean, Christ, he's my best friend, ya know? Sometimes I'm glad he's straight so we don't have to worry about messing things up." Laughing at himself and his own backwards logic, "Does that even make sense?"

Rob nodded, smiling as he took a sip from the wine their waiter had just poured, "It does, but...I

don't know, I guess I always figured if I were going to settle down with someone, my partner would be my best friend too."

Lifting his glass to that, "In a perfect world." Scott said. Taking a sip, his eyes held Rob's for a long moment. The man was attractive enough to make him feel warm all over, funny in just the right ways, and seemed genuine and friendly. Rob was so right on so many levels that it made Scott's palms sweat, but through all the laughs and all the small flirts and innuendoes, he still found himself wishing it was Jimmy sitting across from him. Despite the fact that the man would have ended up in a bathroom stall with one of the waitresses before the end of the meal.

In the end, they decided to skip dancing and went instead to one of the old theaters that was running a classic film festival for the weekend. They shared popcorn and talked about their favorite films while they waited for the lights to go down. Rob slid his arm around Scott's shoulder and they relaxed together in the soft velvet seats.

Everything went well and when Scott dropped Rob off at his front door, he thought for sure he would be invited in. Instead, they exchanged a clumsy kiss that led to a few gropes and a breathless goodnight. As Scott turned to go, Rob asked him, "Next weekend? Maybe we can go down to Alki or something? Picnic on the beach..."

Biting his lip around his grin, Scott just nodded as he turned to go back to his car.

"You're home early." Jimmy told him, arching his brows at Scott as the man walked through the door. "It couldn't have gone that bad..."

As he kicked off his shoes and dropped his keys on a small table by the door, Scott told him, "It didn't go bad at all." Sticking his tongue out playfully at Jimmy.

"Oh. So, what'd you guys do?"

"Dinner and a movie." Scott was already stripping his sweater off and unbuttoning his jeans as he wandered through the apartment. "We're gonna get together next weekend." he added, Jimmy watching intently as he dropped his clothes in a trail between the living room and bedroom, down to just boxers and a t-shirt before he disappeared around the corner.

When Scott came back into the living room, he was cinching some flannel pajama bottoms around his tight waist, "You get your work done?" Scott asked, coming up behind Jimmy, his hands landing on the man's shoulders, kneading the muscles there.

"Mostly, yeah," Jimmy sighed, not quite resting back against Scott as he normally would. "So, what'd ya think of Rob?" he asked, his tone just hinting at annoyance when he said the other man's name.

“He’s nice,” Scott told him honestly, noncommittal, “Cute...” Jimmy’s jaw muscle worked a tense rhythm as if he was trying to stop himself from saying something. Laughing a little, not noticing Jimmy’s discomfort, Scott added, “Funny as hell too. I’m surprised you never had him over before.”

Saving his document and shutting down his laptop, all Jimmy said was, “Yeah, well.” Scott thought the man would lean back into him then, relax a little, but instead, Jimmy was on his feet, pushing his chair back so abruptly it nearly knocked Scott over. “I’m gonna go for a run,” he told Scott, turning and heading down the hall, leaving Scott dumbfounded, standing in the middle of their little apartment.

It was well past midnight when Scott finally gave up waiting for Jimmy to return and went to bed. He didn’t fall asleep, hearing the front door open and then shut again, a quiet click as the lock was set into place. He thought about getting up then, going to check on his friend, but decided that maybe whatever was going on with Jimmy was something he needed to work through on his own.

Scott curled himself around the pillow Jimmy usually used and listened to the sound of the shower running down the hall, closed his eyes when he saw the shadow of his friend in his doorway. He didn’t turn over to look at Jimmy, didn’t say a word, but he pulled the covers back and scooted over to one side of his bed. Jimmy didn’t hesitate, just padded softly across the floor and slid into bed behind Scott. Wrapping his arms tightly around the man, Jimmy pressed a soft kiss to the back of Scott’s head, nestling close to him. They drifted off like that, in familiarity and warmth and in the comfort of knowing that some things can never change.

“Wine tasting? And jazz.”

“Um. Experimental Jazz. Whatever that is.”

“Seriously?”

Scott couldn’t help but laugh at Jimmy’s expression, the man crinkling his nose and pulling a face as if he’d just been asked to clean up dog shit with his bare hands. “I had the same reaction,” he admitted, “I hope I hid it better...” he added with another laugh.

“Rob’s seduction technique is severely lacking if that’s typical of your dates.”

“It’s not...” Scott started to deny it and then couldn’t. Thinking back over the last few weeks, he’d have to admit that-- while the company was nice-- the activities weren’t exactly fun. Or even interesting. “Well, okay, it is pretty typical, but... You should come anyway. And bring one of your girls.”

“I don’t think I know any girls that boring.”

“Get her liquored up first.” Scott offered with a grin.

“Not enough liquor in the world, bro.”

Walking up close to Jimmy, Scott wrapped his arm around the man’s shoulder, beaming and batting his eyelashes just as Jimmy liked to do to him, “For me?”

Rolling his eyes as if their roles had suddenly reversed, Jimmy patted Scott’s head, “Anything for you, princess. Just don’t invite me to go antiquing or some shit.” Scott knew he shouldn’t have glanced away because Jimmy let out a loud bark of laughter, “You’ve already gone antiquing, haven’t you.” he accused, expression triumphant.

“He was looking for a birthday present for his mother, so that totally doesn’t count.”

“Did you two pick out stuff you liked that wasn’t right for her?” At the guilty look on Scott’s face, Jimmy picked up his left hand, examining the fingers one by one.

“What are you doing?”

“Double checking I hadn’t missed an engagement ring.”

“Asshole.”

“Antiquer.”

“That’s not even a word.” Scott told him, finally pulling away with a laugh, “And, I like antiques. I just don’t feel the need to scrounge through dusty old second hand stores in forgotten old towns all day to find them. Or feel the need to furnish an entire house with them.”

“Does he know that your dream house has a game room complete with a wall size TV screen, foosball table, and a miniature golf course?”

“That’s *your* dream house.”

“Yeah, but that’s when you agreed to be my roommate forever.” Jimmy told him, waggling his eyebrows.

“Only if you have an indoor pool too.”

“Deal.”

“So you’ll go Friday night?”

Sighing like it was an enormous sacrifice, Jimmy looked to the ceiling, “Fine, but I’m not subjecting a girl to that. I’d hate for anyone to think it was *my* idea of a good time.”

“Nobody that knows you for more than three minutes would think that.”

Cinching his belt in a notch and smoothing down the front of his dark jeans, Scott glanced at himself in the mirror. He wore a pink pinstripe button down under a light grey sweater and dress shoes that Rob had insisted he buy one afternoon. Scott hated the shoes, preferring sneakers even in formalwear, but, even he had to acknowledge that he looked a little more grown up in shiny black leather.

Jimmy had decided to bring a date after all, telling Scott that he might as well get laid if he could shake the headache he was sure to have by the end of the night. He knew it was absurd, but he couldn't help a small pang of jealousy over who the man had asked out.

Tina reminded Scott of a Barbie Doll with real breasts and a law degree. She was smart, funny, and looked like she'd been airbrushed to perfection. She was the kind of girl most mothers would dream of for a daughter-in-law and, if Scott were honest with himself, she was a good match for Jimmy. They'd only dated casually, but Scott could see it turning into something more if either of them decided they had enough time for a real relationship. The idea made Scott a little nauseous.

“You about ready, gorgeous?”

Scott jumped when he heard Jimmy's voice behind him, “Every damn time, Christ.” He was about to offer another complaint, but when he turned to look at Jimmy, his breath caught in his chest. The man stood in front of him in an honest to God suit. Charcoal gray, over a crisp white shirt, hand painted silk tie knotted in a classic Windsor.

“What?” Jimmy asked at the expression on Scott's face, looking down at himself, “My fly down or something?”

“No, just...” *You look good enough to eat.* “Just never seen you dressed up is all.”

“That can't be true. My cousin's wedding? I was in a *tux* for that.”

“I was so hung over I barely remembered to wear shoes for that. You could've been in boxers and a bow tie and I wouldn't have noticed.”

Jimmy laughed at the memory, nodding, “Hell of a bachelor party, though.”

“The bits I can remember...”

Another laugh, “True. We gotta get going, though. You ready?”

Looking Jimmy over again, “Maybe I should put on some slacks? Or...?”

“You look good, I only put this on ‘cause I know Tina.” Waving his hand vaguely, as if he didn’t know the words to describe the woman, “She’s gonna be all...”

Nodding, understanding exactly what Jimmy meant, he followed the man to the door.

As Jimmy walked up the path to Tina’s door, Scott climbed into the backseat of the man’s car, watching through the window as Jimmy offered his arm to the girl. Her hair was done up in a sophisticated knot, loose tendrils curling around her face. Jimmy was right to wear a suit. Tina was wearing a little black dress that exposed one shoulder, clung to every curve of her body, and looked like it cost about as much as Scott’s car. Her heels were at least four inches high and it put her right at Jimmy’s shoulder. They looked perfect together.

As he felt the jealousy burning up inside him, Scott tried to remember they were on their way to pick up his own date.

Jimmy got the door for her and Tina slid inside the Charger. “Scott,” she said, looking over her shoulder with a sweet smile for him, “Could you tell Jimmy that he’s supposed to bring me a little something when he asks me out on short notice and takes me to something my own grandparents wouldn’t find exciting.”

He couldn’t help but laugh, Tina’s teasing grin and easy nature being two of her many fine qualities. “I’d try but I think he’s a hopeless case.”

“I concur. Maybe I should withhold sex as a reminder.”

“That might work.” he agreed, laughing with her as Jimmy got in.

“What might work?” Jimmy asked, looking between the two.

“Earplugs,” she told Jimmy seriously, “for tonight. Scott and I were trying to decide how best to get through it.” Tina flashed Scott a wink and another grin from the front seat. Even as she slipped her hand over Jimmy’s knee, he had to admit he liked the girl.

Scott had texted Rob when they were close to his apartment and the man was waiting on the curb for them. He greeted Tina with a gracious smile and took her hand as she got out and let him into the back seat. “Jimmy, how did you bribe this gorgeous woman into a mercy date with you?” Rob teased as he leaned in to kiss Scott, grinning against his mouth.

“He doesn’t know it yet, but he’s going to donate his sperm to my sister and her partner. They’re looking for someone tall, dark, handsome, and well educated.”

“And you accused him of not bringing anything.” Scott joked, assuming Tina was teasing too.

“He didn’t bring anything for *me*.” she pointed out, shifting in her seat a little and adding, “But it

would more than make up for it if he gave me a little niece or nephew...”

Jimmy had only laughed when she first said it, but now he was glancing at her in a mild terror, eyes wide, “What, seriously?”

“Yes.” Sounding more like a lawyer than the girl they occasionally hung out with, “They’re open to letting the donor have visitation or, if the three parties could come to an agreement, co-custody. They’re also open to total secrecy as to the donor’s identity if that’s preferred by the man. By *you*, hopefully.”

Jimmy looked on the verge of hysteria and Scott was too shocked to comment, but Rob was near giddy. “My God, we should hang out together more often. I like her.”

Finding his voice, Jimmy asked, “You want *me* to knock your *sister* up?”

“No. I want you to donate some sperm so it can knock my sister’s partner up. Carol doesn’t want to carry the baby, but Stacy does.”

“Right. Okay. Right.” Nodding and looking stunned, Jimmy turned the corner, navigating the narrow streets out of Rob’s neighborhood and heading into downtown. “Right.” He wasn’t really answering anything or talking to anyone. Scott could tell he was trying to wrap his head around the idea.

“We’ll talk about it later,” Tina said, still smiling as she checked her makeup in the mirror, “Just wanted to throw it out there, give you some time to digest it.”

“I think he’d have an easier time digesting a hand grenade. Just sayin’.” Scott told her. Tina laughed, but he really wasn’t joking.

“What he said.” Jimmy muttered, taking a deep breath and tightening his grip on the wheel.

Laughing again, “It’s not like you need to decide tonight, or even this month. I wanted to let you know so you could think about it, talk it over with—“ She stopped herself there, but glanced at Scott in the mirror. “With the family or whatever.”

“Right.” Jimmy said again, “Okay. I’ll... Okay, right. Think about it. I’ll consult my balls and get back to you when they climb back out.”

Leaning over close to Scott, Rob whispered, “He looks a little... Think he’s still okay to drive?”

“For now. I think after the wine tasting we might need to carry him back to the car, though.”

Jimmy surprised them all and didn’t touch a drop of alcohol the entire night. It took him nearly an hour, but he finally managed to say something other than *right* and *okay* and in the end they

had a good time. Tina was her charming self, as if she hadn't asked the end all be all of favors on their way to the restaurant. She pulled Scott aside at one point and confided in him that she'd done it on purpose, had wanted Scott to be there when she asked and knew it could be months before the three of them were together again. Something about that warmed Scott up inside and he'd smiled at her, kissing her cheek.

Not even Rob seemed to enjoy the music and offered sincere apologies as they left at the end of the night, Jimmy telling him they should have just gone out in the alley and listened to the cats in heat for free.

Scott walked Rob to his door and kissed him goodnight. Jimmy and Tina were waiting for him since Rob had said he had to be up early and needed to get to bed. Scott was starting to wonder if things would ever progress between them beyond a few handjobs and some—admittedly mind blowing—frottage.

At Tina's house, the woman let him out of the back seat and gave him a warm hug, the kind he got from his sister, and told him she needed to talk to Jimmy for a few minutes. He nodded and got back in the car, watching the two of them disappear behind her front door.

A half hour later, after updating his Facebook and checking his email from his phone, Scott started to feel the twist of jealousy rising in him again. It wasn't the first time, and probably wouldn't be the last, that Jimmy asked him to wait while he got himself a quickie, but it was making his blood boil more than usual. By the time Jimmy got back in the car, looking a little more disheveled than he had on his way out of the car, Scott was in a full pout.

"Sorry that took so long." Jimmy told him, starting the car again and putting on his seatbelt.

"Have a nice *talk*?" Scott asked, sounding like a petulant child.

"Not exactly." Jimmy told him, not seeming to catch Scott's tone.

"I'll bet."

He did catch the sullen note in Scott's voice that time, glancing at him, "What—Oh," managing to laugh and sound grim at the same time, "Hell no. I might never have sex again after tonight."

Snorting, "Odds are against that." Scott told him, but the knot that had tied itself in his stomach loosened, "You two seriously didn't...?"

"I don't think I could've gotten it up if she'd given me a lap dance." Jimmy told him, shaking his head as he turned on the wipers, a light rain starting to smatter the windshield. "She just wanted to talk."

"Oh. About the baby thing?"

“Among other things, yeah.”

Furrowing his brow, curious, “What other things?”

“Just...” Sighing like it was too much effort to think, Jimmy trailed off, “Stuff.” he finally said, showing Scott how distracted he was by grinding his gears as he shifted.

Scott left him to his thoughts the rest of the way home.

Despite the fact that Jimmy was spending more nights in his own bed, Scott had expected the soft squeak of his door and the shift of blankets after they’d said their goodnights. He didn’t even have to move over, having left Jimmy plenty of space and a free pillow.

“Wanna talk about it?” he asked as Jimmy slid in behind him, taking up his usual position with his arm around Scott’s waist.

Sighing, pressing his face to the back of Scott’s neck, “Not really.” Jimmy murmured, holding him closer than usual.

“Okay,” Scott whispered into the dark, pulling the covers up higher and then resting his hand over Jimmy’s, knowing the man would keep him up all night talking even if he said he didn’t want to.

After a long moment, Jimmy took in a deep breath, his words falling on the exhale, “It’s a lot to think about.”

“Yeah.”

“I mean...a baby? Seriously? Who in their right mind looks at me and goes, ‘*that guy would make a great father.*’?”

“I think you’d make a great father.” Scott told him honestly.

“I still think with my dick.”

Laughing and lacing his fingers with Jimmy’s, “I doubt that changes just because you’re a dad. We all think with our dicks till they don’t work anymore.”

“Yeah, but...”

“Jimmy, it all boils down to whether or not you wanna be involved with putting another person on the planet. Tina said you could be anonymous as far as the kid goes.”

“Wouldn’t feel right about that. I mean...it works for a lot of people and a lot of happy families

are made because of guys that are fine with that and I think that's great, but..."

"But it doesn't work for you. And that's okay."

"Is it? I feel like a selfish shit telling them no. Like, just because I'm not ready to be a father I don't want them to be mothers or something."

"You're not their only option, just their first choice. Kinda flattering, really."

"Yeah, flattering." Jimmy said flatly, sighing again, "What would you do? If they'd asked you?"

"Be grateful no one asked me to have sex with them to do it."

Jimmy bit his ear lightly, "Seriously, jerkoff, would you do it?"

"I jerkoff regularly."

Laughing, Jimmy turned Scott onto his back and pinned him down, "You're such a douche." he told Scott, laughing, "First grownup conversation I try to have with you and you're making jokes."

"And you're laughing for the first time in hours."

Jimmy kissed him for that. Just a light press of his lips against Scott's cheek, a small breath and a smile. "Still wanna know your answer." he told Scott, settling back again and tugging Scott against him.

"I don't know. Might be kinda cool. Like being an uncle with a little more...responsibility, I guess."

"Mom and dad always wanted a house full." Jimmy whispered, sounding more serious again. "After Liam died, though..."

Scott knew Jimmy had a younger brother that died in infancy, SIDS the first assumption, later finding out it was acid reflux and the baby stopped breathing in his sleep one night. "I'd probably feel the same way."

"Me too. I mean...so much can go wrong ya know? A fall on the playground and they break their neck, or let the wrong person babysit just *once*. Or put him to bed and he never wakes up..."

"Or he gets bumps and bruises and skinned knees and the flu like every other kid on the planet and then finds a cure for cancer..."

"I'm not even into my residency." Letting out a heavy breath, Jimmy rested his chin on Scott's shoulder, their cheeks touching.

“True. And it’s not like this is your only shot at having kids. Or theirs.”

“So you think I shouldn’t?”

Laughing softly, still talking quietly, “I think you should do whatever you think is best for you right now. It’s not like some old one night stand showed up and handed you a kid. This is a *choice*, not something that’s happened to you.”

“What if I say no and they go with someone else and get an ugly baby?” Jimmy joked, Scott able to feel the man’s smile against his cheek.

“Tragic.”

“Maybe we should get a dog.”

“Instead of a kid?”

“Or for the kid? I don’t know, Christ.”

“I don’t need a dog. I have you, remember?”

Laughing for that, Jimmy growled and nipped at Scott’s neck, “We’re getting a dog.”

“Okay then.”

Scott smiled to himself, thinking how odd life was, the ups and downs and the in-betweens all seeming a little better with Jimmy to share them with.

“You’re stuck with me for life now, you know that, right?” Scott asked him.

Three days after telling Carol and Stacy he’d need more time—possibly a lifetime—to think about their offer, Jimmy stood next to Scott in their living room, looking down at the two puppies playing at their feet. “Twelve to fifteen years, actually.” Jimmy told him, Scott looking horrified.

“Just long enough to really get attached? That’s…”

Laughing, Jimmy put an arm around Scott’s shoulder, “Didn’t you have a dog when you were a kid? They don’t live forever.”

“We had a cat that liked to jump me from dark corners. Seriously, though? Fifteen years? That’s it?”

“Well, maybe a little longer, but…” Jimmy trailed off, pressing a kiss to Scott’s temple.

“And, there’s *two* of them so they don’t get lonely. What happens when one of them...” Dropping his voice to a whisper as if the puppies could hear him, “*dies*? Won’t the other one get all...depressed?” Scott was already feeling a little depressed at the idea.

“We’ll get him a grief counselor, baby. “

“But...”

Laughing again, Jimmy looked at Scott for a long moment, sobering after a pause, “That really freaks you out, doesn’t it?”

“Well... I mean. Why get all attached to something you know is just gonna *die* on ya?” Again, whispering the one word.

Pulling Scott into a hug, Jimmy wrapped his arms around him, kissing his temple, “It’s that whole cliché, ya know? Better to have loved and lost and all that. Fifteen years of happy companionship and then saying goodbye is better than never getting puppy kisses, I promise.” Just then one of the teacup beagles whined at their feet, tugging with puppy teeth at Scott’s cuff. “Cheer up, they think you’re upset.”

“I *am* upset.” Scott said as he pulled back, but he laughed with the words, stooping down to pick the puppy up, cradling it while it licked his face. “Two dogs. They get your room. It’s already an animal shelter.”

Grinning, Jimmy told him, “I assure you, these are the first dogs ever to cross my threshold.”

Scott had expected the puppies to keep them up all night, having been warned at the vet that it might take a few weeks for them to adapt. Instead, Hercules and Persephone (Jimmy picked the dogs and Scott picked the names) slept soundly but Jimmy woke in the small hours with a shout that sounded wounded, jolting Scott out of a sound sleep.

Jimmy was scrambling on the bed and grabbing at Scott, saying, “No, no...Goddamn it, come on!” He was crushing Scott against his chest like a ragdoll and Scott was trying to shake the man awake at the same time.

“Hey, it’s okay, wake up, Jimmy. Wake up, it’s okay.”

Another small shout and Jimmy was panting for breath like he’d run ten miles up hill, his body shivering with a sheen of sweat covering his skin. “It’s okay,” Scott soothed, stroking the man’s shoulders and back, trying to lean Jimmy back down onto the pillows.

“Jesus,” Jimmy muttered, drawing in a ragged breath, “Fuck... You okay?” he asked, his voice cracking a little.

“Yeah, fine. What happened?”

“Just...shit. Never had a nightmare so...Shit. C’mere,” Rubbing his eyes with the heels of his hands like he was trying to push out the memory of his dream, Jimmy leaned back against the headboard, Scott shifting closer and wrapping his arms around the man’s waist. Jimmy took another deep breath and pulled Scott as close as he could.

Slipping his feet between Jimmy’s, “Tell me,” The whispered command warming Jimmy’s bare chest as Scott pressed a kiss after the words.

“Just...I was down in a morgue, but I was working on someone, using paddles and tryin’ to get them back, I guess. A nurse was next to me and she kept saying, ‘*Dr. Sinclair, it’s too late. It’s too late, you have to stop. You’re too late.*’ And I looked down and it was— I just...Jesus.” Taking another labored breath, Jimmy pressed his face into the top of Scott’s head, his hold tightening as he muttered, “Just a bad dream.”

“It’s okay, probably just stress and school.” Scott whispered, “Want me to get you some water or somethin’?”

Settling down further on the bed and keeping a firm hold on Scott, “No, just...don’t go anywhere.”

Scott slid his phone into his back pocket while Jimmy tossed a tennis ball across the park for the puppies to chase after and fight over.

“What’s up?” the man asked, looking over at Scott, reading his expression.

“Nothin’, just...Rob invited me to dinner tonight.”

“That’s a bad thing?”

“No, just, um...his folks are in town and they’ll be there too.”

“He’s asked you to *meet his parents*?” Jimmy sounded as incredulous as Scott felt.

“Guess so. I mean, I think just as friends? But...”

“He’s not out to his family?”

“No, he is, but, I mean, come on. We’ve only been hanging out for a couple months, it’s not like we’re even...”

“You are, you just didn’t realize it.”

“No. I mean...ya think?”

Just then Persephone tackled Hercules, the two of them fighting for the ball, growling and yipping playfully at each other in the late afternoon sun.

Jimmy snorted a laugh, at Scott or the dogs, Scott wasn't sure. “I think you're gonna be married within a year and you won't know it till you're signing the paperwork.” Jimmy told him, strolling over to the puppies and getting the ball from between them.

“Well, I mean, he did say ‘*no pressure*’ and—“

“And you and I both know that means pressure.” Jimmy pointed out, the sun catching the golden highlights in his hair, making his natural tan look even more bronze.

“You know Rob, I think when he says no pressure, he actually means it.” Scott narrowed his eyes when Jimmy started humming the wedding march.

“How'd it go?” Jimmy was lying in the floor with both of their tiny puppies crawling all over him, licking his face and nipping at his fingers. Scott dropped down beside them and picked up Hercules.

“Fine,” Scott said over an excited tail wag and a lick to his own chin. “His roommates and a couple of his other friends were there too. It wasn't a big deal at all.”

Jimmy flashed an oddly relieved expression then leaned up on his elbows, grinning wickedly, “So this was your engagement party?”

“I hate you.” Scott told him, trying to sound serious even as he stretched out next to Jimmy, laughing as the tender attack from Hercules and Persephone continued.

“I'm offended I wasn't invited.” Jimmy continued to tease, sliding his arm out to let Scott rest his head on.

“If I ever get married, I'm banning you from it.”

“Afraid you'll take one look at me all dressed up and change your mind?”

“Afraid you'll scare away my intended, more like.”

“Because I'm so incredibly hot.” Jimmy joked, grinning into the top of Scott's hair.

Laughing and giving Jimmy a little squeeze as Hercules crawled over them and scrabbled towards the water dish, “Yes, that's it exactly.” After a moment, Scott lifted his head, “Shouldn't

you be cramming for finals?”

Groaning, Jimmy flopped back like he'd been shot, “Starting tomorrow, yeah. Monica and Rob and Becky organized a study group. We're locking ourselves up at Monica's and not coming out till Monday morning.

“Oh.” Scott tried not to sound disappointed even as he shifted closer to Jimmy. He was used to Jimmy being mostly unavailable the weekends before exams, but he usually at least saw him for an hour or two every day.

“I promise to call every day.” Jimmy told him, his voice lilting with half a tease. “And the puppies will keep you company.”

“Yeah.” He hadn't meant to sigh, but it came out anyway. The funny part was, Rob was going to be locked away in the same group and Scott hadn't even given that a thought. “I gotta study too, but—“

“But you'll be studying over pizza and beer with a Firefly marathon on in the background.”

Sighing again, “Yeah.”

“I'm jealous, baby cakes.” Jimmy told him, kissing the top of Scott's head, “But if I don't pass exams with flying colors, my old man is gonna disown me.”

Laughing at that, “Your old man doesn't think the sun rises till you get out of bed in the morning. He just knows what you're capable of so he pushes you harder than you'd like.”

“Or he was a slave driver in a past life.”

Snorting at that, “Correct me if I'm wrong, but didn't daddy buy you that car? You're one pampered slave.”

“That was probably more mom than dad.”

“Right, and she did it because she loves *me* more than you.”

“That's right,” Jimmy agreed jokingly, laughing, “She told me your ass was too fine for cheap seats.”

“Those were her exact words, I'm sure.”

“You know it. I think she's secretly in love with you.”

“Her practically adopted gay son? Twisted old woman.”

“You didn't know she was so kinky, did ya?”

Scott let out a loud laugh then, rolling so he was on top of Jimmy, pinning him down, “You’re a sick man, Jimmy.”

Shifting and flipping Scott onto his back with a thud, “And strong, too.”

Persephone and Hercules charged back in at that moment, watching the two wrestle, Hercules tilting his head and Persephone looking like she was trying to decide which of them to defend, ending up with a whiny little bark instead.

“You’re scaring the kids, sunshine.” Scott told him, still laughing as he squirmed under Jimmy, his cock thickening slightly against the weight of Jimmy’s body.

Jimmy paused for a moment, looking down into Scott’s face, his expression unreadable as he leaned a little closer. Scott could feel a sudden tension around them, not uncomfortable, but heavy and deep, like a storm rising off the coast, sending electric shocks through him.

“Guess we better take ‘em for their walk.” Jimmy said finally, his voice a little rough as he started to pull back. “Wanna go down to Green Lake or...” the man asked, rising up and getting to his feet.

“Dog park so they can come off the leashes.”

“Yeah, I just hate that little poodle that tries to scare Seph.”

Sitting up and tugging his t-shirt down, “Hasn’t worked. Last time she nearly took that dog’s tail off.”

“True. I guess we should let ‘em have their showdown.”

“That’s right, can’t teach them to run away from bullies.” Scott joked, finally standing up, slipping his boat shoes on, not even bothering with socks.

Sunday night, Scott was exhausted but he was as prepared as he was ever going to be for Monday’s finals. His papers that were due had been sent in two whole hours before the deadlines and he knew more about East Asian history than he’d ever wanted to.

Jimmy was still locked in his study group, but he was true to his word and had called every night. They didn’t talk about anything important, but Jimmy made him laugh when he insisted Scott put him on speaker so the puppies wouldn’t forget him.

It was the last thing he thought about before he drifted off.

Two weeks later, they had both survived finals. Jimmy said he was sure he bombed, but Scott knew that was Jimmy-code for, “I owned it.” Academics being the one area where the man showed any sense of modesty and Scott decided early on it was probably good for him.

“You and Rob are comin’ tonight, yeah?” Jimmy asked, his head popping around the corner of Scott’s doorframe.

“God, I wish,” he muttered, flopping back on his bed, having just been thinking about the fact that he and Rob had sort of transitioned into friends and he hadn’t had anyone’s hand but his own on his cock in far too long.

“What?”

“Nothing. Coming where?”

“Sharon’s; she’s throwing a finals-are-over-summer-is-here-let’s-blow-what’s-left-of-our-braincells party.”

“Just the med school crowd?” Scott asked, crinkling his nose as he sat back up.

“You say that like we’re lepers or something.”

Laughing, Scott told him, “No, but you all stand around for the first hour gossiping about each other and bitching about your course load, then get shitfaced and start pairing off for meaningless drunken sex.”

“Since when is meaningless drunken sex a downside?”

“I didn’t say that.”

“You implied it...”

“Maybe I can come late and just show up for the sex?”

“You’re practically engaged, none of that for you.”

Shaking his head, Scott stood up and turned Jimmy around to push him out of his room, “I’m very much *not* engaged. But I might swing by and have a couple drinks tonight.”

“Good enough. See ya then, pumpkin.”

“Yes, see ya then, pop tart.”

Jimmy turned, laughing, “Pop tart?”

“I’m a pumpkin and you can’t be a pop tart?”

“I’m sure there’s a joke in there about popping tarts somewhere...”

“Oh God.” Laughing, Scott leaned in and gave Jimmy a small kiss on the cheek, then pushed him out again. “Gimme fifteen minutes and we can take the pups for a walk before we go.”

After a long afternoon at the park and a quick stop for hamburgers on the way home, Scott told Jimmy he was taking a nap before heading off to Sharon’s. Jimmy called him an old man and reminded him to put the baby gate up for the puppies in his room before leaving.

Scott didn’t really need to sleep or do anything in particular; he just didn’t feel like being around a crowd of people. He did eventually go to the party, but Jimmy was nowhere to be seen and Rob was ensconced in a conversation with three or four guys Scott didn’t know, so he said hi to a few people, made a quick round and went back home again.

He took the puppies for a long walk and made sure they were settled happily before finally climbing into bed alone. He hated to admit it, but he missed Jimmy and wished the man were with him, but he couldn’t bring himself to send a text telling him as much. Instead, he called his sister and talked with her until he was falling asleep on the phone.

Wet heat and a slick tongue stroking over the head of his cock. It had to be a dream. Scott’s stomach tightened, his shaft rigid as it slid down deeper into the warmth. His own voice shook him awake, groaning loudly as his hips started rock, body curling around the sensation, as his knees pressed against a bare chest, his hand finding thick hair on the top of a head rather than his own erection. “Oh, Jesus,” he muttered, another moan catching in his throat as awareness shot through him. It wasn’t a dream and he wasn’t alone. Jimmy was wrapped around him, one strong arm draped over his hip, one large hand folded around the base of his cock, stroking in rhythm with his mouth as he started to suck harder. Scott wanted to tell the man to stop, tell him that it was going to ruin everything. He wanted to tell Jimmy all his fears and get him to see reason, but the words spilling out of his mouth were, “Jimmy...don’t stop. Oh, Jesus, *Jimmy*, never stop...” And the man’s name felt right, whispered into the darkness of his bedroom, whispered into the air and shadows that held them safe as his climax raced through him. “Yes...*please*, Jimmy.” He didn’t have any words after that, only a choked cry that ripped from his chest as he came, deep and hard, in his best friend’s mouth.

Still shuddering as his release washed through him, Scott didn’t want to open his eyes. He kept them tightly shut, afraid to find Jimmy’s face, afraid of what he might see there. Disgust? Regret? He didn’t know, but it was enough to keep him still and quiet.

He didn’t protest as Jimmy pulled back, tugging his pajama bottoms and shorts the rest of the way off. He still didn’t open his eyes as the man shifted, fitting himself between Scott’s legs,

warm hands running down his thighs, pulling Scott closer.

“Look at me, Scott,” He could feel Jimmy’s erection pressed against his stomach, hear the trepidation in Jimmy’s voice as he said Scott’s name. “Baby, open your eyes,” The words were whispered against Scott’s cheek, Jimmy’s breath soft against his skin as the man nuzzled against his jaw. “Please, Scott, open your eyes.”

That undid Scott and he forced his eyes open, able to see Jimmy above him in the sliver of light peeking in through the curtains. No regret and certainly no disgust, but for the first time he could see in his friend’s eyes a look of uncertainty mingled with a palpable want, as if Jimmy’s desire had a life of its own, a will of its own.

Jimmy was rising up a little, leaning over to Scott’s nightstand. His voice was steady, but Scott could tell his hands were shaking just slightly, “If you don’t want this,” Jimmy told him, the words a quiet rumble in the night, “You’re gonna have to say it.”

Scott could hear the crinkle of a foil packet, the sharp snick of a cap being flipped open with a thumb, and he knew what was coming. Jimmy was sitting back on his knees, one tender hand stroking against the sharp jut of his hipbone as the other slipped between his thighs, fingers slick and warm, gentle, as they played against his entrance.

“I do,” The words surprised both of them, Scott could tell. His murmured consent drew a sharp breath from Jimmy even as the man slipped the tip of his finger inside, pushing slowly in. Scott groaned, reaching his hands for the man, finding solid shoulders and holding on as Jimmy started to prepare him.

Leaning closer, Jimmy’s body sheltering Scott from the realities of what they were doing, another finger invaded, pushing deep and sure as Jimmy’s mouth found Scott’s. Soft, full lips pressed against Scott’s own, tasting himself there as Jimmy’s tongue slid into his mouth, parted his lips further. Some small corner of Scott’s mind registered that it was the first time Jimmy had ever *really* kissed him and it felt even more intimate than coming in the man’s mouth. Their breaths mingled, salty and sweet flavors passing back and forth between them, the two finding their own rhythm together just as they always had before. For a moment, it felt like Jimmy was trying to climb inside Scott’s skin, possess him, build a home there as the kiss intensified, Jimmy holding Scott firmly, another finger pushing inside him, opening him up.

When they broke, they were both breathless with need, Scott only able to swallow hard and nod in answer to the question in Jimmy’s eyes.

The cool air hit his chest as Jimmy pulled back, Scott watching the man’s face as Jimmy quickly tore open a condom wrapper with his teeth, covering himself without hesitation.

Eyes drifting shut for just a moment, Scott could feel Jimmy’s capable hands running down his thighs, hooking behind his knees and drawing them up higher, resting them over broad shoulders. He let Jimmy move him, guide him into place, but he looked up again at the sound of Jimmy’s voice. “Wanted you for so long, Scott,” the man whispered, and the admission took Scott’s breath

from him.

Another nod from Scott, acknowledging what Jimmy had said, and, being honest with himself, agreeing. He wanted to respond, wanted to tell his friend all the times he'd hoped for this, but his voice was hiding, keeping all his secret wishes locked inside. All he had was the feeling of Jimmy's palm resting against his chest, as if the man were feeling the rhythm of Scott's heartbeat. He had to trust Jimmy's ability to read all the answers in his face as the man slowly pushed in.

Neither of them could speak after that, lost to all coherent thought as Jimmy pulled back and pushed a little deeper. Scott groaned again, taking in a deep breath as he willed himself to relax around Jimmy's thick cock. He could see the tension in Jimmy's face, knew the man was holding back and all he could do was dig his fingers into the muscles of Jimmy's chest and try to pull him deeper, grinding himself down against the man.

Whether Jimmy's control broke or he could see in Scott's face that it was time, Scott had no idea, but Jimmy offered a deep thrust then and both of their voices cracked the silence that had been holding them. *Yes* and *God* and *so good* were muttered like small prayers in choked voices that hoped for salvation as each solid drive of Jimmy's hips took them both closer to the edge.

Jimmy's hand slid down Scott's body, fingers wrapping around his cock, fully hard now, aching for another release. The man stroked him with a slick, firm grip, thumb circling the crown, rubbing frantically as his thrusts lost all restraint, headboard tapping out a sharp rhythm against the wall in a way that would have been comical if either of them had paused to think about it.

"Come for me, baby," Jimmy's voice was strained, tight in his throat, and the simple words, the pleading command, was all it took to push Scott over the edge. His hips bucked against the steady shift of Jimmy's palm, grinding down against the drive of the man's cock before spilling hotly across Jimmy's fingers and against his own chest.

Two more sharp thrusts and Jimmy was buried deep inside, letting out a suffering cry that was all primal heat, groaning a curse as he came. "Fuck. Scott..." He didn't say anything else for a long moment, collapsing down against Scott, pressing himself to Scott's sticky belly as Scott let his legs fall from the man's shoulders, wrapping his entire body around Jimmy, almost ashamed of the way he clung to the man as Jimmy slowly softened.

Letting his eyes slide shut, Scott tried not to think, tried not to worry about the potential repercussions. He wound his arms around Jimmy's shoulders, fingers threading into the man's dark hair, feet locking together around Jimmy's waist as if he could keep the man still and close forever by simply holding on.

As his breath started to even out, his heart finding its rhythm again, Scott nearly drifted off to sleep, but Jimmy was rising up again, carefully pulling out and discarding the condom.

He wanted to tell the man no, wanted to hang on tighter and keep Jimmy where he was, but he just took a steadying breath and shifted, giving Jimmy space in case the man needed to run and

hide now.

Maybe it was the pained expression that danced across Scott's face, or maybe it was simply Jimmy's instinct, but the man leaned in again, kissing each of Scott's closed eyes, then his cheek, then his mouth. "You're a mess," he whispered, voice carrying a light tease, trying to mask all the things he wasn't saying.

Scott could only smile, nodding his head as he let himself be shifted and tugged, Jimmy sliding over him, climbing up behind him and fitting Scott against himself. The sheet that had been kicked away was now being used to wipe the mess off Scott's stomach and chest, Jimmy holding him close as he cleaned them haphazardly, pulling the blankets back up over them.

"If I'd known that was all it took to shut you up, I would have tried it years ago." Jimmy was teasing again as he settled, but Scott could tell it was really a question as the man wrapped his arms around him.

"Shellshock." Scott said, trying to laugh, but it was too close to the truth and they both knew it.

"Well," Jimmy whispered, pressing his lips just behind Scott's ear, "I thought about serenading you, or sending you roses and a love poem, but you would've accused me of being high."

Scott did laugh then, agreeing, "Yeah, I would've."

"Guess you were right; an ambush blowjob isn't very Cary Grant."

Scott turned a little, his head resting half on Jimmy's arm, half on the pillows, "Oh, God, I'd like to think it is..." He could just make out Jimmy's wicked grin at the words.

"Yeah? You think Cary Grant gave good head?"

"Christ, I hope so." Scott turned back around then, pressing himself comfortably against Jimmy, their bodies fitting together seamlessly. "Speaking of, I mean, I know I was dead asleep when you got started, but..."

"I practiced."

Turning his head again, not surprised at the flair of jealousy sparking in him, "With *who*?"

Jimmy laughed again, kissing the tip of Scott's nose, "Not 'who', more like 'what'." he told Scott.

"Do I even wanna know?"

"Probably not," Jimmy answered, the two of them laughing now, unguarded. Scott could feel Jimmy's grin as the man pressed another kiss against his bare shoulder.

“So...are you...I mean... Are you into guys now? Or...bi or...?”

Jimmy’s arms tightened around Scott, as if he were trying to get closer, his tone serious, “Nope. Guys don’t do a damn thing for me. Hell, even girls lately... It’s just... You.”

He let the honesty of that statement sink in, felt the weight of Jimmy’s words, but after a moment, Scott found himself sniggering, “You’re telling me you’re Scott-o-sexual now?”

The huff of laughter sent a warm draft over Scott’s bare skin, Jimmy pinching his side and grinning as he bit Scott’s ear, “That’s right, dollbaby, I had to make up a whole new orientation because of you.”

“Oh God, if it catches on we’ll have to add a new letter to the LGBTQ.” The two of them laughing again, Jimmy lacing their fingers together over Scott’s stomach, “Pretty soon it’ll be the whole damn alphabet.”

“Better not catch on; you’re *mine*.” Jimmy told him, sliding his bare feet between Scott’s.

“This from the man that’s screwed half the city...” Scott was teasing, covering the flutter he felt in his stomach at Jimmy’s words, wanting to believe them, at the same time knowing Jimmy was all over the map when it came to sex.

“Well, you screwed the other half, so I figure we’re even.”

They fell silent for a moment, cuddled together like always, comfortable with each other in a way they maybe never had been before. Scott broke the moment by asking, “How long?”

“Hm?”

“You said you’d wanted me for so long... How long?”

Jimmy buried his face against the back of Scott’s neck, as if he were hiding from his own answer. “Years.”

Scott stared into the dark room for a beat, shocked silent, before he turned in Jimmy’s arms, “No shit?”

Jimmy just shook his head, readjusting his hold on Scott enough to let the man turn into his arms, pulling until Scott’s head rested on his shoulder. “No shit,” he whispered, pressing his forehead to Scott’s. “Christ, I... I chased down everything in a skirt thinking...thinking it was just a phase or that it was because you were the first gay guy I ever really got to know, thinking maybe one of the girls would stick, but...”

“And all those vapid twinkles you threw at me?”

Closing his eyes and swallowing hard, Jimmy murmured, “I knew they *wouldn’t* stick.”

Reaching a hand up, Scott stroked his fingers through Jimmy's hair, "Is that why you never introduced me to Rob?" Finally realizing what was bothering Jimmy all along.

Jimmy just nodded at first, pulling back and brushing a kiss to Scott's crown, "The guy is a fucking *prince*." he told Scott, half a laugh catching on the words, "Christ, I wanted to hate him, tried to find some...flaw, but the more I got to know him the more I knew he'd be great for you and..."

Scott was grinning, he couldn't help himself, "You jealous little prick."

"I'd say guilty, but little and prick don't really work in the same sentence where I'm concerned..." They were both laughing again, pressing closer as Jimmy's hand skimmed down Scott's back, cupping his ass, rocking his hips into him.

"Jackass," Scott murmured, the word sounding like an endearment on his sigh as he wrapped his leg around Jimmy's hip. They moved together slowly for a moment, both of them starting to grow hard again when Scott stopped suddenly, "Shit, *Rob*."

"So not the name I want to hear when I'm doing this..." Jimmy's voice was light and playful, but Scott could tell the man was unsettled, the path of Jimmy's hand having halted abruptly.

"No, I mean... I should probably tell him. We haven't been... Well, not lately, anyway, but we were kind of dating."

"Feel like ya cheated on him?" Jimmy asked, letting out a small whisper of breath against Scott's hair.

"Well, no, not really, I mean, we never said we were...*exclusive* or anything, and I know Rob probably had a few...and we never even--"

Interrupting, Jimmy asked, "Do you wanna be? Exclusive and all with him, I mean?"

Scott had to think for a moment, getting the words. It was too long, he could tell by the way Jimmy pulled back and worried his bottom lip between his teeth, looking like he was ready to get out of bed. "No. It would serve you right for waiting *years*, but...no. He *is* a great guy, you were right about that, but..." His voice dropped to a whisper, pulling Jimmy close again, "I always wished he was you."

One corner of Jimmy's mouth curved into a cocky grin, "Good." he said, closing in against Scott again. "And, I *did* try, you just always turned me down."

"I always thought you were joking or...just being bi-curious. Wasn't worth risking everything just to satisfy a whim, ya know?"

"Yeah, I know. That's why I waited so long, princess."

Scott rolled his eyes at that, laughing, “Does that make you my knight in shining armor?”

“Yes,” Jimmy said seriously, “With an *enormous* joust.”

“Oh, Jesus,” Scott shook his head, hiding his face against Jimmy’s chest as they rolled and played together, laughing more, “You’re hopeless.”

“You love it.”

Sighing again, “Yeah. Damn it.”

They were quiet for another few minutes, fingers tenderly exploring each other in a way they’d never let themselves before, bodies pressed tightly together. Scott had to ask, “What about Tina?”

Jimmy pulled back to see his face, “What about her?”

“I mean... When I asked where you were last night, Monica said you two were off somewhere.”

“Yeah, we were. Talking about *you*.” Jimmy told him, smiling as he leaned in to nuzzle against Scott’s ear, whispering, “She’s been telling me for a while now... That night she dropped her bomb on me and we went inside to talk for a while?”

“Yeah?”

“She was telling me I needed to get off my ass or I was gonna lose you.”

“I thought she was blowing you.” Scott laughed, feeling like an idiot.

“Last night she pulled me out of the party so I wouldn’t get wasted and told me it was time for drastic measures and I’d better figure something out before it was too late.”

Scott tilted his head so Jimmy could kiss him again, then pressed his lips to the man’s throat, breath warm and soft as he whispered around a smile, “Remind me to thank her.”

“Send a gift; she’s partial to high end jewelry.”

Sleeping more soundly than he had in weeks, Scott rested peacefully in Jimmy’s arms. The first sound that woke him was a small murmur against his ear, “Someone’s at the door, baby.” Jimmy was whispering to him, the two of them still groggy and tousled from the night before.

Groaning, Scott opened his eyes, blinking at the clock. He’d slept through his alarm and it was now after nine in the morning. “Christ,” he said, stretching a little and shifting to get out of bed.

“They’ll go away if we ignore it long enough...” Jimmy told him, a Cheshire cat grin on his face.

“Yeah, but...if that’s who I think it is, I should probably deal with it.”

“Rob?”

Scott just nodded as he pulled on a t-shirt and found a pair of boxers on the floor.

Stumbling into the living room, Scott answered the door to find Rob smiling happily at him. Normally, Scott would have leaned in to kiss him, but instead stood in the doorway looking guilty. “Hey, um...”

Rob paused in the motion of coming in, looked Scott up and down and then grinned, arching a brow, “You look like a man that’s been thoroughly fucked.”

Pausing, not sure how to respond to that, Scott finally said, “It’s not like that...I mean...it *is*, but...”

Jimmy appeared at his shoulder then, standing close, one arm wrapping around Scott’s waist, “It’s totally like that. I’m sorry, man.”

Scott didn’t expect the laugh from Rob, “You are not, you shit.”

“Yeah, I’m totally not.” Jimmy told him, laughing with the man.

“It’s cool. I knew from the first date that you two...well, anyway, it’s cool. Glad it finally worked out for ya.”

Looking as dumbfounded as he felt, Scott just stood there a moment, finally asking, “You sure? I mean...I didn’t mean for anything to...didn’t think it ever *would* happen, ya know?”

Another laugh from Rob, “You’re the only one that didn’t, then. And, we weren’t really...ya know?”

“Yeah, I know,”

“It’s all good.” Rob flipped his sunglasses down from the top of his head, covering his eyes and lifting his light brows over the frames, “Guess I’ll have to go down to the beach and see what I can find.” he teased, looking between Jimmy and Scott.

Glancing at the clock, Jimmy told him, “You’re in luck; volleyball is probably just getting good.”

Rob looked serious for a moment, as if he were considering something important, breaking into a blinding smile after a beat, “Those boys *do* get thirsty. Might stop on the way and get a few bottled waters. Wouldn’t want anyone getting dehydrated.” Slapping Jimmy on the shoulder and

smiling just for Scott, Rob turned, hopping down the steps and out into the sun.

As Jimmy reached to close the door behind Rob, he told Scott, “See? Goddamn prince.”

“Since he’s so great, should I run after him?” Scott asked, reaching for the doorknob around Jimmy. Strong arms wrapped around Scott, Jimmy turning him and pressing him against the door, grinning as he leaned close.

“Don’t even think about it.”

Epilogue

“What are you doing?”

Jimmy was searching through the diaper bag, brow furrowed, “Is Bippy Bear in here?”

Carol laughed, “No, he’s in the other bag, we wouldn’t forget it again, I swear.”

“Not that I don’t believe you,” Jimmy picked up the other bag from the backseat, grinning when he pulled the little bear out, Jake clapping as if his father had just preformed a magic trick. “But I’m never having another night like that again.”

Feeling a tug at his shirt, Jimmy turned, having extracted Jake from his car seat, one bag slung over his shoulder, the other sitting by the car. Cassy was there, her hands already muddy, Hermione—Persephone’s puppy-- squirming in her arms, “Daddy, Scott says I have to take a bath before dinner.”

“It’s either that or hose you down in the back yard, princess.”

Rolling her eyes as only a six year old could, Cassandra huffed her frustration, “I can just wash my hands.”

Trying to be stern, Jimmy passed Jake off to Scott, the baby grinning at him and pulling at Scott’s hair with pudgy fingers, “Bath, dinner, movie. In that order.”

Dropping her voice to a whisper, Stacy told Scott, “She’s been like that for two weeks.”

Nodding, “I don’t think I’ve ever seen her argue with anyone.” Scott told her, watching Jimmy try to reason with the little girl.

“According to her teacher, it’s pretty normal for her age, but...”

“But you’re really looking forward to a couple weeks off?”

Looking over at Carol, her smile bright and her eyes tired, “Let’s just say I hope they stocked the bar well on the cruise ship.”

“Go give your mommies a kiss, sweetheart.” Jimmy was smiling down at his daughter like she was an angel and Scott knew her new argumentative nature and his urge to give her the world could be a recipe for disaster, but he couldn’t help grinning at the man.

Carol and Stacy hugged the kids, smothering them in kisses and reminding Jimmy of the new alarm code at their house so they could water the plants and feed the fish before they raced each other to get in the car, laughing and looking suddenly fifteen years younger.

When Jimmy had told them that he wanted to wait until he was done with his residency before considering kids, they had been disappointed, but after several discussions and a lot of thought, the three of them had decided to wait and see if the man was ready then. They knew they could get a donor and go forward without him, but they liked Jimmy and Scott and they liked the idea of sharing family responsibilities with people they trusted. Now their children had four loving parents and two houses to grow up in.

Setting Hermione down in the grass and reaching up to Jimmy, Cassy said, “Carry me, daddy.” The man complied, as always, beaming as she wrapped her little arms around his neck. “Can we have ice cream?”

“Not before dinner.” he told her, kissing her soft cheek and giving her a little bounce. Scott shifted Jake to his other hip, his free arm wrapping around Jimmy’s waist. “But I happen to know Scott’s got a pint of your favorite hidden in the back of the freezer.”

Pinching his side, Scott narrowed his eyes, “Traitor.”

Turning off the lights as he walked through the house, Scott found Jimmy hovering at Cassy’s door, the man silhouetted in the moonlight, watching their daughter sleep. Standing up on his toes so he could rest his chin on Jimmy’s shoulder, Scott whispered, “You coming to bed or just gonna keep watch all night?”

Leaning back a little, Jimmy pulled Scott’s arm around him, “She’s growing up so fast.”

“I know,” he agreed, laughing softly, teasing, “And all but about ten minutes of it is captured on video.”

“Yeah, well.” Turning, Jimmy pressed a kiss to the corner of Scott’s mouth, smiling for a beat and then looking serious, cupping Scott’s jaw, “I coulda missed out on all this.”

“Me too,” Lifting his face and drinking in Jimmy’s expression, Scott smiled, kissing the man again, letting it deepen at the end with a small slide of his tongue.

Sighing into the kiss, Jimmy's fingers laced into Scott's hair, his arm snaking around Scott's waist, "Time for bed, husband."

THE END

AUTHOR BIO: J.H. Knight hates writing bios and doesn't even fill out the little blurb about herself on Goodreads. Most of her time is spent saying things like, "Not until your homework is done." When not driving/chasing/educating her children, she's usually curled up reading one of her favorite authors or telling herself she's really going to finish that novel she started writing. Really!

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