

IN THE MOUNTAINS

AN IN STEP STORY

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BEFORE YOU READ...

“In the Mountains” is about Blake and Oliver, the main characters of the full-length novel, *Sleepwalker*. Though you can enjoy the story without reading the book, “In the Mountains” does take place between the novel’s last chapter and epilogue.

IN THE MOUNTAINS

"I think I'm going to take a snowboarding lesson," Blake said.

Oliver glanced from the road toward the passenger seat where his eyes lingered helplessly. Blake had one knee pulled up in front of him, his socked foot tucked partially beneath his thigh. How such a position could be comfortable for someone his height was a mystery to Oliver, but he found himself admiring the lines of that flexible body, soft and curved under his jeans and forest-green sweater.

"Oliver," Blake said, almost laughing, and Oliver hastily redirected his attention to the road. "Did you hear what I said?"

"Snowboarding," Oliver muttered, wrinkling his nose.

Blake's head fell back against the headrest, his grin blinding even in Oliver's peripheral vision. "I admit I can't really picture you on a mountain."

Oliver huffed. "I assure you, I look excellent on a mountain."

"On a mountain, *snowboarding*."

"I've skied before," Oliver said slowly, careful that his

tone didn't suggest he was volunteering for anything. "If you want to try, I'm sure we can find a good instructor." Oliver had often visited the cabin they were borrowing, as well as the attached resort. The cabin belonged to Ted, a partner at the law firm where Oliver had started out, and a close friend. Ted, who was maddeningly athletic and outdoorsy, was always suggesting ways Oliver could be introduced to various snow sports. Oliver always ignored him. He went into the Rocky Mountains not to go out in the cold and dominate them, but to sit in front of a crackling fireplace and look at them through a window.

"Maybe just for one day," Blake said thoughtfully, gazing out the windshield. "Or, I don't know." He glanced back at Oliver. "Would you mind?"

It was their first trip together. It was also the first trip Oliver had ever undertaken with a lover in all his thirty-seven years. Despite this, Oliver was trying not to put too much pressure on the experience. "You should do whatever you'd enjoy," he said, hoping his tone sounded light and sincere.

But because he was transparent in Blake's eyes, Blake was undeceived. A wry smile ticked up the left side of Blake's mouth and he put his left hand on Oliver's right knee.

"Never mind. I just want to hang out with you." He squeezed just above Oliver's kneecap and Oliver fidgeted, torn between tickled and aroused. Blake's effect on him hadn't faded in their few months together. That was good, because Blake had the voracious appetites typical of a man in his mid-twenties, and the inspiration helped Oliver keep up.

He marveled that the more time they spent together, the more potent his attraction seemed to grow. In the past, his

relationships had always worked in the opposite way—they lost their luster over time. But sex with Blake had been different from the start and continued to defy all precedents.

"After all," Blake went on blithely, oblivious to Oliver's train of thought, "it's our first Valentine's Day."

Oliver immediately rolled his eyes. "*That is a coincidence.*"

Blake rubbed Oliver's leg as though he was soothing a grumpy child. "Sure it is."

He was being patronizing on purpose. He knew very well how Oliver felt about holidays, especially a holiday that was so useless and purely commercial the banks didn't even close for it.

Oliver couldn't help rising to the bait. "It was the only break in the trial schedule," he said tightly, "and if you don't take your hand off of me, there will be consequences."

Blake's hand did not retreat. Instead it slid up Oliver's thigh. "Oh?" He sounded intrigued.

"Yes," Oliver said, the word emerging more like a growl. Being touched when he couldn't retaliate made him crazy.

He scanned the road ahead for exits, but only found snow-dusted farmland, as far as the eye could see.

The drive from eastern Kansas to the Colorado Rocky Mountains was even more painful than Oliver remembered. The last time he'd taken this seemingly never-ending stretch of interstate highway, he'd sworn he'd never do it again. But boarding a plane with Cujo, his physically small, charismatically enormous, and occasionally aggressive Chihuahua, had not been a serious option.

At the thought of her, Oliver glanced into the rearview mirror, which he'd adjusted so that he could easily see her sitting in the backseat. She was perched inside her canine

booster seat, and wore a padded harness. She happened to be looking up at that moment; their eyes met in the mirror. She had black fur and dark brown eyes that normally appeared black, too, but they were closer to the color of fine ebony wood in the intense light filtering through the car windows.

"You really need to watch the road," Blake advised. "And while you're doing that, tell me more about these consequences."

Oliver glanced down at Blake's hand, then caught sight of a sign for a rest stop and veered rather sharply onto the off-ramp.

The rest stop wasn't much: a cement-block building with a restroom sign; a couple of picnic tables under pergo-las; and a stretch of brown, dormant grass with muddy patches where the recent snow had melted. There were no other small vehicles, but a shiny red semi-truck had pulled off onto the side of the pavement, a cover pulled across its windshield, its occupant likely dozing inside.

Oliver pulled in, put the car in park, and glanced in the rearview mirror at Cujo again, hesitating, while Blake's hand snuck closer to the crux of his thighs.

"You shouldn't feel shy around her," Blake murmured, sounding amused. "She doesn't care what we do."

"It's more *my* feelings I'm concerned about," Oliver muttered, not interested in rehashing why he didn't want his dog watching him and Blake fool around. "Come with me," he said tersely after a moment, unbuckling his seat belt and sliding out from beneath Blake's touch as he climbed out of the car. When Blake followed, not-so-subtly adjusting himself and stealing a quick, slightly concerned look toward the red semi-truck, a thrill ran through Oliver. It wasn't easy to unsettle Blake. But apparently dragging

him into the cold at a middle-of-nowhere rest stop did the trick.

Blake's door fell closed and Oliver locked the car, sticking the fob in his pocket. It was a warm day for February, but still too cold for nothing but jeans and a cashmere sweater. He gave a thought to his coat, folded in the backseat. Then he decided that within thirty seconds, Blake would be warming him up.

Oliver began walking without looking back to see if Blake would follow. And sure enough, he immediately heard the crunch of gravel under Blake's shoes as he shadowed Oliver toward the restroom structure.

There was a concrete walkway that led to the building, then continued around it. Just beyond the rear wall of the small, square building, the hillside fell away sharply, revealing the highway they'd just left and its rushing traffic. They were elevated enough here, though, that the likelihood of anyone looking up and spotting them for more than a moment was infinitesimal. Oliver unbuttoned his fly with his thumb and forefinger. "Get over here," he told Blake, whose eyes went wide. Blake looked down toward the road, then back the way they'd come, the parked truck now hidden by the shape of the building. Oliver leaned against the wall as the cold air kissed the skin beneath his navel. "Hurry up," he added, an octave lower. "I told you there would be consequences."

Blake swallowed, color flooding his face, and dropped to his knees on the uneven pavement. The toes of his shoes dug into the muddy grass. His hands were cold as they pulled open Oliver's jeans, so Oliver batted them away. "Use your mouth," he said gruffly, sliding his own cool fingers through Blake's hair.

Blake hesitated, then used his tongue and his teeth to

get a grip on the elastic hem of Oliver's underwear. Oliver hadn't really thought through the implications of forbidding Blake the use of his hands, but he considered it a happy accident on his part when Blake quickly grew frustrated and sloppy, soaking Oliver's underwear by the time he finally exposed enough of Oliver's cock to get his mouth around it.

Normally, when they did this, Blake was enthusiastic but passive, because Oliver loved nothing more than holding Blake by his long dark hair and fucking his mouth. But today, possibly because of excitement and possibly because of unease regarding their circumstances, Blake seemed intent on getting Oliver off as quickly as possible. Normally Oliver would pace himself, savoring each moment instead of rushing to climax, but Blake's warm, wet mouth sheathed him with instant, relentless suction that left Oliver reeling. Blake bobbed deeply on Oliver's cock, making an exquisite sound when he went too deep, too fast, and gagged himself—yet didn't even pause. So, it didn't take long before Oliver was wrapping one hand around Blake's nape to hold him still, tilting his hips forward, and coming.

That was the serendipitous moment when someone wrenched open the steel door on the other side of the bathroom structure. Blake noticed first; Oliver heard his gasp and felt the tension in his body. Oliver was experiencing everything through a post-orgasmic haze, but after a second or two he regained his senses, in time to hear the thud of heavy footsteps on a solid floor just feet away.

Blake stared up at him, clearly torn between amusement and horror. Oliver did hesitate a moment, but then he hauled Blake to his feet, pinning him against Oliver's body with a hand on his waist, while his other hand dove through the loose waistband of Blake's jeans. The touch of his chilly

palm against Blake's smooth stomach first made Blake jump, then he pushed his forehead hard against Oliver's shoulder as he realized Oliver's intent.

"I don't think...." Blake began, then sucked in a breath when Oliver wrapped his hand around him, restricted by the confines of his clothes. "I don't think I can," he hissed.

"*Please*," Oliver murmured sardonically. Blake was hard and leaking in his hand. Oliver loved Blake's cock. It was longer and thicker than Oliver's. He loved it in his hand and he loved it in his mouth. A thought occurred to him as he began stroking Blake, rough and fast. He put his mouth against his ear. "I love this big, fat cock," he murmured, and Blake jerked and whimpered. "There are so many things I'd like to do with it. Slap it, cage it, tie it."

"Oliver, fuck," Blake said, then choked himself silent when the sound of rushing water, maybe in a sink, came very audibly through the wall. The noise was likely no louder than their voices had been, but Oliver was fairly sure they wouldn't be overheard. They were outdoors, after all. Sound dissipated in the open. But if he was wrong, and some random trucker heard them...they *were* two men getting off together. In the middle of nowhere in a conservative state.

The little thrill of fear inspired him to be quick, even as it sent a pulse of heat to his spent cock. "Maybe one of these days," he said, rolling his palm over the head of Blake's cock, his knuckles pressing into the wet fabric where Blake had been leaking into his underwear. "If you're very good," he continued calmly, and then gripped Blake's shaft more tightly than before, increasing the pace with his precum-slick palm. He lowered his voice to a whisper as he finished, "I'll let you fuck me."

"Ngh," Blake gasped as his head jerked off of Oliver's

shoulder, his eyes wild. "You—?" Before he could get the question out, his hips were jerking in rough little spasms between the hand on his cock and the hand still pressed tightly to the small of his back, and he was coming into Oliver's hand, ruining his underwear and making Oliver's week.

They waited until the bathroom door had opened and closed again, and then a minute or two beyond that, Oliver slumped against the wall and Blake slumped against Oliver. They didn't speak. Oliver was smug and content to say nothing, enjoying the look of stunned amazement on Blake's face. When they were too cold to wait any longer, they went back to the still-running car and were quick to clamber in. Cujo had not missed them in their absence; she'd curled up and was fast asleep.

There was no sign of anyone else. The semi truck was gone.

Blake sprawled in his seat. "Fuck." He sounded ragged. "That was...."

Oliver leaned over the console and peered concernedly at Blake's face.

"Good?"

Blake blinked at him and smiled, looking dazed. Oliver kissed his mouth quickly, in part because he couldn't help it and in part to distract himself from the feeling of his ribs being too small for his pounding, overgrown heart.

While their lips were touching, pressed closed and cold from the winter air, Oliver felt Blake's smile.

That unbearable pressure started to work its way from Oliver's heart past his throat, almost before he realized what it would mean if it got that far. It carried words—words he thought he'd never say, words that scared the hell out of him.

Words he *wanted* to say, almost as much as he was afraid to say them.

At the last moment he swallowed them back.

“Okay?” he asked instead, hoping his breathlessness could be ascribed to having just had public sex.

“Better than okay,” Blake said, his head lolling against the seat. “If you wanted to teach me to be obedient, though, I don’t think your plan worked. Those ‘consequences’ felt more like a reward.”

Oliver chuckled faintly, too alarmed by what he’d nearly said to fall easily into banter.

“Ugh,” Blake said. “I’m going to change.” He put his hand on the door release, then hesitated. “Do you think I’ll get murdered in that bathroom?”

“If you are, Cujo and I will bring the bastard to justice.”

Blake snorted. “Your deputy is asleep on the job.” He glanced over his shoulder at Cujo with a fond smile, then got out of the car again.

Five minutes later, Blake was wearing a pair of snug, soft sweatpants, and they were back on the road.

An hour later, they crossed the state line and Blake was affronted that there wasn’t an immediate change in scenery.

“Where are the mountains?” he demanded, leaning against the dash and straining his eyes toward the western horizon. “Wait, I see them!”

Oliver shook his head. “No, you don’t. Those are just clouds.”

Blake fell back against the seat again and groaned. “You were right. This drive is inhumane.”

“You can borrow one of my books.” Oliver tipped his head toward the back seat where he had a satchel of essentials, including three paperbacks.

Blake was quiet for a moment, and Oliver quickly real-

ized his error. Blake lived with crippling migraines, and he didn't read for leisure as a result.

"Podcast?" he offered. Listening to people he could hear but not see got on Oliver's nerves, but Blake had headphones.

"No," Blake said, basically whining now, which should have been annoying, but it wasn't. No, even his petulance couldn't deter that squeezed-tight feeling in Oliver's chest. He rubbed his sternum in an unconscious effort to ease the discomfort.

Before he could suggest Blake take a nap, Blake's hand had snuck back into his lap.

Oliver shot him a glare.

"Have you ever gotten road head?" Blake asked, matter-of-fact.

Oliver may or may not have swerved very slightly at those words. Blake snickered, his agile, artist's fingers playing up Oliver's inseam.

"That does not sound safe," Oliver said firmly. Also, he had a thing about sex in cars—but it wouldn't have been the first time Blake inspired him to step into unprecedented territory.

With a sigh, Blake pulled away and leaned against the window. Oliver could see his reflection in its surface, a ghost's face in silver and graphite. His expression was suddenly and uncharacteristically hesitant.

"Would you really want...?" He fell quiet and his head rolled toward Oliver, his eyes wide and dark. He bit his lower lip, like he couldn't bring himself to say it.

Oliver's mind was so addled that he didn't realize what Blake was asking at first. Then he remembered his own impulsive suggestion at the rest stop, and grinned. Blake fucking him.

"It is something I enjoy, on *occasion*."

Blake looked adorably eager. "Special occasions?"

Oliver laughed. "Anniversaries and birthdays."

"And Valentine's Day?" Blake's shyness was gone, his grin impish, and Oliver loved him.

He almost blurted it out. He had to swallow his involuntary laughter to keep the words from spilling out too.

Blake closed his eyes, his smile turning quiet and serene. "Sounds way more fun than snowboarding."

Blake was sleeping when Oliver realized the mountains were visible, a jagged outline sharply offsetting a bright sunset in the clear sky. He gently stroked Blake's shoulder until his eyes opened.

"Hmm?"

"Look."

Blake stared obediently, yawning, then sat up with a start when he realized what he was seeing. "Oh, wow. I can't believe I thought I'd seen them before. They're...."

"Unmistakable." Oliver's hands flexed on the wheel. "You know them at once when you see them."

"Yeah." Blake closed his eyes again, a little wrinkle appearing in his forehead. Oliver reached over and combed his hair back from his temple, fingertips gentle on his forehead. "Head hurting?"

Blake tilted his head against Oliver's hand, then sighed. "Not yet. But it's...." He made a gesture in front of his face.

"I have no idea what that means." Oliver made circles with his thumb above Blake's ear, the way that he seemed to like.

"Lights," Blake said. "When one's coming, that's what I

always notice first. I see little flashing rainbows when I close my eyes." He blinked his eyes open again and sighed. "I used to *like* rainbows."

Sometimes Blake's migraines came roaring in, unstoppable, no matter what he tried to do to forestall them. At other times, the medication he'd gotten six weeks before from his specialist seemed to help hold them at bay.

Oliver checked the road sign they passed for information about the exit, and when he saw the symbol for a gas pump, he took his hand from Blake's face so that he could have both on the wheel as he changed lanes. "We need to stop and let Cujo out anyway. You could take a pill?"

Blake nodded, but didn't speak. Oliver stole a glance to observe Blake's expression, but he didn't seem frustrated. Sometimes reminders about medication or questions about his head weren't well-received, but Oliver was learning how much he could ask, and how best to ask it.

The station was more of a truck stop—oversized, with a large lot full of parked trucks. Oliver parked near a grassy median that divided the small vehicle refueling from the truck refueling pumps. As Oliver got out of the car, he saw a red truck pull in. For some reason it caught his eye for a moment before he slid into the back seat to negotiate Cujo out of her seat and into her leash.

Cujo had come into his life unexpectedly almost two years before, a borderline-feral, distrusting little creature that had won Oliver over immediately. It had taken longer for her to warm to him in return, and there were still many moments where he took her cooperation for granted and got a growl or nip to remind him of his place. So he kept his motions slow and deliberate, first scratching her chin, then unbuckling her harness from the contraption that kept her in her little seat, and snapping on the leash instead.

Oliver led her into the scruffy grass, frowning as he saw Cujo's paws sink past a crust of snow into the muddy soil beneath. He had a towel in the trunk to clean her feet before he put her back in the car, but he was careful to keep his own shoes on the pavement.

"Hey," an unfamiliar voice called from about a dozen feet away.

"Fuck," a familiar voice—Blake's—said softly from the opposite direction.

Oliver looked toward Blake first. Oliver hadn't noticed him getting out of the car, but he was now only a few steps behind Oliver, but staring past him.

Oliver followed the direction of Blake's gaze at the same moment that Cujo began tugging at her leash. Though she detested having strangers around her when they were at home, she was delighted by them in open territory, and she had apparently decided that the stocky, bearded man standing beside a fire-engine-red semi truck would make a good friend.

"Cute dog," said the trucker. He was wearing jeans and a denim button down shirt. His medium-brown hair was long and pushed back with product, and his beard was groomed. He had something of a sexy lumberjack vibe going, if Oliver was honest. He was about to say something to the man that would help him intuit that he was flattered, but taken, when the trucker added, "That your car?"

And then it clicked. Blake's look of horror; the vague familiarity of the semi; the rough wall that had dug into Oliver's shoulder blades while Blake sucked him off in plain view of interstate traffic.

The trucker must have seen his suspicions confirmed in Oliver's silent stare, because he smiled lazily. "Thought so." He moved his curious gaze from Oliver to Blake, then back

again. He was probably Oliver's age—late thirties, or possibly a little older. "You ever let anyone watch, or are they only allowed to listen?"

Oliver narrowed his eyes, unsure whether he was being teased or propositioned. The trucker's grin went from sly to somewhat rueful, and Oliver was fairly sure that it was the latter.

He couldn't help a thrill at the suggestion—imagining this stranger watching him push Blake over the hood of the car and take him in plain view of the travelers and station attendants around them. In reality, Oliver wouldn't do *that*, of course, but there were several, corollary possibilities: bathrooms, the advertised hotel rooms above the truck-stop, et cetera.

But though the idea of someone watching them appealed to Oliver, he wasn't sure how Blake would react. He knew that Blake had a voyeuristic streak and he'd once stammered out his willingness to be shared, if Oliver wanted to share him. But Oliver had his own hang-ups about partner-sharing, and the idea of someone else touching Blake made him feel a flurry of inseparable and conflicting emotions. Maybe one day he'd want to, but that day wasn't today.

Still, it felt like being watched by one person, for Oliver's enjoyment, would lie at the intersection of Blake's many twisted and endearing kinks. And if Oliver was wrong and it was too much, he trusted himself to pick up on Blake's unease or if that failed, that Blake would safeword.

But the safety and logistics of a truck-stop proposition with a dog in his backseat were harder to unravel. And maybe one brush with danger was enough for one day.

"Thank you, but we have a long drive ahead of us," he said. Cujo was still struggling at the end of her leash, and

when the trucker smiled and shrugged in a no-hard-feelings kind of way, then bent down to get a better look at her, Oliver relented and walked forward so that he could easily pet her, wincing when mud squelched under his shoes. From this close, Oliver noticed how big the guy was, and imagined for a moment what he and Blake would look like together. Oliver was slightly taller than Blake, but much leaner. He overpowered Blake because Blake allowed it. It would be exciting to see Blake struggle in earnest against someone capable of wrestling him into submission with his bare hands....

Oliver shifted in place to ease the sudden tension in his jeans.

So, yeah, maybe sharing, with careful parameters, wouldn't be out of the question. One day.

"Aren't you a little sweetheart?" the trucker cooed to Cujo, who was licking his knuckles enthusiastically like she was the friendliest creature on Earth. The sight made Oliver feel inordinately proud of his little wayward pet.

"I'm Matt, by the way," the trucker said, digging in the pocket of his jeans and holding out a card to Oliver as he straightened up. Curious, Oliver took it from him. Their fingers brushed and the trucker winked. "In case you ever change your mind. I drive this route all the fucking time; you never know when we might be close by." He looked over Oliver's shoulder, presumably at Blake, and delivered a second wink and a broader grin. "You boys play safe."

They walked back toward the car. Cujo, who resented being dragged away from the patch of mud and snow that had apparently contained a variety of fascinating smells, darted around their legs, winding the leash between their ankles, until Oliver swore and Blake picked her up. She squirmed, dotting Blake's coat with muddy pawprints.

"So, you're an exhibitionist?" Blake asked casually as he dried Cujo's paws with the designated towel from the trunk. Then he disappeared into the backseat to buckle her in.

Oliver leaned against the roof of the car, so that when Blake reappeared, he could meet his eyes with a saccharine smile. "What gave you that idea? I told him no."

Blake gave him a cool look that conveyed just how unconvinced he was. "After you thought about it and couldn't figure out how to manage it."

It was a strange thing to be so *known*. Oliver felt uneasy, his heart over-full once again. "I try to be open-minded." He studied Blake's expression carefully. "What about you?"

Blake's skin was already cold-reddened over his bones—his cheeks and the point of his chin—and the tips of his ears and nose. Oliver watched with satisfaction as he went a shade redder. "Yeah. I mean, if you wanted to."

"I'll keep that in mind," Oliver murmured, then because they really *did* have a long drive still ahead of them, he shed his coat and got back into the car.

The sky had gotten dark and a light snow was beginning to fall, so Oliver kept his speed conservative. He'd always found there was a certain magic in traveling through the dark, only the bit of road in the headlights visible, almost how he'd imagined space travel when he'd read pulp science fiction as a child.

"I wish we could see the mountains," Blake murmured, sounding both closer and further away in their strange bubble of warmth and quiet. The snow scattered against the windshield.

"We'll see them tomorrow. They'll dazzle you fully in the morning."

Blake huffed a quiet laugh. "I'd like to see them as we get closer, though."

"Maybe next time," Oliver said absently, then, feeling his cheeks heat, was quick to add, "I'm surprised you haven't made this drive before. It seems like everyone I've met who's from Kansas City has made the drive more than once."

"My friends used to go out to the mountains all the time when I was growing up. But Colorado wasn't exotic enough for my mother, I guess," Blake said. Sometimes his upbringing as the only child of a famously successful businesswoman was a delicate subject, but he sounded relaxed right now. He stretched his feet across the floorboard, reclining his seat a few inches, and yawned so hard his jaw cracked.

"Sleep," Oliver murmured.

Blake put his right arm between the back of his head and the headrest, eyes already closed. "Mmm." With his left hand, he reached blindly for Oliver, and Oliver caught that questing hand in his. When their fingers were folded together on Blake's thigh, Blake sighed contentedly and appeared to fall asleep in seconds.

There was a haze of light and air pollution encircling Denver, which Oliver skirted, and then the highway became a series of sloping curves, climbing higher and higher with each mile.

Blake was still sleeping when Cujo whined in a very specific way that had Oliver hastily exiting so that he could let her pee. After she'd done her business, he sent a few text messages before he got back on the road.

Nine hours of driving in one day wasn't anyone's idea of a good time, but Oliver was almost sorry to see it end. He'd never spent so much uninterrupted time with Blake, and he

had a feeling he wouldn't soon forget their roadside encounter. Still, after the series of turns onto steadily narrower and less-traveled roads that led to the cabin, his exhaustion caught up with him and all he could think of was collapsing into the nearest bed.

"Sweetheart," he said after the garage door had closed behind them. He leaned over and kissed Blake's cheek. "We're here."

"Hmm?" Blake opened his eyes, blinking at the warm, faint light of the garage door sensors, then he sat up. "Oh my God, I only meant to sleep for a sec."

His medication seemed to make him drowsy, but Oliver knew better than to mention that. And he was bright-eyed now, climbing out of the car before Oliver had even unbuckled his seatbelt. There was a door into the house from the garage, and after Blake had flung it open and turned on the lights, he turned to Oliver with a bemused expression.

"You call this a *cabin*?"

"Yes?" Oliver frowned, getting out and stretching before opening the back seat to reach for Cujo.

"You're one of those people who thinks 'cabin' means anything with log siding." Blake snorted. "How many bedrooms does this place have?"

"Six, I believe. What?" He set Cujo on the floor and she immediately began sniffing the concrete, then sprinted between Blake's feet and into the house. Blake gave Oliver a parting, incredulous shake of his head and followed her.

Which left Oliver gathering their luggage like some sort of pack animal. Granted, Blake's duffel bag could have contained no more than a change of clothes for how lightweight it was, whereas Oliver had two rolling suitcases in addition to his satchel.

The cabin was just as Oliver had remembered it. The garage was attached to a hallway off the kitchen, which was part of an open space that incorporated the living and dining rooms beneath a two-story vaulted ceiling, with a wall of floor-to-ceiling windows overlooking the mountains, and a rocked fireplace.

A fireplace Blake was standing in front of with his hands on his hips.

"Is this for burning human sacrifices or something? I could Floo through this without ducking."

"Floo'?" Oliver echoed with a frown, dumping the luggage on the floor and kicking the door closed behind him.

"Never mind," Blake said. "This is really nice. I was expecting something cozier, but I'll adjust. Wow, you look exhausted," he added, sweeping Oliver with a glance.

"Very flattering," Oliver muttered, but he could hardly argue. Although, he was energized by the excitement of showing Blake around the place where he planned for them to do nothing for the weekend but fuck and watch the snow fall. "Come on, I'll show you the amenities."

"The wash tubs and bedpans and camp stoves, in this *cabin*."

"Ted calls it a cabin, and he owns it, so he must know."

Blake brushed past him to run up the stairs two at a time. He got like this sometimes, filled with a restless energy that Oliver predicted would mean he'd be horny and needy and insist on Oliver resolving that state before he'd let him sleep. The pains and perils of dating a younger man.

Oliver followed Blake. Cujo had been exploring some shadowed corner out of sight, but reappeared, harness buckles jingling, to outpace him up the stairs. He found Blake in the third bedroom he checked. It wasn't the largest

bedroom; in fact, the ceiling angled so low on one side Oliver wouldn't be able to stand upright against the wall. He placed their suitcases in the corner and came up behind Blake where he stood staring out the windows at mountains silver-dipped by moonlight.

Oliver slipped his arms around Blake's waist and Blake immediately leaned back against him.

"What do you think?"

"It's beautiful." Blake said, that faraway note in his voice that meant he was seeing something he'd like to paint.

Oliver kissed his neck. "I could have some canvas delivered."

Blake tilted his head to the left to give Oliver better access to his neck, clutching Oliver's forearms. "How'd you know...?"

Oliver answered by applying his teeth to the next press of his lips and tongue, and by slipping one hand inside Blake's soft sweatpants.

"I'm very observant," he said roughly when the moment passed and he could trust himself to open his mouth without saying a different three words.

If he said them, he'd be leaving behind forever the old version of himself, a pre-Blake edition who'd scoff at the idea of declaring such a thing to anyone. Even before today's revelations on the road, he'd known that his feelings for Blake ran deep. It had been like the shape of the mountains on the horizon—he'd known what was coming months ago. Now instead of seeing them from afar, he was amongst the snowy peaks.

Oliver worked Blake's cock with the hand buried in his sweats, stroking his stomach and chest through his t-shirt with the other, until Blake was grinding back against Oliv-

er's own hardness. "Go get on the bed," he said when he couldn't stand another moment.

Blake went, pausing to slip off his shoes. He put his hands in the waistband of his pants then paused, glancing up at Oliver.

"Leave them on, but take off your shirt. And lie on your back."

Blake looked puzzled, but complied. His cock tented those soft sweats. Oliver was developing a new appreciation for sweatpants.

His breath caught when Blake shed his shirt.

"So lovely," he murmured, slowly following Blake across the room and stripping off his own shirt as he walked, then shed his trousers, and briefs, too, but not before he took a lube packet from his pocket. When he stood naked at the foot of the bed looking at Blake, he said in a rough voice, "Get your nipples hard." Oliver took a long breath through his nose as Blake obeyed, biting his lower lip, eyes falling nearly closed as he rolled his knuckles across his chest, then pinched himself.

Oliver put one knee on the bed and reached between his own legs with two lubed fingers, making no secret of what he was doing.

Blake's eyes widened, his hands stilling. "Seriously?"

"I told you," Oliver chastised, "to lie on your back and play with your nipples."

Slowly, Blake lay back and his palms glided across his chest, his stomach rising and falling fast. When he was satisfied Blake was following instructions, Oliver worked one finger into his own hole.

Blake's eyes were half-closed, so all Oliver could see were his heavy eyelids and just a flash of gleaming dark iris, his body barred with blue moonlight from the window, a

landscape of perfect silver curves. He wasn't sure what it would feel like, to have something inside him after so long. He enjoyed being fucked, if only in certain moods, but it had been a long time. However, by the time he'd crooked his finger against his prostate, he was ready for Blake's touch. When he added a second and felt the familiar, burning strain against his rim that contrasted the buzzing pleasure in his prostate, he was hungry for the feeling of Blake instead.

It didn't hurt that Blake was looking at him in some combination of yearning and terror. Oliver lived to put that look on his face, and seeing it now, then letting his gaze drift toward the bulge in Blake's briefs—which looked even more enormous than usual, under the circumstances—he couldn't wait any more.

Getting his hands free, he levered himself the rest of the way onto the mattress and knee-walked toward Blake. Blake propped himself up higher on one elbow, his other hand still busy on his chest, which was scratched red from his nails, his nipples peaked and straining. Oliver kept moving until his knees were on either side of Blake's thighs, then he bent and kissed the angry skin on Blake's chest until Blake was twisting and moaning under him. His hands were feather-light on Oliver's thighs, like he was afraid Oliver would disappear if he touched him.

Oliver made encouraging sounds, swaying slightly between Blake's hands in wordless encouragement, until Blake's touch grew bolder, his hands skating over the backs of his thighs to his ass. Oliver grinned against his collarbone, then looked up to meet his eyes. "Go on," he murmured. "You can touch me."

Blake's eyes fluttered closed and he bit his lip, like the words alone could have made him come. To be as unhelpful with Blake's battle with his self-control as possible, Oliver

let his knees slide further apart until their cocks ground together, both of them hard as stone and the thin fabric of the sweats letting them slide against each other with a surprisingly pleasant, soft friction.

"You're going to kill me. Oh, my God," Blake huffed, as his big hands splayed over Oliver's ass and the tip of a finger pushed against Oliver's lubed hole. Oliver was tense a moment, then relaxed so it popped inside. He bit the inside of his cheek at the invasion, but didn't flinch away. He just watched Blake with a cool, measuring stare as Blake slowly pumped in and out, barely to the first knuckle.

"Have you done this before, sweetheart?" Oliver kissed his jaw.

Blake's eyes had almost fallen closed, but they reopened at that, with an expression like he suspected a trap.

Oliver laughed, then sighed at a wave of pleasure when Blake's fingertip gently rolled over his prostate. "Mm, that's nice. I know you know how to do this part. I've seen you get yourself ready for me, and I bet you finger your own needy little hole all the time. But what about putting your cock inside someone's ass?"

Blake made a strangled sound and Oliver smiled against his neck.

"N-Not for a few years," Blake muttered, and gasped when Oliver rolled his hips again and Blake's fingers slipped deeper. "Fuck, you feel good. But I don't—we don't have to—"

"I know," Oliver said, sitting up so he could press himself against Blake's touch from another angle. He stretched his arms behind his head, rocking as the warm, smoldering pleasure grew closer to something like bliss, then paused with some regret and peered down at Blake, who was staring up at him, open-mouthed, like Oliver was

an angel or a demon, or some other being that commanded both fear and awe.

The thought made Oliver smile wickedly. He walked on his knees up Blake's chest, Blake's finger slipping out of him in the process, leaving him unpleasantly empty. But then his bobbing cock aligned with Blake's mouth, and Blake eagerly tipped up his chin so Oliver could guide it in, slowly fucking his mouth, bracing his weight against the headboard as his hips moved.

"Touch me again," Oliver murmured as Blake's tongue cupped the underside of his shaft, then smiled when Blake's hand settled back between his cheeks and his fingers buried itself again, this time not wasting any time before he found Oliver's prostate and rubbed tiny, gentle circles there.

He could have come fucking himself on Blake's hand, and he could definitely come like this, under Blake's perfect, clever ministrations of forefinger and tongue. But it wasn't what he wanted. He pulled away with reluctance, this time flopping onto his back beside Blake and spreading his legs, his hand on his own, spit-slick cock.

"Come here, sweetheart," he said, guiding Blake between his thighs. "Show me what that big cock can do."

"Oliver, God, please, fuck," Blake babbled, his hands shaking as he shed his sweats, then cupped the back of Oliver's knees.

"I know you like to make me feel good," Oliver said soothingly. "I like to make you feel good, too. This will make both of us feel so good, sweetheart. Now, put it in."

Blake fumbled for the lube packet, Oliver's legs still raised, and for a split second Oliver rebelled at the feeling of lying there, vulnerable—

But then Blake was slicking himself—his gorgeous cock

so very ready, his expression rapturous, a hint of tears in his eyes—and Oliver's reservations vanished.

He hooked one leg over Blake's shoulder, then wrapped the other around his waist and tugged at him with his heel. Blake groaned, lining himself up. Oliver exhaled hard, and took it. Not with gritted teeth, merely tolerating it, but relaxed and savoring it. The bloom of pain lasted longer and burned brighter than it had the last time Oliver had done this—Blake was beautifully, and slightly inconveniently endowed, after all—but the look on Blake's face was transcendent, and all the while he kept up a breathless stream of consciousness about how Oliver looked and felt and made Blake feel.

When finally Blake was fully seated, he stared at Oliver, unmoving. Oliver had lost track of time somewhat, lying there splayed like a monument to whom Blake was making a willing sacrifice, but he remembered now that he had only told Blake to put it in, and now that he had, Blake was awaiting instructions, his lower lip buried between his teeth and his breaths shallow, his thighs shaking.

"Now," Oliver said in the most leisurely tone he could manage with a cock in his ass, "make me come."

Oliver knew that Blake was strong. He spent virtually all of his waking hours in motion, and he had natural mass. It always pleased Oliver to see all that strength held in check when Blake was underneath him. But now, with their positions reversed, having Blake's larger, stronger body unleashed for his benefit alone made him almost delirious. Blake's strong hands were wrapped around Oliver's hips, elevating his body to the perfect angle as though Oliver weighed nothing, and his strong thighs strained as he pushed himself past all Oliver's barriers.

Blake always gave Oliver everything. That fact was

never more apparent than now, his throat corded with tension, his loose hair sticking to the sweat that glistened on his forehead and shoulders. He filled Oliver so totally, and he'd made Oliver so ready with his fingers, that within a minute of watching Blake struggle to stop himself from coming undone, Oliver could bring himself to the edge with just a few rough strokes of his own cock.

"Come for me, come in me, sweetheart—" Oliver's words were a rasp, but Blake must have been straining to hear them. He let out a low whimper, and on his next thrust, he locked himself tight against Oliver while he throbbed and shot inside Oliver so hard, Oliver swore he felt a ricochet.

Blake threw his head back, the line of his throat stark, his jaw open on a silent cry.

The words might have come out of Oliver then if his orgasm hadn't stolen the breath and any additional words straight out of his throat. As it was, he was speechless.

When Blake would have drawn away, Oliver kept his legs locked tight, reveling in the aftermath of so much feeling. He tightened his muscles experimentally around Blake's flagging cock, and watched him writhe as the overstimulation forced a couple tears from the corners of Blake's eyes. At last taking pity, Oliver let him go, and Blake collapsed forward, catching his weight on his hands instead of Oliver's chest. The movement brought their bodies and faces close together, so that Oliver only had to raise himself a few inches on his elbows in order to gently kissed the salty trails of Blake's tears, one by one.

Anything less than Oliver's very strong aversion to lingering in pools of drying cum couldn't have gotten him out from under Blake's perfect, warm body. But as it was, Oliver rolled a mostly nonverbal Blake onto one side of the

bed, and staggered to his feet. He fumbled through the vaguely familiar rooms until he found washcloths and a spare pillow—there were only two on the bed, and Blake liked to wedge one between his thighs. He cleaned them both up, pulled Blake against his chest, and slept like the dead.

Oliver wasn't sure what woke him. Maybe the winter chill, penetrating the windows despite what was certainly the finest climate control system money could buy.

He found himself alone in the quiet room, the only indication of time a predawn haze in the sky beyond the unadorned windows. He needed to find the controls that would turn the panes opaque, just in case Blake got a headache the pills wouldn't help, and needed a dark oasis.

Blake. At the thought of him, Oliver sat up. Before he could slide out of the bed though, his foot struck something small and warm, and a sleepy growl emanated from the blankets.

"Little girl?" Oliver had forgotten to put Cujo in her collapsible kennel or even set out water for her. He had a moment of feeling like a terrible owner, but she'd found her way to bed at least. Her sharp black face emerged from the cocoon of blankets so she could glare at him.

Oliver gave her chin a careful scratch, and she retreated back into the darkness like a small, sleepy troll returning to the dark underside of its bridge.

Leaving her to sleep, Oliver walked naked through the chilly, high-ceilinged rooms until he found Blake. He was standing in front of the towering windows beside the fireplace, in his sweatpants again and nothing else. The pants

were snug against his ass, showing off its perfect curve. As Oliver passed through the kitchen toward Blake, he had to dodge a bowl full of water, which Blake, of course, *had* thought to set on the floor for Cujo.

Hearing Oliver's bare feet on the hardwood floor, Blake turned and smiled while behind him, the sky filled with an amber glow.

The sunrises in the mountains were so different from the ones on the plains. The color and light built up slowly, climbing past the obstructions of the peaks. They snuck up on you.

The light beyond the window was warm, gold and violet. It lit Blake's ivory skin like a beacon. Blake had pulled his sleep-rumpled long hair into a knot high on the back of his head, but a couple strands tumbled to his bare shoulders.

Oliver walked straight up to him and put both hands around his neck, tipped up his chin with both thumbs, and kissed him.

Then he rested their foreheads together but kept his eyes open. "I love you."

Blake's eyes widened very slightly. It was all of his face that Oliver could see.

But he didn't say anything.

Before Oliver could panic, Blake's hands swept up and down his sides, then he shifted closer so they were thigh-to-thigh, chest-to-chest.

Blake pulled himself onto his toes and kissed Oliver. It was unusual for him to initiate a kiss, except to bait and tease Oliver until Oliver took hold of him and had his way. Oliver felt unspeakably fragile in his passivity; he closed his eyes as a blush burned up his neck, so warm that Blake had

to feel it in the palm of his gentle hand that cupped Oliver's jaw.

"Does that mean," Oliver murmured when they'd leaned their foreheads together again, "that you, also...?"

Blake bumped their noses together softly. "Yes, I also."

"Okay, but really—"

"Yes. I love you, too." He leaned his head back and his grin was so enormous, Oliver couldn't even bring himself to be annoyed when he added smugly, "Happy Valentine's Day."

WHAT'S NEXT?

If you enjoyed this story, then you might want to check out the novels in the series.

Jaywalking (Jay and Emile, a novella)

Sleepwalker (Blake and Oliver, a short novel)

Cakewalk (Bria and Miles, forthcoming in 2021)

