

Fix Me (Be The Father Of This Child! Side Story, Patreon Exclusive) – Sid/Tom

By Laura S. Fox

## *Chapter One - A Little Bit Of Human Touch*

Tom fought a stain on the countertop that seemed to have escaped the thorough cleaning he had monitored earlier that day. Hmm, it looked like it was part of the pattern and not an actual stain. The kids had done a pretty good job, after all.

Jett would make his hair go all grey before time. How could he be with a boy, after having a kid with his girlfriend?

*You know how.*

Tom pushed away the honest voice inside his head. Honesty, unfortunately, had no place there, in that situation. God knew he had made plenty of mistakes in his life, and that meant that he needed to keep his son from making his.

The worst part was that he understood what Jett saw in that boy with the hippy name. He was the kind of boy Tom would have liked for himself some twenty-five years ago. But he had chosen to be a husband and a father, regardless of particular inclinations that he didn't want to think about. He had been in love with Jett's mother; he had desired her completely, and losing her had left him hollow. Yet, to his shame, that hadn't nullified his secret desires, to which he succumbed once in a while. That only appeared to keep the fire stoked, instead of putting it out.

For years, he had tried to rationalize it. While his wife had been alive, he had never cheated on her. The first time he had had a sexual encounter of the kind – of any kind, actually, it had been four years after her passing away, and it had still felt like cheating.

After that, things had gotten a little easier. Since they were nothing but fleeting experiences, he could dismiss them as nothing but a need for sexual release and nothing more. Also, he didn't have time for them, so they weren't a lifestyle or an important change in his life. Or, at least, that was what he told himself over and over again to assuage the guilt.

And now Jett, with the impetus of youth on his side, was just saying loud and clear that he wanted to be with a boy. Tom shook his head. How the times had changed. If it hadn't been for the baby, maybe Tom would have been convinced, after a while, that Jett was making the right choice.

But no, there was a baby involved now, and Jett had to assume responsibility, whether he liked it or not.

A loud knock on the door startled him. He was getting too used to spending time in his head more often than not these days. Maybe he was growing old. And lonely.

“Who could be at this hour?” He mumbled under his breath as the knocking on the door repeated.

It looked like the kids didn't think getting the door was their business. From the living room, some stupid TV show blared the fake laughter of an equally fake audience and the annoying voice of the moderator.

Tom pulled the door open so fast that it almost hit him in the face. He really needed to calm the fuck down a little.

“Yes?”

A man in his forties dressed casually in tan khaki pants, loafers, and a brown leather jacket stared at him from the door.

Tom's first thought was how blue the man's gaze was. The second one was more unsettling.

*Attractive.*

“Sid Summer,” the man introduced himself. He offered his hand, along with an honest look.

Tom hesitated for a moment, but he wasn't one to leave a man hanging. He took Sid's hand and shook it vigorously. Sid smiled even if Tom was sure his handshake wasn't exactly friendly. “The boy's dad?” he asked gruffly. There was no need for too many niceties.

Sid's hand was firm and smooth. Tom frowned as their hands parted. That little bit of human touch wasn't supposed to have any effect on him.

“I'm sorry to bother you so late, but do you think you have a minute?” Sid asked in a pleasant tone, his smile never fading.

It did occur to Tom that he didn't introduce himself, as well, too busy with noticing Sid's high cheekbones and beautifully drawn lips. That angered him a little. “I have a minute, and it's already up.”

“Then, I'll have to ask for one hour.” Sid didn't appear bothered at all by his tone.

“One hour?”

“I was wondering if you could join me for a drink, Mr. Huntsman.”

“We could talk here.” It was annoying how much he wanted to say ‘yes’ to that invitation. His throat was parched, all of a sudden. But he didn't need to let that show. If the boy's dad was there, it had to be for a reason, and it didn't look like that reason was Sid wanting to take his child home with him. Tom didn't like it at all.

“Here, the children will have nothing better to do than to try to eavesdrop, as I bet they are doing right now.”

That was a good point. Without a word, for the sake of not letting Sid guess that he was eager to leave the house, Tom grabbed his denim jacket and almost jumped into his boots. He did everything with brusque moves just so that Sid would know, without one shadow of a doubt, that he didn't like that idea at all.

All that remained was to put things in order before walking out the door. He marched into the living room, where the three misfits were pretending to be watching TV. "I will be out," he said. "Don't stay too late. Stop watching stupid shows on TV. That kid needs to be in bed already. You two, no mischief. I know you," he pointed a finger at April, "have school tomorrow. Jett, you," he added after a short moment of hesitation, "you have nothing to do, but you still need to wake up at six."

That covered it. To make sure his words were taken at face value, he stared at the miscreants, one by one, for a few moments more. To his satisfaction, they all looked away. They probably hated him, but Tom wasn't there to be liked. His role was to put an order in the chaos they had created. And it was all for their own good.

"Let's go," he said to Sid as he walked out the door.

"That's my car," Sid said as he pointed at his vehicle, a station wagon that must have seen better days.

Tom frowned. The guy had said they would go out for drinks. Did he intend to drive how, after that? "You're not supposed to drink and drive."

To his surprise, Sid laughed. "I'm not one of the kids, Mr. Huntsman. I know as much."

"Tom."

Shit. He was supposed to keep the distance between him and that blue-eyed man. There were people in the world who were simply attractive, and Sid was one of them. Mary, his late wife, had also been like that. Like a tiny ray of sun had been snatched at her birth and hidden in her eyes.

"Well, Tom, I haven't drunken anything yet. Scout's honor. But I'm seriously in need of a drink. I booked a room for the night at a local motel, and there's a bar nearby. Is that okay?"

"Why did you book a room?" He climbed in front, next to Sid, who put the engine into gear.

"I have a feeling our conversation will be a long one. I also need a drink, as I told you, and I can always drive back to mine in the morning, after allowing the said drink to leave my system."

"You have an answer to everything." Tom didn't want to sound as morose as his voice seemed to his own ears. Yet, the too pleasant feeling coiling in the pit of his stomach whenever he looked at Sid was making him wary.

“That’s exactly what my boy says, too. I suppose it’s annoying. But parents are bound to be annoying.”

Tom chuckled and shook his head. “You can say that again.”

Wait, he wasn’t supposed to feel at ease in the company of April’s dad. Because Sid was April’s dad and that meant that Tom had to keep that in mind, no matter how much he wanted to stare in those blue eyes and check them from up close.

“So, did my April give you any grief?”

Tom considered his next words carefully. On one side, he had little Jay and his best interest at heart. On the other, there was no need to insult Sid. “No. He’s well behaved.”

“I’m glad to hear it,” Sid said as he navigated the streets that seemed already deserted at that hour.

Silence followed. Tom wanted the conversation to be over already, but Sid seemed serious about that drink. At the same time, he wanted to spend a little more time in Sid’s company.

“The boys,” he started, “they are young. They don’t know what they want.”

“Hmm. Don’t they?”

Tom felt a bit disconcerted by that question. “What’s that supposed to mean?”

A short chuckle followed. “I’m not your enemy, Tom. I’m sure we can find some common ground. But let’s not discuss such serious stuff without some drinks in front of us. What do you say?”

Tom shrugged. “Fine by me.” He was willing to indulge Sid if only because he wanted to be close to another person his age a little longer. Terrorizing a bunch of young people with their heads up in the clouds was hard work. For tonight, he would allow himself a breather. Plus, he could also hope for a resolution to the situation regarding April. He would do his best to convince Sid that Jett wasn’t a good choice for his son.

He shifted in his place. He couldn’t believe he was a tad nervous. To fill the silence, he reached for the radio, although it wasn’t his car, and it struck him too late that it was an impolite thing to do.

His fingers met Sid’s.

“Maybe some music --”

Tom withdrew his hand like it had been scalded in hot water.

Sid laughed. "Sorry about that. I just find long silences uncomfortable."

"Well, you were the one to say that we should postpone talking until we have a drink in hand," Tom replied, a bit irritated.

Sid threw him a sidelong glance. "Don't tell me you also find long silences uncomfortable."

Tom scoffed and pretended to look out the window. Not that there was anything interesting to see; only houses and houses again. He needed to avoid looking at Sid too much. There was no wonder April was so pretty; even if he didn't look like his dad, as far as his facial features went, he was lean and tall like Sid. Tom could guess a slender body in perfect shape under the brown leather jacket and khaki pants. Why on earth was he thinking about how Sid looked without clothes on? He needed to stop and stop right now.

Music filled the car. It was some jazz tune, happy and sad at the same time.

"Is this all right? If you prefer something else --"

"It's okay," Tom said abruptly and stared stubbornly out the window.

At least, they were no longer riding in uncomfortable silence, and, in a way, it was worse. Now, Tom could focus on the smallest details, like the smell of Sid's cologne, something like wood and earth that made him feel longing squeezing his chest

"How come your wife let you out of the house at this hour?" He found himself talking.

There was a short pause. "My wife passed away seven years ago."

Talking about strange coincidences. "I see," Tom replied. "Mine, as well."

Sid didn't add anything. None of them said 'sorry' or any other platitude, and it was better like this.

"We're here." Sid pulled the car in the motel's parking lot.

Tom said nothing and climbed out of the car. He followed Sid as they walked toward the small bar that was located on the grounds. Tom could only hope they had a drink as stiff as he needed right now. His throat felt parched again.

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"You also prefer it neat," Tom said, pointing at Sid's glass. "So, you don't aim for a long conversation, after all."

Sid smiled again. Tom's chest squeezed again. If his kid was half the charmer Sid was, it was no wonder Jett was all head over heels. "One can only hope. And we can always switch to some sparkling water."

"Sparkling water? What's that?" Tom asked with a grin.

Sid laughed, and it wasn't right that the sound of something that everyone did and was of basic human nature could feel so soothing in his ear. "It was a mere suggestion. Now, Tom, can you please tell me how do you feel about Jett and April? Your honest opinion, if you please."

Tom stretched his back. It wasn't that the ride there had been uncomfortable or anything, but the seats in that bar were quite cozy. And he hadn't relaxed in a while. "Jett has a baby."

"Little Jay. I'm well aware. He was a bit of my patient not so long ago."

"Patient? Are you a doctor?"

"I'm a nurse."

Tom nodded. "What was wrong with him? He looks healthy to me, but these kids --"

"Just an unpleasant case of growing teeth. April and Jett were scared out of their wits." Another chuckle followed, but now Tom could blame the warmth in his chest on the booze, and not on the way Sid laughed.

"Were they? They look like an irresponsible bunch to me."

"I beg to differ," Sid said politely. "For their age and lack of experience, they certainly did well. And they do well, as we speak."

"You're the trusting kind. I'm not."

"It's all right. Trust can be learned." Sid leaned slightly and stared him in the eye as he said that.

Tom straightened up in his seat. For a fraction of a second, he saw himself meeting Sid half-way over the table.

*Get a grip, Huntsman. This isn't about getting laid.*

Maybe he needed that, and it was too damned bad April's dad had to appear so attractive in his eyes. On normal days, Tom would have probably found him barely worth a second glance.

What was he thinking? Sid was a handsome man, especially for his age. And you didn't see eyes that blue that often. If he looked a bit closer, he could observe small silver speckles. Sid wasn't just handsome. He was striking.

“Look, Tom,” Sid said with a sigh, “I really want to find common ground with you. But don’t think, for a moment, that your icy stare could intimidate me. I’m a bit older than April and Jett.”

Tom frowned. That was a common misconception about him, one he hadn’t cared to correct over the years. People always thought he was out for blood when all he did was think everything through.

Also, that wasn’t why he stared at Sid. If only the man knew. Tom shrugged away a small shiver; for his usual encounters, he never ran in blind. There were places where he could pick up men, and this wasn’t one of them.

Sid tapped the table with his fingers, and Tom stared at his left hand. “You still wear your wedding ring.”

Sid appeared surprised as he looked at his hand. “Well, it does come in handy when I have to fight off unwanted advances from the ladies. Unfortunately, it has worked a bit too well.”

It was a joke, but one that Tom could glean from that Sid was very much straight and not at all aware or interesting in another guy’s thoughts about him. Thoughts that included staring at those blue eyes from up close and seeing their owner without any clothes on.

“Have you ever thought about remarrying?” he asked directly.

“I’ve been a bit too busy with raising the children to give it actual thought. But, well, I must admit that after April left home this fall, things have been a little bit too quiet around the house. It’s strange to wish for someone to call you from the other room to ask you where his favorite socks are, isn’t it?” Sid shook his head in mirth. “I suppose it will take some getting used to, being completely on my own, I mean. As a grownup, you would think I know how to handle – What am I doing? I’m talking too much. And I’m here to talk to you about you.”

Tom wasn’t great at talking, and he couldn’t figure out what Sid’s angle was. “What do you want to know?”

“Anything you want to tell me. I heard from April that you’re an army major.”

“Yes.”

A short silence followed.

“Well? Care to share some war stories?”

Sid’s eyes shone, even in the dim light, and it must have been the booze, or the strangeness of the situation because Tom found himself talking. And talking. And talking.

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“Another?” Sid shook his empty glass.

Tom didn’t answer and just waved for the waiter to come over. It was funny how much he could talk once he started. And Sid was a great listener. Or he hadn’t drunken like that in a while, meaning that he hadn’t had that sort of pleasant company in a long time.

“Sid, I’m going to tell you this straight,” he said after they had their refill. “I can’t allow Jett to be with April.”

“Why not?” Sid’s voice was sincere. “Give me one good reason.”

“The baby.”

“What about him?”

“Do you want him to live without his mom?”

“Why would he do that? I don’t know the details, but I suppose that Jett wouldn’t keep Carina away from the child’s life or fight over him. Also, I think they could both look after him just fine.”

“How?” Tom felt his frustration growing. Did everyone today think life was easy? It was expected from young people like Jett and April, but not from a grownup like the one sitting across from him.

Sitting across from him and looking too good in his pale yellow casual shirt, with his sleeves rolled up, showing sinewy forearms, and bony wrists that, for some reason, fascinated Tom as Sid moved his hands to emphasize his words.

A short vision of his own massive hands keeping those bony wrists down and pressed against a bed made him shake his head in horror. Something was very wrong with him. Maybe it wasn’t such a good idea to go drinking with a man he found attractive for no other reason than that he hadn’t gotten laid in months.

“There are many possibilities, but it all depends on what they want,” Sid replied, completely unaware of the effect he had on Tom. “Carina could live under the same roof. Or she could live somewhere else, and Jett would just have to visit. The kid won’t suffer.”

“How can you tell? Have your kids been happy without their mom? Kids need both parents!” Tom cursed under his breath as he saw Sid’s face changing. That was a hit below the belt, and he knew it. Now he couldn’t take it back. At least, that would cause a large enough chasm between them so that he could finally push away the improper thoughts he had had all evening about Sid.

“You’re projecting,” Sid said in a stern voice. “This has nothing to do with what happened to your wife.”

“Don’t tell me that,” Tom said through his teeth. “You have no idea --”

“I have every idea, Tom.” For some reason, Sid’s tone brooked no contradiction. “Jett likes April very much. And I know, for a fact, that my son loves your son.”

“What do they know? They’re twenty!”

“And they have a right to make their own choices. They’re not kids anymore, whether we like it or not.”

Tom pursed his lips. Sid was driving him mad with his argumentation. Did he really have an answer to everything? “Well, they would make a mistake if they remained together, ignoring the needs of that baby.”

“They’re entitled to their own mistakes, as well. If that’s the case, it will be up to them to correct them. Tom, we can’t live through our children and prevent all harm from coming to them.”

“Ah, so you’re completely passive. That’s your answer to everything!”

Sid appeared taken aback for a moment. Then he linked his fingers in front of him on the table. Tom looked again at the bony wrists. They were strong and delicate at the same time. Tom wanted nothing but to wrap his fingers around them and test their strength. “No. I didn’t say that. But if we try to control our kids – and trust me, we cannot – they will only grow to hate us, and then they won’t listen to any advice, no matter how good.”

Tom sighed and crossed his arms over his chest. “You wanted my opinion on this, and now you got it.”

“And you must listen to mine. It’s only fair. Jett and April are good for each other, trust me.” There was a short moment of hesitation that wasn’t lost on Tom. Maybe Sid had second thoughts, but he was just a stubborn mule.

“What can I say? How is that good for Jay, huh?”

Sid frowned, and it had to be for the first time that evening that his face clouded like that. “Do you have something against your son being gay? Or worse, mine?”

“Jett is not gay,” Tom said sternly.

“Yes, forgive me, please. Bisexual. You just riled me up for a moment.”

“Really? I thought you were a mountain of Zen or something,” Tom said, munching on each word and spitting it out.

For a moment, Sid stopped and blinked. And then he started laughing. “A mountain of Zen? I’m hardly anything remotely similar.”

“Oh, yeah? You’ve been sitting there all evening preaching at me, and cornering me, and --”

“Preaching? When have I done that?”

“Just now!”

“That’s hardly all evening. If anything, it’s but a speck in an ocean of moments --”

“You’re so annoying; you make me want to strangle you!” Tom realized too late what he was saying. Strangling wasn’t exactly part of what he wanted to do to Sid, although maybe the obnoxious ass deserved it a little. “Sorry, that was out of line.”

“No problem. It’s not an easy thing what you’re going through.”

“Oh, yeah?”

“Oh, yeah?” Sid mimicked him and cocked his head to one side, watching Tom across the table.

Tom frowned, but then he felt like laughing, too. He stopped in time; there was no need for Sid to know that he could get at him so quickly. Not many people dared to stand up to him like that. And when they did, Tom was sure to make a battle out of it. The only thing was that he didn’t see himself going to war with Sid. He saw himself going to bed with him, and that was a stupid thought that he needed to push away for good. With all his might, he fought to hide his real feelings, and he could feel his face hurting from frowning too much.

“Tom, I don’t want my son to be exposed to some homophobic bastard,” Sid said, this time the laughter gone from his voice.

“What homophobic bastard? Oh, do you mean me?” Tom pointed at himself, in utter shock. He just didn’t want Jett to make a mistake; he wasn’t a homophobe! If Sid only knew what kind of thoughts had been tortured him all evening, he would take everything back. But that wouldn’t happen.

“Yes. If you are, don’t worry, I’m not on a mission to change you or fix you. You’re a bit too old for that, and I don’t run a charity. But you can give it to me straight, and I’ll take April home with me tonight.”

Tom stopped. There was a way out. He could just tell a lie, and Jett would be left alone by his pretty boyfriend, at least for a while. And that was maybe enough for Jett to reconsider everything and think more of his child and his girlfriend.

But he couldn’t, in good conscience, live with that lie. “I’m not.” He had said the words softly. If he opened his mouth again, he would end up spilling not so little truths. It was safer just to shut the hell up.

“I don’t believe you.” Sid was frowning again. “I think you’re a bit of a hypocrite. You’re clearly trying to rein in whatever you’re feeling right now. I can hear your teeth grinding from here.”

That was true. But it wasn’t what Sid thought it was.

“I’m going to call an Uber, and I’ll go get my son. He won’t spend one more moment under your roof. Unlike you, I care more about my son being safe from others than from making his own mistakes. But that’s a lesson I’m not going to give you.”

Sid threw some bills on the table and got up. Tom stood there in stunned silence. “Wait.”

Sid didn’t look back and walked out. Tom counted the bills on the table to see if Sid only paid for his part. Damn, his mind didn’t work right and couldn’t do basic math. With a frustrated groan, he threw some money on the table, too.

The waiter seemed to have witnessed everything and hurried to the table. “Shout after me if this doesn’t cover everything,” Tom gestured at the cash and jumped to his feet.

The waiter nodded and took the bills.

“Sir!”

Tom was at the door already, and he turned toward the waiter with a growl. “Ah, damn it. How much do I owe you?”

“It’s too much,” the waiter waved the bills.

Since they had been the only customers in the bar for the last half an hour, there were no other customers to witness all that.

“Just keep it,” Tom shouted and walked out the door.

Sid was in the parking lot, fiddling with his phone. Tom hurried to him and caught his arm. “I’m not a homophobe. I can prove it.”

Sid looked at him like he had horns on his head. “Please let go. And I don’t see how you can prove --”

Fuck consequences. Tom grabbed Sid and kissed him. The sound of the phone hitting the ground made them both jump away from one another.

“Ah, damn,” Sid said and picked up his phone. Then he turned toward Tom. He was blinking hard.

Tom could feel Sid’s lips on his like they were still kissing.

“What was that all about?” Sid seemed genuinely surprised. “Tom? All right, maybe you drank too much and --”

“No. I’ve been thinking of this all evening.” Not exactly a kiss, but some things much riskier, but Tom didn’t want to scare Sid.

Sid appeared nonplussed. “Oh, yeah?” he mumbled, mimicking Tom’s voice from before.

“Yeah.” Tom grabbed Sid again.

And then, the most astonishing thing happened. Sid kissed him back.

## *Chapter Two – Ignite*

Sid's lips were firm on his, and Tom let out a small weird sound. Sid pulled away in an instant, and a slight frown knitted his eyebrows together. "Wait, is this some kind of joke?"

"No joke." Tom didn't care to stop and think. There was a fire ignited in his bones, and it was overwhelming. He took Sid's hand and dragged him along, without knowing where he was heading.

"My room is actually over there," Sid said and pointed out in the correct direction.

Tom changed his trajectory but remained firm in how his fingers wrapped around Sid's smooth, cool hand. He wouldn't hesitate. Maybe it was the booze, or maybe he was going slightly mad, but nothing mattered. Sid stopped him in front of his door, and, with some difficulty, he opened it.

They were both silent, only the sound of breathing letting them know of the other's presence. Sid walked in first, and Tom followed. It was a nondescript motel room, just like any other he had seen in his life, so it had a bed, which was the only thing he was interested in right now.

He closed the door, flicked the lights open, and then he stopped. Sid chuckled and ran one hand through his hair. He still appeared puzzled. "Now, what?"

Tom had a few ideas about how he wanted things to go down, but, again, there was no point in scaring Sid. So he didn't say a thing but closed the distance between them so that he could cup Sid's face with his hands and kiss him again.

Steady hands rested on his wrists, not to stop him, as it might have seemed, but as if they wanted to check on him, on him being there and real. At least, those were the thoughts going through his head. What went through Sid's head, he could only guess.

All his life, he hadn't been good at guessing, not when it mattered at least. "Is this --"

"Hush, don't talk," Sid murmured against his lips. "It's crazy, and I might change my mind."

That was a risk he wasn't willing to take. Suddenly, they were in a frenzy, struggling with their clothes, trying to undress one another with trembling hands. At least, right now, Sid no longer seemed a mountain of Zen like earlier. His lips tasted of booze, but they were so pleasant that Tom wanted to devour them. He was crazy about that mouth, he realized, as their kiss deepened, making their tongues clash.

How long had it been since he had kissed someone? Since his wife, Tom was sure, because the few random sexual encounters he had had during the last years had been all about sex, not kissing.

But now he was kissing a man, and he wasn't just any man. Tom ran his hands over Sid's now naked back and enjoyed the shiver they elicited in their wake. They were just sexually starved. It explained everything.

What was equally unnerving and exciting was the determination he could sense in Sid. Just like the second kiss in the parking lot, the way his hands moved made Tom think that he might have bitten more than he could chew.

With the other men before, Tom had been treated the same way everyone reacted to him usually. They assumed he had to be the one in charge, and they had been more than willing to tend to him, acting in an almost subservient manner. Tom had drawn a line only when some had tried to call him 'daddy'; for some reason, he didn't find it exciting at all, but an actual put off. He had searched for an equal, but, so far, he had been out of luck.

Or maybe, his luck had just changed. Sid attacked him, his hands roaming down his back, as well, and resting above the waistband of his jeans. Would Sid go for it? Tom wondered.

Sid hesitated only for a moment. As they continued their no holds barred kissing, his hands dropped and squeezed Tom's ass. That would be interesting, Tom thought. He broke them apart, only so that he could fiddle with Sid's pants. It was a real emergency that involved seeing the other naked.

He palmed Sid's erection after he opened the fly. A small hiss was the answer. If what Sid had said was true, he must have remained untouched for years. The thought made Tom glad, not because Sid was a widower, like him, but because no one had managed to snatch him until now.

"Are we going to --" Sid gestured with his head toward the bed.

Tom just nodded. Sid smiled, and it was too open, too honest, that smile. He went for another kiss and pushed Sid toward the bed. There was no way of saying what would happen next. Tom didn't want to go through the tedium of having to ask. For some reason, he didn't want this to be the usual pick up, hook up, fuck up.

One thing was sure. He would push for everything; he wanted it all, and he wanted it tonight. They ended up on the bed, and Tom finally managed to wrestle Sid's pants off him. He quirked an eyebrow. "That's some pretty sexy underwear."

Surprised, Sid looked down at the tight white briefs that offered the delicious profile of his erect cock still kept tucked inside. "What's sexy about it? They're just briefs."

For a moment, Tom felt foolish. They were grownups, adult men who didn't do courtship. For some unfathomable reason, they were hooking up and seducing his partner was redundant. The moment Sid had kissed him, he had made it clear what his intentions were.

He shrugged and ignored Sid's snicker. It was the booze or not, but everything Sid did, it tickled him the right way, and that included the eventual sarcasm and ironic chuckles. Tom climbed on the bed and grabbed Sid's cock through his briefs.

The chuckle stopped and got replaced by a sharp intake of breath. "I don't have to remind you that not many hands have wandered around that area for years."

"Not many? Don't you mean only one?"

"I'm ambidextrous. A little fun fact about me."

It was just a joke, but Tom liked that Sid told him fun facts about him. "Prove it," he challenged him.

Sid cocked his head and stared at him. "How?"

Tom gestured at himself with his chin. Sid's eyes grew wide but then crinkled at the corners with amusement. "All right. I suppose it's only fair."

Tom rolled on his back and allowed Sid to undress him. His partner appeared to be more efficient than him because he pulled down his boxers, too, along with his jeans. He stared at the ceiling as chilled air hit his heated cock.

Sid straddled him and began a small demonstration. Tom followed his gestures, his eyes settling on those bony wrists that had fascinated him so much earlier that evening. "Right, left," Sid said as he wrapped his fingers around Tom's cock with one hand, then the other. "Can you tell the difference?"

Tom shook his head. Sid could ask him anything. "Have you ever done anything with a man?"

Sid appeared discomfited by the question. "No, but I do have a cock of my own, and I'm not from the Dark Ages. Your cock doesn't scare me, Major Tom."

"I did," Tom said sharply. He wanted Sid to know.

"You did what?" Sid asked, while his hands didn't stop playing with Tom's cock.

"Things with men."

Sid stopped. "Oh, then that changes everything."

"What?" Tom asked, unsure what Sid wanted to say.

"I was hoping you would be a complete virgin."



There was one moment of silence, and then, Tom burst into laughter, followed by Sid right away. Laughing hadn't been in the cards when Tom had kissed Sid. Now, they talked and laughed like they knew each other from Adam.

Tom moved his hips and made Sid lose his balance. Maybe it was only the booze and the lack of sexual satisfaction from the past months, but he wanted that sexy man and wanted him fiercely. Sid didn't protest as Tom made him roll on his back, and neither when his legs were pushed apart, and Tom came to rest on top of him.

He didn't allow Sid to run his mouth or laugh at him again. This time, he grabbed the strong wrists and pushed them against the headboard while he rubbed his naked cock against Sid's still clothed erection. Sid didn't fight him as they kissed again, but he did test Tom by trying to pull his hands free.

He was strong, but not that strong, and Tom had a powerful motivation on his side. He enjoyed Sid's struggle as their kiss deepened. They were both buzzed by how both were a bit clumsy as they moved.

So, it wasn't perfect, but it didn't have to be. Tom allowed Sid to free one hand so that he could enjoy a bit of wandering of his own. This time, he went for the prize, sneaking one hand under Sid's ass and starting to pull at the sexy underwear until he touched skin. He kept Sid busy with kisses while he made himself way for his partner's ass.

The buttock in his hand was firm and shapely. Tom inched slowly toward the crack. Sid stood still, and their kiss halted. "Wait, what kind of sex are we talking about here?"

Emboldened by how pliant Sid seemed to be in his arms, Tom replied, "The best kind."

"Penetration," Sid said flatly.

"Yeah. Something the matter?"

"Prophylactics. Do you happen to have any? I haven't thought of getting lucky in years, so --"

"I don't," Tom said curtly.

Okay, that put a damper on their enthusiasm.

"I get checked up regularly," he said, without overthinking things. "I need to stay healthy. And I always use protection."

Sid remained silent, and Tom didn't dare to look at him. As much as his brain was soaked in alcohol, he wouldn't press Sid into something like that.

"When was the last time you had sex?" Sid asked him in a professional tone.

“Um, around six months ago.”

“Anal?”

“Oral.”

“Did you or --”

“It was performed on me.”

“The date of the last checkup?”

“Three months ago.”

“All clear?”

“All clear.”

Tom exhaled. Had he just been interviewed? Had he passed?

“Just what I thought. Practically a virgin.”

Tom wanted to swat Sid upside the head, but instead, he pushed his cock against Sid's, although both have cooled down considerably. He got busy pulling Sid's underwear so that he could enjoy skin on skin contact completely.

“You okay with this?”

“If I squeal like a little girl, you'll know I'm not okay.”

“Is everything a joke with you?”

“Not really. Sometimes being nervous does that to me. It stimulates the joker part of my brain.”

Tom shook his head. It wasn't normal that they were talking so much while rubbing their naked cocks together. He grabbed Sid's wrists again. “What do you have to be nervous about?”

“Getting ass fucked for the first time in my life. I think it's a pretty good reason.”

Tom snorted. “I'll go in so smoothly you'll barely feel anything.”

“Funny. I thought men were obsessed with the size of their penises, in the sense that they would rather have their partners praise them for their endowment even when they lack it.”

“Stay like this,” Tom said, ignoring Sid's blabbering for a moment. Not having condoms was one thing; another was to go in dry, which he never did. As relaxed as they must have been because they were pretty imbibed, that would hurt, and Tom had a feeling he wouldn't escape Sid's sarcastic repertoire for a while if he did that.

He hurried to the bathroom and rummaged through the usual toiletries. It wasn't perfect, but it had to do. The small hand lotion tube was all he had, and he depended on it to do the job.

To his satisfaction, Sid was in the same position as he had left him. Tom hurried back and began to prod him gently. It was tight, and it felt like promised heaven. He couldn't bear the wait. Coating his cock generously, he lined it up with Sid's crack. He was barely one inch in that unbearable heat when Sid exclaimed, "How come you're on top?"

Tom cursed but didn't stop. "Take a breather from joking, Sid. All I could think about all evening was how it would be to fuck you."

"Really? I thought you said something about stuff much more innocent, like kissing."

Tom descended another inch, and his breath grew labored. "Please, Sid, no more joking. Your butt is killing me already."

"I have to do something to take my mind off the pain."

"Does it hurt?"

"Yes. If you didn't know, Major Tom, your cock is a bit above average. And my backdoor has never been aware of certain anal delights."

"Just relax," Tom urged him.

"Don't tell me that. I know enough about sex. I read books." That was followed by a short nervous laugh.

Tom could worry and pull out, but Sid suddenly wrapped his legs around him, linking them at his back and trapping him.

"I guess it gets easier after, right?"

Tom nodded and decided that, after all, he could do something to distract Sid from having his ass impaled by another man's cock. He kissed him, and he felt Sid relax a little, enough so that he finally managed to bottom out inside him. It was intimate like that, and Tom could feel his entire body screaming at him to move. Sid allowed him to do that, and it was a bit crazy, but there was no time to ask questions, especially when Sid let one small moan escape his lips, followed by a shiver.

That was enough to get him going. Tom began moving, and Sid adjusted his position to help him. There was another chuckle from Sid, a breathless one this time. "I never knew."

Tom knew, and still, it was unexpected. They faced each other, and Tom was pounding into him. Right that moment, it was all that mattered. Sid was good, his body was a thing of wonder, and Tom was thankful for it all.

It all ended too soon. Tom let out a growl as he came and kept Sid close as he did so. Their bodies were slick with sweat, and he could feel Sid's neglected cock pulsing between them. He slid along Sid's body and swallowed his cock without a problem. Not that Sid didn't have a nice cock, thick and long enough to make Tom have wet dreams just thinking about it. He just knew how to suck cock, a particular skill that he had learned over the last few years.

"Oh, fuck," was the surprised exclamation that followed.

Tom was beyond eager at this point. He wanted Sid even after he had just had him, and it hurt. It wasn't normal, whatever was happening, but Tom knew it had to be all about repressed desires and the fact that they had both drunken quite a lot tonight. Regrets could come in the morning. Now the hard cock in his mouth was putting him to work.

"I've forgotten how good it can be," Sid murmured as he thrashed, almost chocking Tom with his cock.

He steadied the slim hips, pushing them against the bed so that he could control the situation. Even if they might bruise a little, it was for a good cause. Tom bobbed his head up and down fast, enjoying the way Sid continued to shiver and buck his hips while cursing under his breath.

"Fuck, I think it's --"

Tom swallowed as deep as he could and let Sid come. Fingers were in his short hair, grabbing it, but it was hard to think of pain while he got throat-fucked like that. He moved away only after he was sure Sid was completely done.

They sat in silence for a while.

"This is so weird." Sid was the first to talk. "To feel so empty, but in a good way."

Tom just nodded, although Sid wasn't looking at him. Sex with the lights on. Now that was new. As they had stumbled toward the bed, no one had thought about using the bedside lamp instead.

"So, now it's my turn?" Sid asked.

Tom perked up and stared at him. Yes, those blue eyes were even more fascinating from up close. They also shone with mischief. His turn ... oh.

Sid laughed. "You should see yourself. It's funny."

"No, it's okay. Of course, it's your turn."

Sid stopped laughing. "What? For real? I thought there was only this much guilt-free sex we could have."

Tom pushed himself up on all fours. He didn't want to think of guilt right now. There was time for it in the morning. "Consider it a one-time offer. Hurry up, Summer."

Sid no longer appeared amused. He was, however, staring dejectedly at his own cock. "I'd like to, but it's not like I can get it up again so fast."

Tom grabbed Sid's cock, still glistening from the earlier release and his saliva. With a focused expression on his face, he began to pump it slowly.

"Oh, wow, now that's a miracle," Sid remarked, but his voice was breathless, and he didn't appear as sure of himself as before.

At least, the guy had his weaknesses. Tom brought him to full erection. "Now get to it," he said curtly.

Sid chose to tease him. "Is that an order?"

Tom grunted and looked away. All right, it was only quid pro quo since he hadn't actually ever been penetrated. Still, with Sid, he felt that he needed to insist. "While the night's still young."

Sid's face lit up with a bright smile. He got quickly behind Tom and put his firm hands on his ass. "How do you think the first humans realized that it would be fun to do it in the ass?"

Tom would have considered a chatty partner like Sid a pain in the behind, but the husky voice in which those words were said compensated for the attempt at humor.

"Don't answer. Animals do it, so they probably just saw some monkeys and thought, 'let's try it, too'."

"Are you usually fun at parties?" Tom asked.

Sid was busy prodding him with his cock after pouring the rest of the lotion on Tom's ass. "The soul of them, as you may well expect."

Tom grunted when a blunt head pushed at his backdoor. So, it wasn't as easy as some people made it be. It did hurt. He willed himself to relax, but he was overly conscious of the sweat pooling at the small of his back.

Sid wasn't aware of his predicament because he continued to push, albeit slowly.

"Oh, damn," Tom cursed when the blunt head went through the tight ring of muscles.

Sid stopped. "Among the things you did with men, was this, too?"

"Mmm," Tom refused to reply.

"What was that?" Sid caressed his back slowly.

“N-no.”

“Ah, okay. Then you’re doing fine. I sincerely thought you didn’t like me that much.”

“I don’t like your taking so much time to put it in,” Tom replied.

“Hey, since you’re a virgin, I guess I should treat you kindly.”

“I’m not a virgin, don’t be so ridiculous.”

“I suppose you’re only half a virgin,” Sid said, completely unperturbed by Tom’s words. “And now, only about forty percent, and now --”

“Oh, damn you!” Tom reached with one hand, grabbed Sid’s hip, and pulled him close while pushing his ass back.

“All in!” Sid said, and he sounded victorious.

Tom shook his head. A life spent with this man had to be interesting. Probably, there was a lot of laughter involved, and Tom didn’t recall laughing much. Frowning was more like his usual *modus operandi*.

It was strange to have a foreign object stuffing his back hole. Now, he wondered why Sid had been so cool with him fucking him just earlier. Maybe it was all about not overthinking things, and it was challenging to do that, anyway, for no other reason than that the thing inside his ass began to move.

He jolted when Sid rested on top of him and kissed his shoulder. “Are you okay?” Sid’s voice was breathless, and the movement of his hips was steady.

It wasn’t all unpleasant. What made it less so was that Sid was moaning softly in his ear while kissing it gently.

“Do your thing,” Tom said shortly.

Sid didn’t speed up, but he used his hands to rub Tom’s chest and pull playfully at his hair and then at his nipples. Tom realized, in a moment, how artless he was when having sex. He was all about getting off while Sid wasn’t.

Sneaky hands moved lower and grabbed Tom’s cock. He was afraid Sid would be disappointed in his lack of reaction, but then Sid adjusted his position and hit him somewhere that caused another jolt, this time of pleasure mixed with surprise.

“What’s that?” he asked out loud.

“Hopefully, your prostate. Did I tell you that I’m a health care professional and also read a lot of books?”

“I remember something,” Tom replied wryly.

Again, Sid’s cock hit the spot, and Tom couldn’t suppress a small shiver. It was quickly getting out of hand. He had assumed that position only to give Sid satisfaction, too. No longer was it about that.

“Oh, fuck,” he mirrored Sid’s words from before.

“Oh, yes,” Sid added in a matter-of-fact tone.

Sid milked his cock effortlessly now while moving his hips faster. Could it be that he could come like that?

“Oh, fuck,” he repeated.

His entire body shook. The sensation was too much to handle, and Sid’s hand on his cock was a blessing. As he let go, he had a vague sensation that Sid’s cock joined his in that release. He was only sure when Sid groaned and said something dirty but sexy that Tom was sure he would forget the next moment because his mind went all blank.

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“What time is it?” Sid’s sleepy voice interrogated him.

“Late. Early. I don’t know.”

“Why did you wake up?”

“I need to go.”

He had gone out like a light after their earlier exertions, but now, as they said, it was time to face the music. His head was pounding, and his tongue felt cloyed and unpleasant. What the hell was he doing? When his eyes had opened automatically moments ago, it took him a while to realize where he was and why there was a naked man sleeping beside him. As usual, regrets hit like the merciless coven of witches they were.

“You could wait until morning. No guilt trip trains are running at this hour.” Sid flicked open the bedside lamp.

Half asleep, and he could still joke. Only that it was no laughing matter. “You don’t know everything,” he replied in a frustrated voice.

“Hmm. I’d say I know enough. You showed me.”

Tom didn't say anything. He just needed to get out of there and fast. If he took one look at Sid, he was sure his resolve would go down the drain.

"So you're running," Sid said flatly.

"It's not like I'm leaving you at the altar, right?"

"Ha. Ha. Major Tom knows how to joke, after all," Sid commented, but he didn't appear amused at all.

"Okay." He took a deep breath. He still didn't look at Sid. "Last night was a --"

"Mistake."

"And I'm --"

"Sorry."

"Will you stop --"

"Finishing all your sentences?"

"You're impossible!" Tom exploded. He fished his clothes from the floor and began dressing up.

"How can you joke like this? What we did was --"

There was no comeback. Finally, Tom looked at Sid. "What? Aren't you going to finish this sentence?"

"No. I'm curious."

"Whatever," Tom said through his teeth. He was completely dressed now, and it had taken him more than usual.

"Leave the boys alone, Tom." The warning in Sid's voice was real this time, changing the topic of conversation.

"Why would I do that? Hmm? They don't know what they're doing."

"Like us earlier?"

"That was --"

"The booze."

"Here we go again." Tom threw his arms sideways, in defeat. "How can you be so calm and joke about everything?"



“With much difficulty, I assure you. This is a mask you see.” Sid gestured at his face. “And a coping mechanism, without a doubt.”

Sid did look a bit anxious now if he looked closely.

“Just think of what I say to you right now. The boys won’t listen to you anyway. And they will do what they want. You can’t stop them.”

“Maybe, but I’ll do my best,” Tom said.

“And I thought you were worth fixing,” Sid said with a sigh.

“Fixing?”

“Yeah.”

“You’re an arrogant --”

“Son of a bitch.”

“I was going to say ‘prick’.”

“Well, you can’t guess them all.”

Tom ran a hand over his face. “Any chance that you will forget about this night?”

“None, obviously.”

“Don’t you think it was bad what we did?”

“No.”

“Really? What would your son think?”

There was hesitation in Sid, and this time he kept his mouth shut.

“Thought so.”

Sid pushed himself up. “I’m going to take you home. Just give me a minute to throw some water on my face.”

“I don’t think it’s a good idea. We drank too much. Allow some more time for the alcohol to leave your system.”

Sid nodded. Then, he extended one hand. “Give me your phone. And, for the record, I’m still the health care professional here. There’s little to no alcohol in my system.”

“Liar,” Tom said in a more playful voice than he intended.

“Phone.”

Tom didn’t want to, but it was hard to find a reason to refuse outright. “What for?”

“I need to have your number, and you need to have mine.”

“This was a one-night-stand.”

Sid rolled his eyes. “My kid lives under your roof. Maybe I want to check on him sometime without calling him and suffocating him.”

That was a lie, too. Tom had a hunch Sid had no qualms with asking his son directly everything he wanted to know. But, if he pretended he bought into it, he would have Sid’s number, guilt-free. He surrendered the phone.

“Why did you say you needed to cope earlier?”

Sid quirked an eyebrow as he gave Tom his phone back. “Isn’t it obvious? I’ve never had sex with a man before. Until tonight, I mean. My head still doesn’t wrap around it too well. It feels like there are loose ends we should talk about.”

“No. We don’t talk about it.”

“Fine.”

“Don’t you feel the same?” Tom asked.

“What? That it was a mistake?”

“Yes.”

“We can blame it on the booze.”

“Yes.”

“And on being lonely and unfucked for some time.”

“Yes.”

“They’re all valid reasons, you’ll say. But I’m forty-six, Tom, and I stopped believing in the tooth fairy a long time ago. Tonight happened for a reason.”

“You just listed them all.”

“So you try convincing yourself. But it’s all right. You’ll see things in a different light tomorrow. And you have my number.”

“I won’t call you.”

Sid shrugged. "If you say so. But I might call you," he teased, wiggling his eyebrows.

"It must be fun being such a carefree character all the time."

"You don't know anything about me."

Sid's face was now schooled in a neutral expression. Tom looked away. "Gotta go."

"God's speed," Sid said, and strangely enough, he didn't sound ironic at all.

Tom hurried out the door without a word. He needed to leave before he started blabbing what he honestly thought. That it hadn't been just a one-night-stand.

### *Chapter Three – Hard To Swallow Morning After Pills*

Tom was glad for Sid letting him off the hook and not driving him home. He asked the taxi driver to leave him at some distance from the house so that he could walk off some of the thoughts clouding his mind.

What the hell had he been thinking to hook up with that boy's father? He felt revolt growing inside him. One, he wanted to strangle himself. It had felt too damned good, but guilty pleasures always did. Also, Sid was a piece of work, always talking and having something to say. And he was wrong. He wouldn't let this night change what he thought was right for Jett.

*You're a bit of a hypocrite.*

Great. Now his conscience had conveniently switched to sounding exactly like Sid.

All right. It had been nothing but sex. And it had happened because they had drunken too much, and because Sid had kissed him back, and because –

Tom clenched his hands into fists. To think that he had been so eager to get in bed with Sid. Should he had been any other man, it would have been fine.

He knew what the problem was. The problem was that being with Sid felt natural. Even the sex, as new as they had been to it – which was funny, indeed, seeing that they were both grownups – had been amazing. Tom grimaced as his ass reminded him of what he had done just earlier that night.

But, still, Jett wasn't supposed to be with a boy, no matter how pretty he looked, and how awesome his dad was. Tom cursed under his breath. He was trying to focus but wasn't doing a very good job. Thoughts of Sid, a word, a touch, the feel of his skin, were messing up his brain.

Before, whenever he had been with a man, any thoughts of his partner for the moment had been washed away with a shower and a cup of bitter coffee. Maybe that was all he needed.

The guilt, he felt it, and it was as strong as ever. But other emotions were growing, and stifling them was hard work. What if Sid hadn't been the boy's father? Would he have felt the same attraction? After all, maybe it was all about the forbidden fruit.

Tom ran both hands over his face. The chill air of dawn made him shiver a little, but he shook it off and sped up the pace. That was the kind of truth he didn't want to face.

That he was attracted to a man, and it wasn't only about sex, although that played an important role, too. Such thoughts needed to be beaten into submission and eliminated for good.

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He opened the front door carefully, hoping his coming home this late wouldn't wake up any of the residents, and Jett, in particular. Tom wasn't sure he would be able to face his son after spending his night with another man. He feared that his kid would just read everything on his face.

And then, he wouldn't listen to reason anymore.

Damn, his throat was so dry. At least, he could sneak into the kitchen and drink a glass of water. It might not wash away thoughts of Sid from his mind, but it might clear his taste buds a little. He really needed to stop drinking like he was still young, and it didn't matter. Also, there were parts of his body hurting that he didn't know existed. That had to be because of the sex.

The water was cool on his tongue, and it did clear his mind a little, too.

"Where are you coming from at this hour?" An angry whisper made him turn.

Just great. Jett had to have a sixth sense to know he was in so fast. But it had always been like this. As estranged as they had been for years now, Tom could still recall how Jett knew, as a kid, when he was home, even when he hadn't sent word that he would be back so that he could surprise his family.

He threw Jett a withering look, hoping that it would be enough to stop him from turning this into a conversation. No such luck. Jett closed the kitchen door carefully after him. Tom took a moment to look at his son. He had every reason to be proud. His kid was tall and strong, and really good looking.

He also had a boyfriend for whose sake he was whispering now instead of shouting. With a small tinge of regret, Tom realized he was jealous of Jett for being able to go back to bed to his partner whenever he wanted.

Now that was one hard to swallow pill.

"I'm not being held accountable by the likes of you." Aggressiveness was in his blood. And he wouldn't think of strange desires to crawl back in the bed with someone at this hour. No, not someone, but a certain possessor of the bluest eyes he had ever seen in his life. "What am I? Twelve? I'm your father, and I can come home whenever I want."

That should do it. Jett couldn't be in the mood to fight, seeing how everyone else in the house was still asleep.

"Oh, really? It didn't cross your mind that some people might worry, right?"

Jett worried. Tom wanted to believe that, hell, he had been wanting Jett to care for years, but he doubted it. No, he couldn't blame Jett. After all, the kid had remained without both parents. But

he had been so adamant about staying with his aunt Flora after Mary had passed away, that Tom had felt that forcing the boy to follow him would be a mistake.

Now, he wasn't so sure anymore.

*Put that down to past mistakes.*

“Don't take me for a fool, Jett. I know exactly how much you care. You made it pretty clear yesterday. Just to put your mind at ease, I'm in one piece, as you can see.”

It was better to push Jett away and care for his wellbeing from a reasonable emotional distance. Yes, that was what he needed to do. He cared about the boy, and he didn't need him to worry about him. That was not a son's debt to pay.

Tom gripped the glass of water and took another sip.

“I don't give a rat's ass about that,” Jett said aggressively. “Where have you been the entire night? What did you say to April's dad? Were you with him all this time?”

Questions, questions, questions! Was it written on his forehead what he had done?

He slammed the glass down on the counter. “That's none of your business, is it?” he said with a small hiss.

“It is. April's dad wanted to talk to you for a reason.”

“Yeah. He made that clear.”

What the hell did the boy want from him now? Tom was starting to sweat. If Jett knew, all he had tried to build to convince him that it wasn't a good decision to stick with April when he needed to be a responsible man and take care of his own son would go down the drain.

Jett sat in the door, his arms crossed across his chest, and with a deep frown on his face.

Tom could feel his body getting hotter, and his sweat more difficult to bear. With a growl, he took one step forward. “Out of my way, boy.” He needed out. He couldn't bear those judgmental eyes reading right into his soul. He was very much afraid of what Jett might find there if he looked too much.

“April is not leaving,” Jett said, setting his jaw hard.

Right. It was all because of the boy that Jett was getting so interested in him and his whereabouts. This wasn't about their relationship as father and son.

“April this, April that.” His frustration at not being able to get out of the kitchen was getting the better of him. “Is there nothing else on your mind, boy? Like having a son? Living responsibly?”

That was surely a topic that Jett wouldn't like. But it was his duty, as his father, to remember him all that.

*Hypocrite.*

Damn Sid and his voice. Tom would have a hard time trying to get that guy out of his head.

“Living responsibly? What's that even supposed to mean? You care about Carina getting an honest job. You order April to go to school. It's me you don't care even to say anything like that!”

What? What was that all about? It wasn't like Jett to like being ordered around.

Tom let the words out before he could control them. Jett didn't care about him at all. “I know what you are. Do you think I'm blind? You're a thug, and you're so spoiled for anything good in your life that you're not worth the trouble.”

Damn, talking about the wrong things to say. Jett's face changed, and, for a moment, he looked like that kid who had lost the most important person in his life those many years ago.

Another hard to swallow pill. He couldn't back down now. Their relationship was severely compromised and beyond repair. Tom needed to think only of putting Jett on the right path. “Just make right by that kid,” he added. “Maybe your wife will manage to make an honest man out of you. God knows I tried.”

“You didn't try enough,” Jett said, closing his fists.

*You didn't try enough.*

Guilt trips were personal. There was no room for extra passengers.

“Says who? You? All you cared, all your life, has been to do the opposite of everything I've ever told you.” Tom knew his own internalized loathing was clouding his judgment now, but it was like he couldn't stop. If his kid thought so badly of him already, there was nothing he could say to make it better. He would just continue to care for him the only way he knew how, even if that meant saying hurtful words.

Jett no longer looked lost. He was angry, and Tom knew that anger was good for a man. Maybe Jett hated him, but he would have to see reason, after all.

“Whatever. April is not leaving. That's all I want you to understand.”

The standard sentence that went through the mind of a young man like Jett.

*Whatever.*

It felt terrible that Jett didn't care about their relationship, but it was good that he didn't.

Jett moved away, letting him finally flee the kitchen. Tom fought with all his might against the need to run for real. Instead, he walked with heavy steps, not sparing Jett a glance on his way out.

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"That glass must have done something really bad to you, Mr. Huntsman."

Tom stopped wiping the glass in his hand and put it down. He threw Carina a look that was supposed to make her understand that it wasn't a good idea to talk to him at all.

"What do you know?" he said brusquely. "You kids could live in this pigsty as it is without realizing how bad it is."

Carina looked around, and her eyes narrowed. "Is that a stain on the wall behind you?"

Tom turned on his heels and stared at the empty wall. There was nothing there.

"It's nothing there. Stop bothering me. Where is your child?"

"Asleep and happy. Diapers changed, belly full, and he even got a lot of hugs and kisses. Satisfied?"

Tom grunted.

"There's someone else around here who's in much need of hugs," Carina added.

"What?"

"Mr. Huntsman, would it be too much to leave April and Jett alone?"

"I'm not taking parenting lessons from you."

"Good. 'Cause it's not about parenting. It's about being open-minded."

"I'm not against the boy being gay!" Tom exclaimed and returned to wiping the glass. "When are you, people, going to understand that?"

"Hmm."

"What's that supposed to mean?"

"Nothing."

"It's not nothing. If you're here to bother me, just get it all out. Not that I have to listen. I have lunch to prepare."



“About that. Let me help. I’m bored out of my wits with April and Jett out of the house, and Jay sleeping.”

“Are you sure you want to help? You could just go watch TV or play with your phone or something.”

“I was hoping you could teach me how to cook,” Carina said, completely unfazed by him.

Tom stopped. Yeah, that could be a good idea. It would also serve to learn more about the girl. After all, he wanted Jett to get together with her, the mother of his son, and not with that pretty boy.

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Carina had been surprisingly obedient throughout the cooking lesson, but Tom still felt a little bit on guard about the girl. No one could tell what really went through her head.

“I heard you came back late last night,” she said all of a sudden.

“Did Jett tell you anything?”

“No, but your door is next to mine, so I just heard you.”

“I didn’t want to wake you up.”

“Jay wakes me up sometimes, anyway.” Carina followed him with his eyes. “It was five a.m. or so.”

“And? Are you going to question me about where I was?”

Carina smiled. “Nope.”

Tom didn’t like that smile at all. What could it be she was thinking right now? The girl was a mystery. “Well, you helped enough. Run along, young lady.”

Carina stood up and threw him a pensive look. “Jett is a lot like you, Mr. Huntsman.”

She left him with that.

Yes, Jett was like him, and that complicated matters. And maybe that was why he was so attracted to that boy, and it was all his father’s fault, not his.

Tom clenched his hands into fists. Regardless of how much it hurt, he needed to shield Jett from disappointment later on. From guilt and sleepless nights. Maybe it all looked like fun with Jay being still a baby, but that wouldn’t last forever. The kid would grow, and he would start asking questions about why his parents weren’t together.

Admitting to his own guilt would be too much, and it would serve no one. What served was action, and that meant that he needed to have the same conversation with Jett, and insist on him seeing reason.

It didn't matter that last night had been so amazing. It had been about release and having fun, and nothing else. In the light of the day, other things mattered much more.

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Tom waited for April to be out of earshot so that he could start the conversation he wanted to have with Jett. For the moment, it looked like the boy wasn't anywhere in sight.

"Son, we need to talk about your situation. Whether you like it or not."

Jett threw him a withering look. "There's nothing to talk about. I told you this morning, didn't I?"

"And? That doesn't change the truth."

"What truth?"

"Jett, you have a son. What are you going to do? Dismiss him like he's nothing?"

For a moment, Jett looked like he wanted to say something. But he refrained, as it seemed, and said something else. "Will you get off my case already?"

Great. Now he was shouting. Tom could feel his heart rate rising. He crossed his arms over his chest and stared Jett down. The boy would have to see reason. "I told you I wasn't going to let you off the hook." The more he insisted, the more Jett would have to see things in their true light.

"And I told you, loud and clear, that nothing would change my mind."

Talking about stubborn. Tom turned his head and noticed April in the door to the backyard, standing there awkwardly, with his phone clutched in one hand. Who could he have been talking about? For a second, Tom wondered if April didn't have his father on the phone right that moment, and Sid could hear everything.

"This boy," Tom pointed at April, "has no business living with you like you two are married or something. I can't let you do this."

April stared at him like a deer caught in the headlights. At least, the boy could see some sense where Jett couldn't. It was evident that the situation was uncomfortable for him.

"Why does it matter what you think?" Jett shouted. "You're never home. You don't care. April doesn't leave, and that's final!"

*You're never home. You don't care.*

*You should have known better.*

Time never turned back. It flew away and thrived on human mistakes. What could he do to make Jett see that all he did was to make sure Jett would be happy?

April cleared his throat and raised one hand. Tom stared at him. "Maybe I could let you two talk about your, um, issues, on your own time."

"April, you're not leaving." That was Jett, with all the hotheadedness of his young years.

Tom set all his attention on April. Maybe the kid knew what was right, after all. Maybe whatever was between him and Jett wasn't all that strong.

April began talking, somewhat hesitating. "Okay, but, you know, it's your father's house, and it feels like --"

"It's not his house," Jett said. "It's mine." He followed his words with a finger pointed at his chest.

Tom clenched his teeth hard. It wasn't his home; that was correct. But it was an unspoken rule between them that Jett would never bring that up. But it appeared that he had been wrong. "I was waiting for you to bring that up."

It was a lie. He had hoped Jett would never bring that up.

"Aunt Flora left it to me. You sold your house."

*Your house. Not ours.*

"Because it wasn't a home. No one wanted to live there anymore." No. He hadn't wanted to live there anymore. It had stunk of death and pain and regrets. And he couldn't stand expecting Mary at every corner, beautiful and full of life, every moment spent there. It would have turned him mad.

"That's right." Jett's voice was stone-hard. His hands were clenched into fists. "And that means I do what I want in my own house."

Right through the heart.

"Hmm." It was hard to keep a steady voice while his insides were sinking. "Everything is about what you want to do, isn't it? You don't care that it's wrong."

"Wrong? What's wrong? Wanting to be with April? Why? Because he's a dude, and you can't think of two dudes living together?"

“If this is you trying to make me into some bigot, you’re wasting your breath, son. I have nothing against the boy. You just have other priorities right now.” He tried to manage his voice, to keep it from breaking into anger or something else.

Jett was beyond listening to reason now. “Like what? Carina and I will take good care of Jay, don’t you worry. We’ll do it our way.”

“Just as much as the baby is your son, he’s also my grandson.”

“Your grandson? You’ve never held him once!”

Another shot. Jett’s aim was true.

“I don’t need to hold him to care for his wellbeing.”

Why hadn’t he held Jay? Tom wasn’t sure. But it felt like he would do something wrong if he got too involved. Or he was afraid that broken dams wouldn’t hold water any longer.

Jett continued berating him, his voice growing louder and louder. “That’s you. All alone in your world. God forbid anyone touches that.”

*All alone?*

“I lived enough to know what’s right.” Tom could feel a headache coming. Jett was so stubborn, so, so stubborn. And this wasn’t an argument either of them wanted to lose.

“You should have lived enough to know you’re wrong,” Jett said.

“Think that all you want. As long as I’m here, I’ll do my best to put you on the right path.” If he stood his ground, if he believed and nothing else mattered, he would make his son see the truth.

“As long as you’re here? Does that mean all this shit is going to stop if you leave? Then, you know what? You’re not welcome anymore!”

Tom could hear the pounding of his blood in his ears. All these years, he had hoped he would never hear those words. But now, Jett had said them, and just as he had imagined, it hurt like all hell.

A small gasp came from April. “Jett,” he said in a reproachful voice.

“Are you saying that I should leave?” Tom couldn’t yet believe Jett meant all that. He couldn’t, right? Despite everything, they were father and son.

“Yeah, that’s what I’m saying. Pack your bags and go wherever you want to be in this world. Not here. Don’t come here anymore if all you want to do is make me bend to your will. I’m not doing squat.”

Talking again about hard to swallow pills. If Jett wanted him to leave, maybe it was all for the best. God knew what he would do next. But, for now, with his son shouting at him and sending him packing, there was just one course of action to take. "If that's what you want."

His feet were made of lead as he walked away. Jett didn't spare him a glance. April, on the other hand, stared at him with moist eyes. Jett was wrong. He didn't have anything against April; April was a good boy, and his father had raised him well.

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All his life had been nothing but packing and unpacking. His base was his home, but, to himself, he needed to admit that it had never felt like a real home. It was just somewhere he could sleep. There was no one waiting for him to come back. There was too much silence, and the only people he ever interacted with were either his subordinates, superiors, or equals in rank. He didn't do friendships. Some people did consider him that, and he didn't contradict them, but that was all.

Throughout each year, there had always been a beacon he could turn after: the month of leave he got that he always spent home, with Jett.

But, according to his son, that wasn't his home. It was just another place where he came and went.

With steady gestures, he placed his clothes, toiletries, and other things in the suitcase he carried with him. Where would he go now? Money was not an issue. He could stay at a motel, hotel, or hell, he could go on a vacation, a first in many years.

While Mary had been well and healthy, they had used to go on vacation all the time. Jett was quite the adventurer. Tom smiled, but then, he shook his head. Mary was gone. And Jett had finally spoken his mind. He couldn't stand the sight of his father, and the burden of guilt was not something for him to bear.

Tom closed the suitcase and looked around the room one last time. That was Jett's bedroom, so his eyes traveled to the few artifacts that his son loved so much, a car poster on the wall, an old plastic figurine. For years, the other room where Carina and Jay were now, had been his, and Tom had silently appreciated Jett taking care of it and keeping it clean. The rest of the house was, usually, much more neglected. Much of each leave, Tom spent making it livable, although he knew that next year, he would find it the same, and start all over.

Now there would be no such things anymore. There had been something final in how Jett had talked to him today. There was no turning back. They would still see each other, but Tom would be what he had always been. A guest. A stranger.

That was all. He would soon be out of that house and out of his son's life for good. Maybe it was all for the better. Not for him because that wasn't something easy to live with, but for Jett, who truly hated his guts.

His phone ringing interrupted his train of thought.

"Yes?" he asked gruffly without checking the caller ID.

"I heard everything."

Sid's voice in his ear gave him pause.

"Oh, yeah?"

"Oh, yeah."

Without seeing him for real, Tom could still imagine Sid cocking his head to one side and throwing him an all-knowing grin while imitating his speech mannerism. "Doesn't your kid keep anything from you? Ever?"

"Never. He tells me everything. And he just called to tell me you had a huge fight with Jett, and now you're leaving the house."

Tom sighed. The last thing he needed was to hear Sid's voice. All right, that wasn't entirely true. He had wished to hear Sid again. See him again. But only more like a fantasy, not something real.

"Are you still there?"

"Yes."

"What are you going to do?"

"Not sure just yet. First, I need to find a place for tonight. Then I'll see."

"Do you still have leave days?"

"A little more than three weeks, yes."

"Then come stay with me."

"Come stay with you?" Without realizing, Tom raised his voice. It was such an astonishing thing to say, but that was Sid, so normal rules didn't apply to him. He dropped his voice considerably.

"Are you sure? I'm a stranger."

"Who had his cock up my ass and doesn't want to talk about it."

Tom gulped. So like Sid to say such things. That kind of image was bound to haunt him. He had no time for this. "I still don't want to talk about it."

"Fine. Just come."

"Just like that?"

"Just like that. I told you that you need fixing."

"It won't work."

"What?"

"This fixing you're talking about."

"We'll see. This is my address. Write it down. It's about an hour's drive."

"Okay."

"I'm at work right now. But if you're there before me, you'll find the spare key under a pot on the left. It's the one with a tall dead stalk in it."

"You leave spare keys all over the place like that?"

"I have nothing worth stealing; trust me."

"Still."

A small chuckle followed. "See you at home, Tom."

Tom stood in the middle of the room, stunned for lack of a better word to describe how he felt.

*See you at home.*

Magic lived in the little things, after all.

## *Chapter Four – The Reasons Why*

No one stood in his way as he left the house, and that hadn't been a relief. Tom had hoped that he would still see Jett and tell him goodbye, but it had looked like his son didn't want to see him at all.

He barely registered the landscape changing on the other side of the car window. The driver was a quiet person, and that was a blessing because Tom was in anything but a mood to do small talk.

Was he losing his mind already? Why was he heading to Sid's home right now? He didn't dare to explore the reasons why. Whatever had happened between them, it had to be just a one-time thing. If they repeated it, they were bound to get in trouble.

But why? And in trouble from whom? Jett didn't care. Tom could safely do whatever he wanted with whomever he wanted, and Jett wouldn't give a rat's ass. That didn't mean that it was okay to fool around with April's dad. All his life, Tom had struggled to do the right thing, and even if that had turned out badly more often than he cared to admit, that didn't mean that he was ready to give up on it.

He would stay for a while at Sid's, but only so that he could talk to another grownup and have a little break from everything. It was funny how his brain refused to admit that lie.

It was strangely transparent what the actual reason was for him to stay with Sid since the man had invited him. Tom closed his eyes and refused to think altogether. Maybe it was all in his head and nothing more. Sid had appeared attractive the other night because they had been drunk and also lacking sexual release. Now, that was no longer the case.

Tom swore off the booze for the time he would spend under Sid's roof. That was one way of playing it safely; also, he would look at Sid with a critical eye. After all, the man was a pain in the behind if he thought a little. He was a know-it-all prick with a penchant for finishing other people's sentences. Also, he was so arrogant that he believed he could play shrink to Tom for some reason.

Like he would allow that to happen. Sid was free to poke him as much as he wanted, but Tom had no intention to give in and let him get something from it.

Why was he going again?

Telling the driver to turn around would be ridiculous, he thought to himself. No. After all, Sid was the only guy he knew around, and Tom could talk to him if only for the sake of not being all alone.

And yet, he knew precisely why he was going where he was going. Resisting the thought would prove difficult, without a doubt.



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With critical eyes, Tom took in the front lawn that looked like it had been the victim of ten acid rains in a row. It wasn't littered with garbage or anything, but it wasn't exactly cared for, either. The house has a homey feel about it, from the outside, although Tom couldn't put his finger on what made it feel that way. Maybe it was because of the bushes that almost overtook one side – those seemed to thrive, or the pleasant colors chosen for the façade, pale yellow tones that made it look at bit like a lemon cake with red icing.

Tom hesitated in front of the door. Maybe Sid was home already, and he should knock. There was the tall dead stalk, he observed from the corner of one eye. He decided to knock, after all.

For a few moments, not a leaf stirred. The weather was calm for that time of the year, and that meant that people could still spend time outside and enjoy it. On his way to Sid's house, Tom had noticed a few elderly couples taking advantage of the pleasant sun on their porches. It was a quiet neighborhood, but Tom couldn't agree with Sid leaving a spare key in such a visible spot. Maybe he could do something to change such dangerous habits.

The door opened brusquely, and a disheveled Sid appeared in front of him. It looked like he had just stepped out of the shower, and Tom could smell the body wash on him. It was something fresh and citrusy, and he instantly liked it.

“Hey, come in, come in,” Sid said cheerfully and gestured for Tom to enter. As Tom walked in, Sid snatched his suitcase from his hand.

“It's okay,” Tom said. “I can --”

“I'm the host, so shut up.”

Tom didn't comment anymore. He followed Sid into the hallway after Sid closed the door after him. “So you just happen to have a spare room?” he asked, feeling awkward all of a sudden.

The interior was like the exterior. It had a homey feel, but a bit messy. Not in the sense that it was unclean or anything like that, but some things lay in disarray, such as a newspaper spread on the coffee table in the living room, and an old sweater thrown over the back of the sofa.

It was nothing like the orderly layout Tom preferred wherever he went. But this was not his house, so he was supposed to live with the owner's quirks.

“A spare room?” Sid laughed. “I am a dad of two with no child home anymore. You can bet that I have plenty of space.”

“If you have a guest room, that's okay. I wouldn't want to take over one of your kids' rooms.”

“Guest room, right,” Sid said with a snort.

Tom followed him past the living room into another long hallway.

“Here.” Sid gestured for him to enter.

The bed was neatly made, but a stack of books was on one of the nightstands with a pair of glasses on top of them.

“Is this your bedroom?”

“Oh, yeah,” Sid said as he put Tom’s suitcase down. “There’s plenty of room in the closet for your things. Feel free to unpack while I fix us a light dinner.”

“Sid.”

His stern tone made Sid stop from whatever he was doing. He was dressed casually in a pair of faded jeans and a white t-shirt. He looked absolutely delicious.

“Am I going to sleep with you?”

Sid quirked an eyebrow. “Is that a double entendre I’m hearing?”

“No, that’s on you. You must have another room.”

“They are all messy. And musty. And you won’t like them. Yes, you’re going to sleep with me.”

Tom stood there, baffled. “I can’t do that.”

“Sure, you can. I stick to my side of the bed; don’t worry.”

“It’s really not the issue!” He didn’t want to explode, but Sid was getting the better of him.

“Fine, fine,” Sid grunted and grabbed his suitcase again. “It was worth a try, but if you want to take it slow --”

Tom cursed under his breath. Sid hauled the suitcase and Tom followed. From the back, Sid looked just as yummy as from the front. Tom found himself moving and grabbing him from behind. Sid dropped the suitcase, and he turned.

He looked like he wanted to say something, like usual. But Tom clamped his mouth hard on his, to shut him up. It was a reason as good as any. Sid’s lips tasted of a minty toothpaste, and his skin smelled so good.

He took his time to taste it, too. It felt liberating when it must have felt wrong. Playfully, he pulled at the bottom lip with his teeth. Sid killed the moment with a small chuckle.

“I’ll take the guest room if you please,” Tom said promptly.

Sid rolled his eyes. “Buzz killer.”

“Are you the one to talk? You just ruined a perfect kiss.”

“Really? How did I do that?”

“You laughed.”

They were back in the hallway and soon in another room, one with a considerably smaller bed and a lot of decorations that made Tom frown.

“There is no guest room, so Melinda’s will have to do. April is quite territorial, and I don’t want to risk his wrath,” Sid explained.

The coverlet had a neutral color, thankfully, but the boy bands staring at him from all the walls made him groan. There was also a makeup table or whatever that was called. Tom groaned. “Are you sure you want me to be in your little girl’s room?”

Sid snorted. “Little girl, right. Melinda is too busy with her family to care about her old room. She hasn’t slept here in five years.”

“All these boy band posters are killing me. Are you sure April would be upset if I slept in his room?”

“I’m afraid you won’t escape the boy band curse there, either,” Sid said with his signature grin.

Yes, of course. That made perfect sense. Tom took in the surroundings once more. He couldn’t shake off the sensation that he was nothing but an intruder. But, for the moment, at least, he couldn’t even fathom imagining how it would be to sleep in the same bed as Sid. One look at the man and Tom knew that all the lies he had told himself on his way here were nothing but that.

Threadbare. That was what he felt from time to time. Worn out and left to dry. But not here. Inside Sid’s home, from the moment he had set foot in it, he felt calm energy all around him. It was soothing, but it also threatened to open him raw.

“Let’s have a bite,” Sid said, stopping his train of thought. “You can always get comfortable later. Now I’m dying to know what happened.”

“Aren’t you an old lady always in the mood for gossip?” Tom frowned, but he did it halfheartedly like he couldn’t even manage to feel pissed in that house.

Sid laughed. His eyes crinkled at the corners as he did that, and Tom could feel a crooked smile creeping in, too. There was no wonder April was like a little ray of sunshine with a dad like that. How did other dads do it? Between Jett and him, there had always been storms and no fair weather.

Not always. There was a before and an after. But dwelling on every little thing that made him feel so carved out didn't seem like a good idea.

And, in that house, it didn't seem appropriate anyway. He followed Sid to the kitchen, and the smile from earlier stuck to his face like the kiss of an old lover as he listened to his host humming and preparing food.

Sid placed a plate in front of him with a big smile. "There's a lot of green in here," Tom noticed.

Sid shrugged as he brought his plate to the table, as well. "Green never killed anyone, Major Tom."

"Don't think I didn't already hear all the jokes."

"What jokes?" Sid wiggled his eyebrows.

Of course, he knew what jokes. Tom just shook his head and dug in. "It's actually tasty," he said after the first bite.

"Don't worry, Tom. I'm not a vegan. But until fresh veggies go out of season, I try to cook them as often as I can find them."

"They never go out of season. Haven't you heard? There are plenty in the frozen food aisle."

Sid chuckled. "Are you trying to make jokes, Tom?"

"Why? Do you have exclusivity on that?"

"Far from me. I'm sure that, deep down, you're a fun guy."

"A fun guy, not a funny guy," Tom noticed the difference right away.

"Yeah. A fun guy. I know it for sure."

He could swear Sid had just thrown him a come-hither look, but it was gone as soon as it came, so maybe he just imagined things.

"Stop overthinking everything," Sid said as if he could read his mind. "You know we're heading there, anyway."

Tom pretended to be busy with his food. His throat was getting dry again. It was a common occurrence around Sid, for some reason.

"I'm not ascetic, by the way. I have cold beers in the fridge, and we can watch whatever you want on TV."

Tom perked up. Beer sounded cool. And it wasn't strong like whiskey, so maybe it was okay if he had one or two. "I've never said you were ascetic."

"You must have thought it. No sex in seven years," Sid said as he ate with gusto. "What could you have thought of me? Maybe that I was rusty in bed. How was I, really?"

Tom coughed and swallowed the food in his mouth with some difficulty.

"What, not a good topic of conversation over dinner? But it felt good to be wanted for a change," Sid added as if he was talking mostly to himself.

Being at war with one's self was tough. Tom didn't know whether he wanted to pretend he hadn't heard that last bit or if he just needed to declare dinner over, grab Sid's hand and take him to his bedroom so that he could show him that he was very much wanted still.

"For so long, I haven't been someone's lover. I've only been a dad, a nurse, someone's neighbor. And I had no idea how much I missed it until yesterday." Tom looked up. Sid smiled at him. "Don't mind me. Enjoy your food. I tend to ramble a lot since my kids left. Only that my own self doesn't make a good conversation partner."

Tom knew a thing or two about that. "That's okay," he found himself saying. "I don't like talking to myself much, either."

"Good. So what happened?"

Tom quirked a questioning eyebrow.

"With Jett. What happened?"

"Ah, just the usual. Me and that boy, we don't see anything eye to eye."

"Hmm."

"I bet that's not something you know. Your April must think you're the center of the universe."

"That might change, though. I think your son is too much of a contender for me to keep the crown."

"You really think they're in love?"

"I don't think. I know for sure." A small hesitation followed, and Tom wondered about it, like before. What could that be about?

"Still, Jett's situation is anything but simple. He needs to do right by his kid. I know he's young, but mistakes have consequences," Tom said, reenacting his argument with Jett.

"Ah. Your grandson is a mistake."

“Don’t put it like this. You know what I mean. He and that girl should have known better. You would think kids today don’t leave home without a condom in their pocket.”

“No contraception method is one hundred percent sure, as you may well know it.”

“That’s the nurse talking?”

“You can say that. I don’t think they were irresponsible. Maybe it wasn’t a mistake, but a little miracle that happened.”

Of course. That was such a Sid thing to say, Tom thought. “Well, Jett still needs to think of his son’s future. And I know for a fact that he has always had dozens of girlfriends. Aren’t you afraid he would just leave April for some random girl at one point?”

“Ah, I don’t worry,” Sid said enigmatically. “There must be a reason why Jett couldn’t settle for a girl.”

“Yeah, sure there is. He’s a womanizer. God knows where he got that from.”

“Hmm. He must have gotten something from you.”

Tom clenched his fingers on the fork. It wasn’t like he hadn’t thought of that, too. He just didn’t need to hear it coming from someone else’s mouth. “Not that,” he said curtly.

“He’s stubborn just as you are. Right now, you’re so afraid that you might not be right that your entire mind and soul clenches as tight as your hand on that fork,” Sid said.

“You don’t know me.” Tom didn’t enjoy the idea of fighting with Sid, but it looked like his host had no self-preservation instinct.

“But I would love to. Spend these weeks of leave you still have with me, and let’s get to know each other.”

Like it was fucking summer camp, and they planned to become BFFs, as kids said. “How can you be,” Tom searched for the right word for a while, “so lightweight?”

“I eat sensibly,” Sid replied as he pointed at his plate.

“You know what I mean.”

“I know. And I will tell you. We have so much to tell each other.”

“How can you be so open with me? You don’t know me.”

“As I already said, I would like to know you.”

“Why?”

Sid stared at his plate. “Because I’ve never felt so good in years, and I want to know the reasons why.”

The reasons why. That was on his mind, too. “Sid, we were just drunk and --”

“And you kissed me just earlier. No, no more excuses. I want to know the real reasons why.”

Tom knew when to shut up. His throat was begging for that beer. It looked like Sid only offered plain water with food. Perhaps it was some health thing he only knew about. Maybe it was worth it to explore the reasons why together.

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Sid was the real thing, Tom thought as he listened to his laugh and his funny comments about the movie they were watching. How they had ended up doing that, he had no idea, but mostly it had to be because he hadn’t protested when Sid had flipped through the channels and settled for a silly comedy that had to be at least one century old.

“You’re not watching,” Sid said with slight reproach.

Tom nodded. “I’m busy watching you.”

Sid stared back at him with hooded eyes. “Are you trying to seduce me, then? I’m afraid I’m easy and not too much work.”

Tom swallowed hard. What had happened with his resolution to keep things civil, aka no sex? But he couldn’t think of anything else, and it wasn’t even only physical. There was a strange sort of ache, nestled in the middle of his chest, demanding closeness with the man sitting at the other end of the sofa.

They had sat like that, with at least three feet between them, from the beginning. Sid hadn’t tried to come closer, and Tom had kept to his end of the sofa. Unconsciously or not, they feared to be too close. He knew that to be true about him, but Sid had seemed to have no qualms with that.

“You’re easy? A little farther, and you’d fall off the sofa.”

Sid laughed, but it wasn’t his easy laugh this time. “I don’t think I’m doing a good job of reading you. Just earlier, I came too strong at you. Like it would have been realistic that you would want to jump in bed the first second you got here.”

Tom swallowed once, twice. He drank from his beer, just because he wanted to avoid replying to that. Sid had smelled so good when he had opened the door, Tom wouldn’t have minded at all a bit of jumping in bed.

“I hurried home to take a shower because I didn’t want to put you off. Talking about getting one’s hopes high,” Sid added with a small, self-deprecating smile.

Tom put his bottle down on the coffee table with a small thud. Then he turned toward Sid and stared at him some more.

“What? You know, the reason why you’re hard to read is that you’re not talking. I’m just rambling here, feeling like a total idiot.”

Tom moved fast. Sid yelped as he was grabbed, and they both ended on the floor. The situation was a bit ridiculous, but right now, he couldn’t care about that. He needed to wipe that smile off Sid’s face. He had no business feeling like that, not when Tom wanted him with all his heart and body.

For a second, they both breathed hard as they stared into each other’s eyes. Tom took in the bluest of blue, maybe not as pretty in the artificial light in the living room as in bright daylight, but still hypnotic in their own right. Then, he looked down, at the straight nose, and the nicely drawn lips, and that moment, he knew that he couldn’t turn back if it killed him.

He pressed his lips hard against Sid’s mouth, forcing it to open. No booze in the world could stave off his thirst. It wasn’t that kind of thirst; their tongues danced, and the faint laughter on TV seemed very far away.

Tom reveled in the kiss, the sounds they made only putting fire in his veins. Sid kissed him back, and his limbs were hard and squeezed as they wrapped around him. There was no more denying. That was why he had jumped into the cab and come here. That was the most crucial reason why.

“You smelled so good when you opened the door,” Tom murmured as they let go of their kisses so that they could breathe a little.

“It’s a new body wash,” Sid murmured back as he reached for another kiss. “You can borrow it.”

“Only if you’re going to use it on me,” Tom replied.

“Oh, right. Are you going to shower with me, then?”

“You can bet. But first, we need to have a reason, right?”

“I knew you had a sense of humor.”

Tom swallowed Sid’s laugh from his mouth, biting playfully. This time he didn’t stop even if Sid continued to laugh. Maybe they had a lot to laugh about, to talk about, to share. But it would come later because right now their erections rubbed against each other so forcefully that they were at risk at creaming their pants like teenagers.

It had to be done quickly, too, this time. Tom managed to free his cock and opened Sid’s fly with dexterity and speed he didn’t even know he possessed. Now at least they were humping each other for real. Later, they would do it in a bed; he was sure of it.



“Nice, this is nice, too,” Sid said as he gasped.

Tom covered his mouth and continued to move on top of him. There was almost just enough pressure, but his body wanted more. As if he could feel his predicament, Sid pushed his tongue inside his mouth and began moving it rhythmically.

That felt like fucking, the good kind, too. So, Tom moved, pressing down Sid and their cocks between them.

“Oh, wow, this feels --” Sid said, and there was no more time for words because they came almost at the same time.

They remained on the floor, staring at the ceiling for a while.

“You know, I didn’t really think this technique could bring a lot of satisfaction,” Sid interrupted the silence.

“Maybe only when the right circumstances are met,” Tom offered. He smiled, and he was overly conscious of it, but he couldn’t stop. Sid’s chatting nature was rubbing off on him.

“I suppose. Still, we got off, right?”

“Yeah.”

“Oh, yeah,” Sid replied, and then he laughed.

Tom rolled to one side and looked at him. The beautiful blue eyes observed him.

“You’re the only guy I get to experiment so much, you know,” he blurted out.

“Good.”

“Good? That’s all you have to say?”

“Why? It’s not good?”

“That’s not what I – Ah, you’re just playing with me.”

Sid chuckled. “Yes, I am. How come I’ve never felt attracted to a man all these years, and suddenly I’m with you, and it feels so good? You can’t say that we’re drunk,” he warned. “We barely had some beer.”

Tom shook his head slowly. “Sometimes, maybe it’s just the person.”

Sid nodded. “It could be. It looks like I like you very much, Mr. Huntsman.”

“Mr. Huntsman? Why the formality?”

“I don’t know. It makes it more official.”

“Do you need extra confirmations that you like me, and I like you?”

“That’s not what I need. The real question here is: am I at a disadvantage? You’ve been with other men before.”

“No one like you.”

“That could be equally a bad thing or a good thing.”

“It’s both.”

“How so?”

“Let’s say that, in equal measures, I want to do you, but also strangle you a little.”

“Strangle me?” Sid mimicked surprise, but Tom knew better this time around.

“Not with any ill intent. You piss me off, but it feels good.”

“Oh, and that makes perfect sense.”

“Maybe it doesn’t, but attraction doesn’t play by the rules, right?”

“So, you’re attracted to me?”

“I can’t see any other reason why else I would be right now stretched on the floor in the living room of a stranger, with my cock hanging out and cum all over my shirt.”

It was then that Sid looked down, first at Tom, then at him. “It looks like I’ll have laundry to do.”

“And you can also use your new body wash on me. I think we both stink.”

Sid laughed, throwing his head back and exposing his throat. Tom couldn’t resist. He traced the shape of Sid’s neck and Adam’s apple with his index finger. The laughing stopped. “I know what Jett must have gotten from you. The ability to seduce people,” Sid said.

“I’m barely touching you. I doubt this counts as seduction.”

“No, not that. You’re looking at me like I’m the only person in the world for you right now.”

Tom didn’t deny it. Instead, he smiled, and his hand wrapped playfully around Sid’s throat. “Let’s shower before I give in to the temptation of strangling you a little.”

## *Chapter Five – Craving*

“I’m afraid it’s a bit cramped. I’ve never really thought about remodeling,” Sid explained, as Tom held him close and kissed him slowly under the water spraying their bodies.

“I don’t mind it.” It was such a wonder to touch someone else so freely. Tom enjoyed every bit. He liked Sid’s natural smell, too, faint already.

As they stood face to face, their cocks touched, and it made him remember what had happened just earlier. He should have known that he wouldn’t be able to resist temptation. But, strangely enough, he had no regrets.

“Not that I don’t enjoy the attention, but I think we should take this to bed.” Sid shivered slightly under Tom’s fingers. “Will you sleep with me now?”

“Is your bed big enough for both?”

“Yes. I’ve never changed it.”

Tom understood what wasn’t said. Those were the shadows between them. “Maybe it’s better if we sleep in different rooms.”

Sid just nodded. The magic veil had been torn with a few words. “But, you could still spend the evening with me.”

Tom climbed out of the shower. “What towel can I use?”

“Ah, avoidance,” Sid commented. “So, we’re not going to talk about it?”

“It?”

“Them.”

“No.”

Tom almost made a run for the door, the first towel he got his hands on wrapped around his midsection. In the hallway, he stopped for a moment, but then he decided that the least he could do was to run all the way. He went directly to his room – Melinda’s, actually – and closed the door behind him.

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He had slept through the night quite well, given the circumstances, but it was mostly due to his training that he could shut down his mind and get the needed rest than to other factors. At first, when he opened his eyes, he needed a few moments to understand why he was there. The girlish décor made him smile a smidge. Sid seemed like the kind of dad who would allow his kids to

walk all over him. Tom had only one son, so he couldn't imagine the challenges of having a daughter, but the size of that makeup table said something about how Melinda must have gotten her way.

Last night, he had run away like a criminal. Sid hadn't come after him, and that was a relief, although Tom couldn't stop feeling a bit annoyed with how he had been ignored. Maybe that was something Sid had gotten during his training as a dad. But no, Tom couldn't imagine Sid ignoring April or his daughter. He seemed like the kind of guy who would always peck and peck at something until he had it all unraveled.

Or maybe he was wrong because he didn't know Sid at all. Tom tiptoed out of the room, listening carefully for any sounds of activity in the house. It was six in the morning, so maybe Sid didn't get up that early. It had been his understanding from their conversation at the bar the first time they had met that Sid worked for a private practice, so he didn't have as strict hours as other nurses.

Tom also remembered that Sid had said something about being lucky to manage both his job and taking care of his children. That had been something he, personally, had failed to do, so he was envious of Sid for having it all figured out.

Tom didn't figure out stuff. He either solved it or preferred to pretend that it didn't exist. In his world, that was how things stayed. If Sid didn't like it ... well, he didn't like it, and that was all there was to it.

He headed for the bathroom and manipulated all the appliances with maximum care while making as little noise as possible. Then, he headed for the kitchen, only to witness Sid fiddling with the coffee machine.

"Oh, you're awake!" Sid exclaimed.

The fact that they had parted the night before without even saying goodnight seemed forgotten. Tom sighed. "I walked so carefully around so that I didn't wake you up." He took a seat at the table.

Sid waved. "I don't sleep late. I have no reason to, and I've never been the type to sleep in, not even as a kid."

"Now you're showing off. Don't tell me you never skipped school, either."

"I did, once in a while. I even did detention."

"I find it hard to believe."

Sid chuckled. "The things I did for love."

Tom froze. "Can I have some of that coffee?"

Sid turned and placed a full cup in front of him. "Catherine and I were high school sweethearts. We skipped together a few times and also did detention together. She was a bit of a wild thing."

Tom didn't want to hear. But running away again couldn't be his modus operandi as he stayed there. Not that he had any obligation to do that. After all, Sid had courteously invited him over, but he could just as courteously thank him for everything and be on his merry way.

"And now you're thinking how to run away again. Should I go lock the door?"

"Stop it, please," Tom said quietly.

He didn't look at Sid, so he was surprised when he was suddenly embraced. His head was pressed against Sid's chest, and he inhaled the now familiar smell of cologne by accident.

"There." Sid let him free.

Tom shook his head. "How can you make everything a joke?"

"That wasn't a joke. It was a hug."

Tom ran one hand over his face. The stupidest thing was that he felt like laughing. "I'm not the hugging type."

"Oh, you're not?" Sid asked suavely. "Wait till you sleep with me. I'll be all over you."

Tom could feel his cheeks getting red. He was too old to be embarrassed, but the mental image of Sid wrapping his long limbs around him made him instantly hot.

"I need to go to work, so I'm afraid you will have to entertain yourself while I'm not here. Will you be all right?"

"I'll find something to do."

"For food, I think you'll find everything you need in the fridge."

"Don't worry. But do you have to be so early at work?"

"I need to organize some files. I hate leaving my employer and my colleagues with too much on their hands when I go on leave."

"Are you going on leave?"

"I'm planning to. Only that I won't be going anywhere, I'll stay here, with you."

Tom could feel his jaw dropping. It had to be hard enough to rein in the temptation in the few hours Sid would have been around after work and before time. This complicated things.

“Don’t do it for my sake. I’ll find something to do.”

“You might feel tempted to run, and I can’t have that. Also, I will still need to go to work a few days, maybe all week, so that the others won’t suffer on account of my absence.”

“Are you always this considerate with others?”

“Yes, I think so.”

“Then why aren’t you as considerate with me?”

Sid smiled at him, and Tom felt his heart skipping a beat. “Because you need fixing, and that means a little bit of tough love.”

“Tough.” Tom snorted. “When have you ever been that?”

“Just watch me,” Sid promised.

He patted Tom on the shoulder on his way out of the kitchen. Tom stopped him and pulled him hard toward him. Sid lost his balance and landed with a small laugh in his lap. “I must take back what I said about you being a seducer. You have the seduction techniques of a Neanderthal.”

Tom grunted instead of a reply and then kissed Sid. There was blessed silence for about one minute until Sid pulled away. “I still need to go to work.”

“Then go.” Tom held Sid tightly in his arms.

“You want me to fight you.”

“That’s the idea.”

“Hmm. I’m not all muscles like you.”

“Good. I finally have the upper hand in something.”

“Dream on.” Sid grabbed him and kissed him until Tom could feel he was going out of breath. His hands caressed Sid’s back.

Sid stood up fast. “See? All free.”

Tom shook his head. Sid was incorrigible when he wanted to. “Then go.”

“Don’t leave while I’m gone. Promise?”

“Okay, I promise.”

“Call me if you get bored.”

“Bored?” Tom snorted. “Your property needs a lot of work.”

“My property?” Sid asked.

“That lawn is a disaster. The faucet in the bathroom is leaking. When did you last --”

“I see why the kids hate you.”

Tom stopped. Now, Sid might get the idea that having such an annoying guest was not that good a thing, after all. “Okay, I get it. If you don’t want me to touch anything, I won’t.”

“Are you kidding me? Knock yourself out.”

“Really? Won’t you get pissed?”

“Why would I do that?”

Tom smiled. “Okay. You give me free rein, right?”

Sid shrugged. “Just don’t touch April’s room. I swear he senses from a hundred miles if I ever displace something of his. He’s very attached to his things.”

“All right. Let that be the forbidden room, then.”

Sid caught his chin and kissed him loudly. “All right, honey. Off I go, then.”

“Off you go,” Tom replied. “Wait, I’m the stay at home wife?”

Sid laughed on his way out. “You’re whatever you want to be, Tom.”

Tom shook his head and tasted his coffee. He smacked his lips. Sid might not be a lawn expert, but he sure as hell knew how to make good coffee. And now, it was time for him to get to work.

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He had to make a few trips for supplies since Sid’s idea of a repair kit was abysmal, to say the least, but once he had everything, he started working. Physical work had never scared him, but after doing most of the light repairs around the house, Tom stared at the sad lawn with a frown. That could be enough work for a landscape expert, but he didn’t want some stranger to do that.

Armed with a shovel, he decided that it couldn’t get any worse. And he would have to think of rejuvenating the soil first, anyway.

“Are you a friend of Sid?”

Tom looked up and saw an old lady resting on a cane and examining him with keen eyes. “Yes,” he replied.

The old lady nodded. “Good. He’s too alone since April left. Kids always leave and forget about you.”

Tom didn’t know exactly what to say, so he just nodded. Not always kids left; parents were to blame for doing that, too.

“Are you trying to do something about the lawn?”

Tom nodded again.

“Come with me. I’ll give you something to make the soil better,” the old lady gestured. “I keep telling Sid, but he never has time. Come, come, young man.”

Young man? Tom rested the shovel against the wall and followed the old lady. She clearly needed glasses.

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“Oh, wow, I almost drove by,” Sid said when he got back home at five o’clock. “What happened to the lawn? Are you trying to bury a treasure here? And you thought I was reckless about hiding the spare key under a pot.”

Tom hushed him. “I moved it.”

“Where?”

“Somewhere random people won’t be able to find it.”

Sid laughed. “All right, I may start to regret a little leaving you in charge. What’s with the excavation?”

“I’ll have some new soil delivered tomorrow. And also, I have Mrs. Gibson’s magic formula for making grass grow.”

“It’s not exactly a good time of the year for planting anything, right? Not that I know anything about it. Wait, did you fall for Mrs. Gibson’s charms?”

“Charms? The lady must be one hundred!”

“And she makes the best lemon cake in the neighborhood. You’ve tried it, right?”

Tom admitted silently. Maybe he had had one too many slices. Sid slapped one hand against Tom’s belly in passing. “Then a light dinner it is.”



“Light, right.” Tom snorted, but he sucked in his belly. “I’ve already cooked. Some people also need meat.”

Sid remained silent for a moment. Tom wondered if he didn’t make some wrong move. After all, it was Sid’s house and his kitchen. Sid turned toward him, and he seemed to have stars in his eyes. “Excellent! Do you have any idea when was the last time someone cooked for me?”

Tom had an idea, but he didn’t comment on it. “Come. I’m starving, so be quick with the shower.”

“All right, captain.”

“I’m a major,” Tom corrected him playfully.

They walked into the house together. Only after the door closed behind them, Tom dared to do something he had been thinking of all day. He took Sid in his arms and kissed him deeply. His kiss was welcomed, and Sid wrapped his arms around him for a while.

“You know, that does smell fantastic,” Sid said, as soon as their kiss was over.

Tom surely hoped his talent as a cook would impress Sid. Hell, he hoped anything he did would impress his host because somehow, for some reason, it mattered.

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Tom took his phone, looked at it, and then tucked it back into the back pocket of his jeans. Sid stared at him from across the table. Without really planning for it, they were both solving crosswords or at least pretending to. It looked like an activity Sid liked to indulge in, so Tom had just asked to be part of it.

“When are you going to call Jett?”

Instead of a reply, Tom offered a grimace. “I’m not going to call Jett.”

“Yes, you are going to call Jett.”

“You have no idea what that boy told me.”

“I do have an idea.”

“Of course. April spilled the beans, right? Let me just ask you. Your son isn’t much loved at school, right? He must be the number one snitch wherever he goes. He sure has the training.”

Sid laughed wholeheartedly. “That’s just something he does with me. And he wouldn’t have told me anything if he had thought it was someone’s secret. God knows I’ve never been able to make

him talk when Melinda asked him to lie for her. Good thing I have my methods of keeping track of my children.”

“Then you know,” Tom said curtly.

“He couldn’t have meant all of that,” Sid insisted. He pushed the crosswords aside and stared at Tom. “He’s just a hothead, just like you. I bet he misses you right now.”

“Ha! Jett isn’t like that. He must be so happy that I’m finally out of his hair.”

“What about you? Are you happy being out of his hair?”

“This isn’t about me.”

“Oh, it is all about you. Somehow, you don’t manage to tell your son the most important thing.”

“Oh, really? I told him everything. That he should be responsible, take care of that kid, forget about stupid --”

“Stupid what? Were you going to call my son stupid?” Sid challenged him with his eyes.

Tom pursed his lips. “No, nothing like that. I was talking about Jett’s infatuation with him. April’s not stupid,” he added quickly. He had a feeling that he would get on Sid’s bad side pretty fast by mistakenly saying something bad about his son.

“Good. Because he’s really bright. He’s my pride and joy. Not that Melinda is not that, too. But he’s a tiny smidge above her in my preferences. Just don’t let her know. Ever.”

Tom sighed. “I don’t believe you’re in danger of me saying anything to your daughter. There’s no chance of meeting her, so --”

“Hmm.”

“Why are you always interrupting what I’m saying? It’s a surefire way to jump to conclusions. You do that all the time.”

“Hmm.”

“Stop ‘hmm’-ing at me.”

Sid’s lips curled into a smile. “Hmm.”

“I can take you in a fight. I have at least twenty pounds over you.”

“Make that thirty.”

“Are you calling me fat?”

“No. But you’re a big guy.”

“Exactly. So why do you pick a bone with me all the time?”

“I like many things about you, Tom, but there’s one thing I don’t.”

“Only one? Okay, what is it?”

“That tough shell you’ve built around you. You might think that you’re safe there, but you’re just lonely.”

That gave Tom pause. He grunted and looked away. Lonely. Had he really felt it? Loneliness? When Sid put it like that, yes, he must have felt it, for so long, that it was his best pal or something.

“I have no idea what you’re talking about.”

“All right.”

“Ah, so you’re not going to fight, after all.”

“Don’t worry; I have my strategy.”

“Care to share it?”

“No. It wouldn’t be effective then.”

Sid made a move to pick up the crosswords again, but Tom grabbed the booklet and held it over his head.

“Ha-ha. Very funny,” Sid said dryly. “Do you want me to fight you for it?”

“If you want it, you should come for it.”

Sid stood up quickly, but Tom was ready for that move. He stood up, too, and ran out of the kitchen, with Sid after him.

They fell on the hallways, Sid on top, taking him completely by surprise.

“Did you just jump on my back? How badly do you like crosswords?”

“Not as much as to tease you.”

Tom turned, making Sid roll on one side. “What is it with us and landing in a horizontal position?”

“Do you really have to ask? I think you have the answer.”

Tom turned and stared at Sid. “Why ...” He didn’t know exactly what to say.

“Why what? Why are you here?”

“Really? You invited me.”

“Sure. But it’s the question that you keep asking yourself.”

“Oh, right. You’re a mind reader. I keep on forgetting.”

Sid was beside him, and Tom could feel his body heat, or maybe he just imagined things. Whenever he was this close to Sid, he couldn’t stop what he felt; it was a pull, a sort of longing that soon turned into craving. He couldn’t recall feeling like that toward another person. It was easy to shut down all the memories.

Only that, with Sid, it was impossible. If there was a dam keeping his heart at bay, Sid had all the drilling equipment on his side, starting with that blue gaze that searched deep inside his soul whenever he looked at him like that.

“Tom,” Sid whispered, “thank you for the meal.”

Tom blinked a few times. “We ate a couple of hours ago.”

“Yes. I just thought I should say it before I forget.”

“Why would you forget?”

“Because of all the other things I must thank you for.”

What other things? Tom wanted to ask, but Sid moved quickly and pressed their lips together. It wasn’t fair that only that was needed for him to come undone. He wrapped his arms around Sid, pulling him on top.

Had kisses always been sweet like this? There was something in how their lips touched that made Tom feel like melting on the inside. Water came through, or maybe the dam wasn’t there at all anymore.

Sid pulled back. “The bed. And I’m serious. You can’t stop me. I will --”

Tom put one hand over Sid’s mouth. “I’m coming with you. Don’t fret so much.”

The blue eyes crinkled with amusement. Tom removed his hand.

“With you, I can’t tell. I need to make sure you want it.”

“I want it. I do. With you of all people.”

“You make it sound like it’s something you’re not happy with.”

“It’s not a matter of being happy or unhappy. I don’t know what it is. But it feels like it’s right. Is it?”

“Yes. I’m sure of it. Don’t think of anything else. Just come.” Sid pushed himself up and then offered Tom one hand.

The crossword booklet remained on the floor.

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Sid straddled him and seemed curious with tracing invisible lines on his chest. Tom watched him with unhidden curiosity. “What are you doing?”

“Do you like men’s bodies? As a general rule?”

“My hard cock against your backside right now is not enough proof?”

Sid snorted. “Yes, I can feel it.”

“I thought you were ready to do it.”

“I am. But I need to talk a little about it.”

Tom threw Sid a cursory look. His toes curled against the coverlet. Some people were just cruel. He liked Sid’s body, so lean and tight everywhere. In the past, he had never thought about having a type, but now it looked like he had found one, at least.

Sid was even more attractive without clothes on. Some might have been fooled by his joyous attitude all the time and didn’t believe that there could be a fox hidden under those clothes. His waist was lean, but his shoulders were strong, and Tom liked his arms, so sinewy and firm in how they moved.

He didn’t dare to look down. Staring at Sid’s cock would only add to the torture. “So,” he tried to sound casual, “what do you want to know?”

“Why do you like me? Is it because I’m a guy, and you like guys?”

“Are you, what, insecure?”

“No. Just curious.”

“Funny, you just sounded insecure.”

“From this position, I can reach your balls.”

“Is that a threat?”

“Yeah.”

“Okay, what was the question again? Oh, yes. I like you because of you.”

“So disappointing,” Sid moaned, but Tom could tell he was just playing. “Do better.”

It was a bit difficult to focus while Sid raked his fingers through his chest hair. “Okay. For starters, you’re sexy.”

A snicker was the immediate answer. So like Sid.

“Okay, you’re not sexy. You’re a pain in the butt. You piss me off so much that I feel that I need to set you straight, and the only way to do that is by fucking you.”

“You’re setting me straight by fucking me?”

Tom rolled his eyes. “Just a way of saying. I do like guys. I mean sexually. I think the real question is why you like me. You’ve never fooled around with another man, right?”

“Right. Hence the conundrum. Did you give me the gay or something?”

“Give you the what?”

“Sorry, just a stupid meme that crossed my mind. Or it may be just a joke on the Internet. I can’t really tell the difference. Maybe I should call April --”

Tom just had enough of it. He maneuvered his tormentor swiftly and ended up on top. “Shut up, Sid. You’re not calling your kid. Right now, you’re not April’s dad. You’re the guy I’m going to fuck, okay?”

To his surprise, Sid just nodded thoughtfully. And then, he kissed Tom, and that bone-melting sensation came again in full force. That was more like it.

It took some moving around to find the right position, but in the end, Tom was sure he preferred it like that, facing Sid while fucking him. It made everything feel intimate, complete. And he could also watch Sid’s face and gauge his reaction. Maybe there was a smidge of insecurity there, and Tom wanted to make his lover get rid of it. There was no point in feeling that; Tom really liked Sid, and that was a simple fact.

“You’re a great lover,” Sid praised him breathlessly, as Tom moved steadily, making sure not to thrust too hard or too fast.

Tom just kissed him again. He found it hard to admit that simple words like that made his heart soar, and his chest tightened. It was a form of validation he didn't even know he needed. But now, that he was getting it, he needed it all the more.

Sid kept him close, and they moved like one being. It felt so good; it wasn't just the sex, it was the completeness of whatever it was that he was feeling. Sid's soft murmurs and encouragements were making him just as hot as the tight channel of muscles squeezing his cock. He knew he couldn't last forever. The craving, at least now, was subdued, and with each move, each time he went deeper, he was closer.

Sid coaxed him gently into it. Tom kept steady and allowed himself the pleasure of coming inside that lean body he wanted to hold close like he couldn't recall wanting something.

One minute later, he was on his back, and Sid was all over him. He didn't mind the slightly clumsy manner in which he was manipulated to open up, as well. It looked like Sid preferred the face to face position just as fine.

It was new to him, and a bit embarrassing, to accept being penetrated like that. It wasn't the burn or the slight pain, but the idea that another guy could dominate him. It was all right only because it was Sid and no one else. No matter what he said, Tom knew one simple fact, which was that Sid didn't judge him.

His breath hitched as Sid focused on giving it to him. It felt so good now that Tom could feel his cock twitching again. But now, it had to be about Sid and his need, so he tried to push down the growing arousal.

"Am I hurting you, or you have a toothache?"

Tom opened his eyes and stared at Sid. "No, I just want this to be about you. My cock has a mind of his own."

Sid stared down between them. "How about you rub it while I fuck you?"

"No. It's about you. I just came."

"Do it. I want you to do it."

Tom felt slightly uncomfortable to do that. Not that they hadn't gotten so far already, but simply because he felt exposed. Tentatively, he took his cock and began pumping it. It wasn't hard to get it to full mast; after all, Sid's hammering was doing wonders for it. That kind of arousal was unique.

"Look at me. Don't be ashamed," Sid said softly.

He definitely was a mind reader! Tom grunted, but he opened his eyes. What he saw made him understand; Sid got him. He got him in more ways than one, and that was strange and beautiful at the same time.

“With me. Do you think you can?”

Their heavy breathing mingled. Their rhythms matched. And then it happened, and Tom cursed and praised at the same time.

Sid laughed a little as he pulled out. “I guess this is how you make sure you’re going to sleep until the next morning without even moving from one side to another.”

Tom laughed, too. Sid saw the positive in everything. How marvelous was that?

“So, where do we go from here?”

Sid’s question floated in the room. And it was a very good one.



## *Chapter Six – Where We Go From Here*

“Do you have any idea?” Sid poked him again.

“Why should we go anywhere? We could just stay like this.”

For a while, there was silence. But Tom didn’t hope that would last.

“Not that I don’t like the idea, but we have lives.”

“Ah, so you’re not all about living in the moment?”

“I would like to think a bit about the future. Not that the moment doesn’t have its perks.” Sid ran one hand over Tom’s chest, teasing his nipples in passing.

“I don’t know what to tell you.” It was an honest answer.

“I see.” Sid pushed himself up and then sat on the edge of the bed.

Tom took in the lean back, the slight tension in the shoulder muscles. “What are you thinking of?”

“Is this fleeting? Just a one-time-thing?”

“Obviously not. We’ve done it more than once.”

“Then? What do we do? We can’t keep it a secret from the boys, either. They will have to know eventually.”

Tom sighed. Telling Jett anything wasn’t in the cards. “I don’t see why.”

“I understand.” The words were said in a clipped voice.

Sid took off to the bathroom, without one look back. Tom remained alone with his thoughts, and he realized right away that he didn’t enjoy that company that much. But he didn’t quite know what he could tell Sid. What was it that they had? Was it just sex? The sex was good, no, scratch that, it was fantastic and it was new and exciting, and Tom didn’t want to ruin it by talking about serious stuff.

But Sid saw things differently, and he had all the right in the world to think like that. After all, their sons were in a relationship, and there was also Jett’s complicated situation with a baby and an ex-girlfriend.

A sudden moment of clarity struck him. It wasn’t possible for him to win, not if he wanted to be happy. He would need to put the cards on the table with Sid and decide what was more important, after all.

Debating with himself had never worked well. He still believed that Jett needed to assume responsibility and stay with his baby's mother. But Sid didn't think it was the right choice; he had made it pretty clear, and with that, he had decided to be on the opposite side from him. So, they didn't agree on that. Sid also appeared convinced that Jett and April were in love and that nothing should stay between them.

If he continued to stick to his side of what he believed to be the right thing, he would lose Sid; that was a given. But if he gave in and agreed with Sid, what would follow? What would happen to Jett? To his son, Jay? To Carina? Were young feelings like that really worth that sacrifice? With an annoyed grunt, he pushed himself up. He needed to have a conversation with Sid and set things on the right path, even if it hurt.

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Tom had ended taking a shower alone since it seemed that Sid had taken his fast and now was nowhere in sight. He couldn't have gone out at that hour, so Tom decided to do a bit of an investigation. Eventually, he found himself in front of the so-called forbidden door that stood slightly ajar.

He pushed it open with just two fingers while trying to make as little noise as possible. A short look around the room convinced him that what Sid had told him about the boy band curse was real. The walls were covered in posters. It was a teenager's room, complete with a study desk, a bookcase, and even a computer. Most probably, Sid liked to keep the room ready for April to use whenever he came home to visit.

Sid sat on the bed and seemed lost in thought. He wore casual clothes, and the smell of the earlier shower wafted toward Tom.

"I didn't mean to make you upset."

Sid appeared a bit surprised by the interruption. "You didn't make me upset." A sigh followed. "I've never been with anyone in so long. It's logical for me to ask, at least myself, if it's the real deal or not."

Tom wasn't sure he liked what he heard. On the one hand, it made him happy to hear that Sid considered whatever happened between them more serious than a romp in the hay. On the other, he didn't have an answer.

"What do you want, Tom?"

The question caught him unawares. "I – I'm not sure."

"Be sure. Think about it. Don't talk to me until you know."

"Really? Is that an ultimatum?"

“It’s not one of my habits to go to bed with someone and then treat everything like it’s business as usual. So, I want to hear from you what you think of it all.”

“What do you think?” Tom counter-attacked.

“I think that you should stop trying to protect Jett from love --”

“That’s not what I’m doing!”

“Yes. It is. It’s what you do to yourself, so you strongly believe that it’s the right thing.”

“Your logic astounds me. This is clearly not what I’m doing.”

“Then what? You looked at me and thought I’d be a good lay for a while or something?”

“Again, with the insecurities,” Tom moaned. “How can you be insecure? You’re ... you’re sex on legs.”

Sid turned toward him and quirked an eyebrow.

Tom let out a frustrated groan. “Come on; you know what I mean. You’re a handsome guy. I bet many women have wanted you over the years. It must have been only because you had two kids to look after that you didn’t pick up the signs. You could always date --”

“I don’t date. I’ve only dated one woman in my life.”

*And she’s gone.* Tom completed the statement in his mind. Had he never thought of it the same way? Mary had been the only one for him for a long time. No one else could ever equal her, let alone surpass her. What that what Sid was talking about?

“Okay, so you don’t date. But you could have someone in your life. Now that you no longer have to focus on your kids, and your kids alone, you could remarry.”

Sid shook his head and turned his eyes away. “You just don’t get it. I’ve never stopped focusing on my kids. Even right now, with you, I’ve continued to think of April and his happiness. Well, not all the time, and that makes me feel guilty.”

That was honesty. Tom understood it. “You have no reason to feel guilty. You just allowed yourself a little bit of time to enjoy yourself.”

“And is that all? Nothing but pleasure?”

Tom wanted to have a smart answer for that. Instead, he changed the topic. “I’m not shielding Jett from happiness. It’s not what I’m doing. Sometimes, in life, we need to choose the right thing, even if it hurts.”

“And you think that Jett giving up on April is the right thing? If Jett ever follows your advice, he’ll be in deep shit.”

That had to be the first four-letter-word he had heard from Sid since they had met. It took him by surprise. “He will be a man who lives responsibly.”

“Of course, of course.” Sid was rubbing his hands together. “It’s what you think.”

“Why do you keep antagonizing me? April will find someone else.”

“No, he won’t. Not anyone like Jett, I’m sure.”

Tom looked around the room, his mind frantically searching for a way to reach common ground. His eyes fell on the bookcase and noticed a bright-colored cover. In two steps, he was there, picking the book. He didn’t need to open it to know that it had to be some romance novel. “Life is not like in these books,” he pointed out.

“Not if you choose so,” Sid shot back.

They were having a fight. They weren’t having a calm conversation about it, and the worst part was that they danced around the real topic. “What do you want, Sid?”

“Funny you’re asking that.”

“I know you asked me first, but I think you must know perfectly well what you want or else you wouldn’t have asked me. So, out with it. What do you want?”

Sid looked straight at him. His gaze was firm, and Tom found himself incapable of looking away.

“What I want is simple. I want you to let Jett and April alone so that they can have their happiness.”

“Ha!”

“And I want you to admit that this isn’t just some fling, whatever we have. That you think of us beyond these days together, and that, next time you’re on leave, you’ll come here, back home to me.”

Tom stood there, dumbstruck. All right, so too much honesty was bad. He felt as if the air had been knocked out of his lungs, and he couldn’t even see anything clear in front of his eyes. Without a word, he stormed out of the room.

Steps followed behind him, and Sid caught his arm, making him stop. “What? You can’t see the truth for your stubbornness?”

“What truth?” Tom turned toward Sid, his hands made into fists. “We’ve only had a bit of fun, that’s all, Sid.”

Sid seemed taken aback by his conviction. “Wow. Then I must have gotten it all wrong.”

Tom set his jaw hard. “Believing in fleeting things like happiness doesn’t work. Yes, I’m shielding Jett. From disappointment. He might think April is the love of his life or whatever, but if he does the right thing, he will still have something! Something to make him proud, to make him stand tall, as a man!”

“Is that so? You want him to be a coward, so you don’t want him to walk forward? Just like you?”

Tom blinked hard a few times. This time around, he wanted to strangle Sid, but not in the fun way. “It’s all so easy for you,” he said through his teeth. “You’re like one of those hippies in touch with the universe or whatever. You probably think your wife is now in a better place, and the world has come round, and everything happens for a reason, but I don’t! My wife is dead. Forgive me if I don’t think of her as being a star in the sky or some other stupid mumbo jumbo!”

He was breathing heavily at the end of his tirade. Sid made a move to touch him, but Tom jerked away.

“Do you really think it was easy for me to lose my Catherine? To live with her absence?” Sid asked in a soft voice.

“You surely look like you’ve taken it well. I haven’t. I’m not over it, and I’ll never be.”

The need to run was too strong. With large, heavy steps, Tom walked away, out of the house. He stopped on the stairs, not knowing what to do. It had been a stupid idea to come here. The door opened behind him, and a warm hand squeezed his shoulder.

“I think there are some things you should know about me. Because it definitely looks like you got me all wrong.”

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Tom waited for Sid to prepare some tea. He wasn’t sure he could handle more honest conversation, but he was indebted to Sid for taking him in. The least he could do was to listen for a while.

Sid placed the cups of tea on the table. For a few moments, he looked at his hands and said nothing, seemingly lost in thought. “When I lost Catherine, I lost myself.”

Tom shifted in his chair but said nothing. He knew how that felt, how it hurt.

“It was an accident that killed her, and it was so sudden that I was stunned. Luckily, I had family that took care of the funeral, because those days are all a blur to me even now. I couldn’t imagine my life without her. I couldn’t even grieve properly. To keep myself going, I self-medicated, and, let’s just say, that a certain inability to count pills brought me to a bad place, and fast.”

Tom remained silent.

“I had to be hospitalized and then meet a grief counselor on most days. A relative took Melinda and April and looked after them while I was there. You see? The world wasn’t round and complete at all. In my grief, I let down my children.”

Tom rubbed his face. That was a face of Sid he hadn’t known, and it only made him understand better why he liked the man so much. His appearance was pleasant and attractive, but there was something more profound than the surface that defined him.

“She kept telling me this thing. That what we lost, we could have again.”

“And that helped you? To heal?”

“I wanted to strangle her.” Sid chuckled. “I couldn’t bear to see her face. And then, one day, she changed tack with me and told me that my children needed me and that they now had just one parent. She told me some other words, but I won’t recite them since they were not at all flattering for me. In my grief, I had ended up selfish and self-destructive.”

“I didn’t know.”

“It’s okay. How could you? We haven’t really talked much since we met. Do you know why I favor April just a smidge over Melinda?”

“Because he’s the bright one?”

Sid smiled. “No. We’ve been close always, but in families with more than one child, parents tend to have their favorites. April was his mother’s boy, while Melinda was my girl. We used to joke about that all the time. With the counselor’s help, I dragged myself out of the slump I had pushed myself into. So I got better and then went to take my kids home.”

“From your relative?”

“Yes. I felt guilty, and I barely knew what to say, so in the end, when we were all back home, I stood in front of them and asked them to forgive me. Melinda shouted at me and then she ran to her room. Just to make it clear, I’ve never judged her for it. I had lost my wife, but she had lost her mother, too. I should have been there for them.”

“What about April?”

Sid sighed and pushed the balls of his hands against his eyes. “I guess that’s when something truly meaningful happened in my life. He came to me and took my hand, and he said, a child of thirteen, can you imagine? He said, ‘Dad, it’s okay, you still have me’. He was thinking of me, of what I felt, I, the father who had let him down. And I guess that’s why, secretly, I love him just a little more.”

Tom covered his face with both hands. There, in front of him, stood a man who wasn’t ashamed to admit that he had been weak when he should have been strong.

“So that’s my story. I still grieve my wife, too, but she wouldn’t want me alone and unhappy; I’m sure of it. I want to move forward. What do you want, Tom?”

For long seconds, he remained there, not saying a word. “I --” he stuttered. He stood up abruptly and began pacing the room. “How could you – No, that’s not the right – Oh, damn.”

“I didn’t hear your story. Maybe it would help me understand you, too.”

“I thought I was doing the right thing!” he blurted out.

“I am sure of that. I am sure that you are a good man, Tom,” Sid said softly.

Tom shook his head; it was like a storm of thoughts was threatening to take over his mind, and he couldn’t pick the right one.

“What happened to your wife?” Sid asked in a kind voice.

“Cancer.” He said the words through his teeth. “She suffered for a while.”

“You must have suffered a lot,” Sid said. “And you couldn’t allow yourself to show it, right?”

Tom just nodded; he couldn’t speak, so maybe it was for the better that Sid was putting words into his mouth. They were correct, after all.

“How did Jett take that? Your strength?”

He just couldn’t bear it. He needed out. Was it wrong that he wanted – no, that he needed – to be the strong one? “I don’t know,” he whispered.

“It’s all right, Tom. I’m not judging you at all so that you know. How come Jett didn’t go to live with you?”

“I,” he cleared his throat, “I told him I needed to go back to my base and asked him to come with me. But he refused, and I didn’t have time for that.”

“Don’t lie to yourself.”

“All right.” Another deep breath. One step at a time. “I didn’t know what to do. I didn’t want him to see me --” He choked on his own words.

“Weak?”

A simple nod was all he could manage.

“I understand.”

“How can you understand?” It was wrong to explode like that, but he didn’t know what else to do. “You had the courage to show your kids that you were ... I don’t know!”

“There is no right and wrong here. Or there is both right and wrong. Just listen to me for a while, and you can do whatever you want with what I’m telling you. Was I right to hurt so much after losing my wife? Yes. But was it wrong to wallow in my pain and forget about my kids, what they were going through? Hell yes. And you,” Sid made a small pause, “you were the same. You were right to want to be strong for Jett. But also wrong for not letting him see that you were hurting, too.”

Small, shallow breaths made his entire body tremble. “Has everyone ever told you no one likes a know-it-all?”

The reply was a small chuckle. “Yes. It was actually my wife, Catherine, who often told me I was annoying, always having something to say about everything.”

Tom felt a little like laughing. So it was possible, after all, to like Sid so much and still find him a bit annoying. But it was the right kind of annoyance he felt if he could name it that. Words came easier. “For so long, my life’s been on an automatic path,” he found himself saying. “I guess it was easier.”

“And still, you cared about your son, and you still care. It’s easier to let go than you think, Tom. You know, of all those things that don’t really help us.”

“Is it, really?”

They looked at each other, and Tom found himself reflected in Sid’s blue eyes. He liked what he saw; it seemed like Sid did like him, after all.

“Yes, it is. Of course, we always tend to believe that being right is important. But guess what? There’s no hole in the sky if you choose to do things differently.”

“What should I do, then?” Tom asked, in all honesty.

“Tell Jett what you really feel. He will listen.”

“Funny, I thought you would just pester me again about letting Jett be with April.”



Sid just shook his head slowly. Then he stood up and came to him. The hug felt good, and Tom took one deep breath and held Sid close, inhaling his scent.

“I will still pester you about Jett and April.”

Good thing Sid didn’t want to see him cry only so that he could prove himself right and Tom wrong. It was better to laugh. “Okay. Pester me all you want.”

“Better?” Sid asked as he pulled away.

Tom stopped him. “It will be soon.”

When their lips touched, he really felt it, like a balm on his soul. He had a lot of amends to do with Jett. God knew he didn’t know where to start, but it was clear as day all that he wanted to do was to make things right. And not the kind of right he had been obsessing over for so long, but the right kind of right.

“Have you ever thought of becoming a psychologist?” Tom asked after their kiss turned into a warm hug.

“No. I just had my fair share of them, I guess. As much as you might think that I enjoy torturing you, that’s not it. It’s actually quite painful and risky. I couldn’t tell whether you would be out the door wanting to have nothing to do with me ever again, or you would stay and listen. Thank you for choosing the second.”

Tom chuckled. “And I thought that, in your arrogance, you would have believed that you got me well cornered.”

“It’s just a mask I’m wearing, this arrogance. Inside, I’m often scared shitless. But it’s fine because I can live with it.”

“What would you be scared of?”

“Mainly, of you leaving without me managing to get the truth out of you.”

“The truth, huh? What truth?”

“Right. I still haven’t heard it from you. What do you want, Tom?”

“Hmm, should I tell you, or should I torture you a little?”

“Not funny,” Sid warned.

“All right. Then I want to talk to Jett, and I want him to be happy.”

“That’s it?”

“What could be more? The selfless being that you are, you must have only cared about me making peace with my kid.”

“You are so not funny,” Sid said louder this time.

Tom held him close as Sid struggled to get out of his arms. “Of course, there is also something else.”

“Well?” Sid poked him with one finger well-aimed between the ribs.

Tom winced. “I think I like you very much, Mr. Summer.”

“Mr. Summer?”

“I also want to make it official. And I think it would be a great idea if you planned your leave so that it matches mine and maybe we could go on vacation sometime.”

“It’s too late to plan anything.”

“This year, yes. But what about the next?”

Sid didn’t reply to that, but he kissed him instead. Maybe, after all, things weren’t as complicated as he always thought them to be.

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They were like a well-oiled machine. Tom was sure that all that theory about soulmates had to have a small grain of truth in it, not for some mystical reasons, but because, simply put, some people just fit.

He would have expected to become bothersome for Sid to have someone else around. But after two weeks spent together, there was no sign of any of them getting too annoyed with the other. Not that they didn’t have their small squabbles, such as where the tall glasses needed to go. Those moments just made the thing they had just all the closer to an ideal relationship.

“You know, we still haven’t called April and Jett,” Sid said, waking him from his daydreaming.

“We have time. After we tell them, all this secrecy will disappear, and, who knows? Maybe the sex will become boring.”

Sid laughed out loud. “I have a couple of ideas on how to spice things up in the bedroom. I’m just waiting for all that boredom to come already.”

“Oh, really? What ideas? Care to share?”

“No way. I’m keeping them for rainy days.”

“Then, I should check the weather forecast.”

“I didn’t know you were such a funny guy.”

“And if you knew? What would you have done differently?”

“I don’t know. Maybe I would have bought a funny hat for you.”

“Do I look like the type who would wear a funny hat?”

“Not really.”

“See?” Tom pulled Sid close and kissed him. “I kind of like this topless fashion. Should I join you?”

Sid pushed him playfully. “As you can see, I’m wearing an apron. I’m not completely topless. But you can be. For some reason, I like staring at your naked chest. Now I’m off to the kitchen. Don’t forget to come to distract me with your topless fashion.”

With a small laugh, Sid walked away. Tom went for a quick shower and then put on an old pair of jeans, leaving the t-shirt on the bed. After all, he wanted nothing but to distract Sid in the kitchen.

“Could you check the pantry for some extra flour?” Sid asked the moment he was in.

Sid moved his hips to the rhythm on the radio, while his hands were busy.

“Ay, ay, sir,” Tom replied.

He placed the flour on the table and then turned to check the list of supplies on the fridge. The music on the radio broke into a happy beat. Sid’s happy humming made him smile. So far, he hadn’t done much distracting Sid, so it was a good moment to work on that.

He caught Sid from the waist and buried his face into his nape. Sid responded by leaning into him.

“Mr. Huntsman?!”

Tom jumped. What the hell? In the kitchen door stood April, his big green eyes as large as saucers, his jaw slack. And for some reason, there was a cake on the floor, Tom noticed as an afterthought.

## *Chapter Seven – Worth Fixing*

“April!” Sid exclaimed, turning rigid in Tom’s arms, obviously in shock over having his son walking on them like that. “What are you doing home?”

“Really, dad?” April seemed frantic, and his eyes were making rounds, trying to land on something, most probably other than his half-naked dad and his dad’s boyfriend.

Tom was the first to shake off the shock. It was an emergency, and he had been born ready for that kind of stuff. The first thing he needed to do was to turn the music off. Maybe Sid and April would no longer feel the need to communicate through shouts once there was no background noise.

As soon as the music died, Sid spurred into action. With automatic gestures, he took off his apron and was out the door. Tom watched him and April, waiting for any reaction and ready to intervene. But April just followed his dad out of the kitchen, so Tom hurried after them, too, carefully jumping over the destroyed cake.

Sid grabbed a t-shirt and got dressed fast, while his face remained as unmovable as stone. Getting dressed for a conversation of that magnitude was only normal, Tom thought and hurried to the bedroom so he could grab something to wear. Unlike Sid, he wasn’t comfortable with having clothes spread all over the place.

Now that wasn’t how they were supposed to tell the kids. Tom rubbed his face; what would Jett think now? The moment April would finish talking to his dad, he would call Jett, without a doubt. Damn, they should have opened that topic with the boys already; now, as much as Tom disliked the idea, they would be judged for their lapse in rational thinking by a boy barely out of his teens.

He hurried back to the living room, where the two parties appeared to be already engaged in conversation. April had sunken into one of the armchairs, and Sid stood on the sofa, his hands brought together, his fingers moving nervously. Tom felt a bit fidgety, too, so he quickly sat on the sofa, next to Sid; he stole one look at April, and he then moved his eyes away. Of course, the kid had a right to judge them now. All the time Tom had told him to leave Jett alone now, most probably, seemed like a farce.

“Does that mean that now Jett and I are brothers?”

Tom frowned and stared for a moment at April. His big bright eyes shone, and his entire face was an illustration of utter shock. But, hell, was that the first thing he worried about? “Are you sure he’s the bright one?” he asked, turning toward Sid.

Sid seemed to have let go of some of his nervousness, because this time, he chuckled and let out a small sigh. “He’s just joking. I suppose it’s a coping mechanism since he, well, walked in on us like this.”

Yeah, that made sense. Tom agreed with a short grunt. Then they had a chance; maybe April didn’t feel all that judgmental if the only thing he worried about right now was whether he and Jett were brothers, now that their fathers were –

Tom wouldn’t think right now about what he and Sid had been doing these last two weeks. Especially after they had come to an agreement about where things stood between them, they had been busy, busy, busy. And what had they been busy doing? He didn’t want April to find out, or even ask.

“April, ah, damn, how do I start?”

Tom wanted to kiss Sid right now. As ready as he felt to handle the situation head-on, it was good that Sid was taking the reins. After all, he had a better chance at making things right with his boy, which meant that Tom wasn’t at all a coward, and all the distress he felt right now had nothing to do with how guilty he actually felt. He stood straight as a rod, hands resting on his knees, and watched April closely. As long as he managed to put on a brave face, the enemy wouldn’t be able to smell fear on him.

April seemed to know better than to look at him. He made himself small in the armchair. “I’m not mad or anything, dad. Just frigging surprised is all.”

Sid laughed. “All right. I suppose I’m glad that you’re not mad. And this,” he gestured between himself and Tom, “doesn’t make Jett and you brothers. Just so that you don’t worry.”

“Thanks,” April murmured. For a second, Tom thought that the kid would look at him, but April continued to focus his attention on his dad.

“Hmm,” Sid began, “you see, son, we didn’t mean any of this to happen. It just did.”

Oh, and how many things happened and they had meant them to happen, Tom thought, feeling his resolve to be tough getting weaker. But he trusted Sid and his abilities to make this situation right.

“Okay,” April replied in a meek voice.

By how his eyes were darting sideways and the height of his cheeks were coloring slightly, Tom could tell that April was already picturing in his mind what his dad and his boyfriend’s dad had been doing all this time.

Sid stole a quick look at him, and Tom read it quickly. It was time for him to step up, too. “It’s true.”

April turned his head fast to look at him. The color of his cheeks was now turning into a brighter red. “How can you be against Jett and me when you --” he sputtered. All the courage he might have had looked like it was draining away.

Tom drew a small, inaudible breath. So far, all they had managed was to make April feel embarrassed for walking in on them.

“He’s not,” Sid intervened, after another short look at Tom. “I’ve been working Tom up to gather the courage to talk to Jett for the last few days.”

Oh, right. When had that happened exactly? Tom frowned as he tried to recall that stuff. A small warning from Sid’s eyes made him keep his mouth. Maybe Sid had pestered him a few times.

“The last few days? But Jett’s dad has been away from home for two weeks! What did you two do all this time --”

All right, so April really was putting two and two together. That was enough to make him sweat. Tom adjusted his position, while Sid fidgeted in his place on the sofa.

April’s face was now red as a beet. He was probably conscious of it because he buried it into his hands. “I can’t believe it,” he moaned. “Dad, did you even ever --”

Oh, the big question. Tom knew he needed to make things clear. “Son, don’t question your father like this.” Whatever he and Sid were doing, it wasn’t wrong. April needed to see that and pay his parent proper respect.

“Don’t call me ‘son’,” April protested. “You’re not my dad. Oh, wait, but if you marry my dad, oh, no --”

“April, April, just let us explain, okay? Tom, let me handle this.”

Good. So Sid was still the braver one, not that Tom cared to admit it. Maybe he had too brutish manners of handling delicate stuff like that. But someone needed to make April stop thinking of certain activities his dad and Tom must have – certainly had – indulged in.

“All right,” Tom admitted, a bit harsher than he intended. By how April recoiled in his seat, he must have been misunderstood. But Sid knew what he meant, and that mattered the most.

“I’ve been alone for many years,” Sid started. “Not alone-alone, since I had you and Melinda, but I haven’t had a partner in so long.”

Tom let out a small breath; maybe it was the same he had been keeping in since the beginning of that conversation. He didn’t know exactly.

“I’ve never thought of that,” April replied. “I had no idea you were lonely.”

“I wasn’t lonely, even if I was alone,” Sid explained. “But you left for college, and I guess that sentiment eventually began to get to me.”

“I’m sorry, dad.”

Of course, April was a good kid, and he loved his dad. Tom had an inkling that Jett wouldn’t be as accommodating and pleasant once he learned what his dad and Sid had been up to lately. And by up, he meant -- No. He wouldn’t go there.

“Are you serious about my dad?”

That question was aimed at him. The big green eyes were now set on him like they were actually asking something else. Maybe the kid thought Tom wanted to steal his dad or something. Survival instincts kicked in. “This kid has some nerve,” he said the first thing that came to his mind.

“He has a right to know.” Sid justified April’s question right away. “No, it’s not something --”

*What? It’s not something what?* “Yeah, it’s serious.” Tom looked at Sid, and a surprised smile was the immediate response. But Tom had been inches from confessing like a teenager only like one hundred times already. Sid should have known the truth by now, or maybe he was trying to appease April and any worries the kid must have had about having his dad stolen away from him.

“It is?” Sid and April uttered the words in unison.

“Yeah, it is,” Tom said the words with all the confidence he could muster. Oh, he would have a little conversation with Sid about that. Was it about insecurities again, or did the man really need a full-blown confession?

“All right, all right, this is a bit too much for me. Mr. Huntsman, why haven’t you called to talk to Jett all this time?” April questioned him, asking quite a logical question.

“Call me Tom.” April straightened up in his armchair again. Damn, the kid was really jumpy. Tom needed to make sure April got a little more relaxed in his presence. “Your dad’s been bugging me for days to do that. I was going to.” It was only fair to spare Sid at least of some of the accusations that perhaps were on the tip of April’s tongue. If he admitted he was the only guilty one, then things would be fine.

April’s eyes became a bit worried and sad. “Jett is ... He’s upset. Big time.”

Upset? About what? After all, Jett had won that fight. “For what? Not having his way?” he asked with a snort.

“Losing you, I guess,” April said back, and his green eyes were filled with honesty.

Now that was something new. Tom swallowed hard. A gentle touch on his arm let him know Sid was beside him. "I told you as much. It wasn't possible for Jett not to feel a thing for you, his father."

That had been another topic of conversation that they hadn't quite agreed on. "You did tell me," Tom admitted, but not without setting his jaw hard.

"Jett would talk to you if you made the first step," April said. "And now, since you don't have anything against us ... I mean, do you still have something against us?"

"No," Tom said sharply. "And I just wanted Jett to have a simple and happy life, nothing else." Even if Sid was right and April was right, and the entire universe was right, and he was the only one who was wrong, that didn't mean that he would just lay down and let everyone walk all over him. And he was pretty sure he would get an earful from Sid later, but it was only a preservation instinct that had him react that way.

"But he was happy with me," April said softly, looking down, and much vulnerable in his large armchair.

"Things are more complicated than they look, pumpkin. Grownups have their hang-ups, too. It's not easy --" Sid hurried to Tom's defense.

"I didn't want Jett to feel caught like me between two worlds," Tom explained. As much as he loved Sid for taking his side, he needed to own up to his own opinions and mistakes.

"Was the same thing happening to you, dad? Being caught between two worlds?" April asked, his eyes set on his father.

"No," Sid replied right away. "It was, um," he ran one hand through his salt and pepper hair, "rather a surprise." Oh, and what a surprise, Tom mused. "Let's just leave it at that," Sid added quickly. "I believe there's a bit of a mess in the kitchen that needs tending to. Also, I should finish preparing dinner."

Ah, so he was running away, after all. It was funny to see Sid a bit flustered over having to confess to his son that he had a thing with another man; Tom made a mental note to tease him a bit later.

"Sorry about dropping the cake," April said softly. "It was supposed to be a surprise."

"I suppose it was a surprise, no matter how you look at it. But don't worry about the cake. I'll whip out some dessert, too." Sid seemed to get back in charge again, and Tom liked the show he was putting on. There were many things Sid solved with food, and Tom didn't mind that one bit.

"No need to," April said quickly. "I shouldn't stay."



“Nonsense. You’re home now, and you’ll stay here. Did you want to visit over the weekend?” Sid inquired.

“Yeah, something like that. Jett took off somewhere with Zane --”

What? Jett had left home? “Did he leave his child alone?” Tom intervened.

“Jay is with Carina,” April pointed out.

“You both left a woman and her child all by themselves?” Kids today. Tom felt a bit of righteousness getting back to him.

It was Sid who quickly intervened, this time to save his son. “I believe Carina is old enough to be on her own for a couple of days, Tom. Stop being so overprotective.”

Well, that wasn’t such an easy thing to let go of. “I shouldn’t have left,” Tom said under his breath.

“They’re all good kids,” Sid said calmly. “April, Jett, Carina, and even little Jay.”

“They need someone to watch over them.” Tom was pretty sure of that. They were too carefree, these kids.

“And? Where did Jett go with his friend?” Tom asked April directly.

“I’m not sure. He was so upset that he just wanted, I don’t know, some time alone.”

Some time alone. Why did Tom find it all too familiar?

“Like someone else we know,” Sid replied with a small snort. “All right, guys. I have a dinner to prepare. April, I don’t even want to hear about you going back. You’re spending the weekend with us.”

“But won’t I be in your way?” April asked.

“You could never be.” Sid ruffled his son’s hair. “It’s so seldom that I have you home, with me, lately. Let me spoil you a little.”

“But, you’re not alone, dad.” April pointed with a small gesture at Tom.

“It’s all fine by me,” Tom replied hurriedly. Now it was a good time to make some amends, even if he didn’t start with Jett. “And it’s a good occasion to get to know you better, April.”

“Should I call Jett and tell him --” April started.

“It’s better if I talked to him in person,” Tom replied. “And let him have his time out with Zane.”

“Do you know Zane, Mr. Huntsman?”

“Tom. Yes, I do. I know more about my son’s life than he might think.”

He knew Zane as the best friend, and Carina as the best girlfriend, and Jett’s favorite food, favorite music, and even favorite color. But maybe, just maybe, as Sid had already pointed out, he needed to let Jett know that he knew all those things.

Sid was out of the living room, on his way to the kitchen, obviously determined to cook and put everyone at ease.

And that meant that he was all alone with April. It was time to make good on his promise. “So, what did you say you study?” That sounded like an interrogation, but it wasn’t. Maybe he needed to work a little on his delivery speech, too.

“Computers,” came the weak reply.

Tom offered April a reassuring smile. He wasn’t that great with words, but he could smile. Sid had taught him that, and it did come naturally now. It also seemed to have the desired effect because April smiled back, even if it was just a small and unsure movement of the lips.

“Jett was never the studious type,” Tom started.

April giggled, and then he covered his face quickly. “I guess he’s not that much into books and stuff.”

“I can’t blame him,” Tom explained. “We’re all men of action in our family.”

April watched him with big wide eyes. Maybe just as with the dad, Tom could make the son warm up to him some if he told some war stories.

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Sid appeared rather stiff as he called for them to join him at the dinner table, and Tom noticed right away. Alone with his thoughts, Sid might have gone over whatever was happening between the two of them and still felt guilty toward April. That was something for both of them to work through, but it would be later. For the moment, it seemed like a wise idea to play along. As Sid asked stiffly how they found the food, he offered an equally wooden reply. Then he asked for the salt with all the ‘please’ and ‘thank you’ imposed by the situation, and Sid offered it with a correct ‘you’re welcome’. It had to be the quietest dinner that had ever happened in that house in a long time.

“You don’t have to be like this for my sake,” April blurted out, interrupting the unbearable silence.

“Like this, how?” Sid asked his son, quirked an eyebrow.

“You know,” April replied right away. “Like you haven’t, err, um, like you didn’t, ah, like you don’t know each other!”

“You don’t have to shout each phrase,” Sid said sternly and put his fork down.

Tom did find the entire exchange a bit funny, although he understood the source of Sid’s discomfort.

“Sorry.” April looked down and a tiny bit embarrassed. Yeah, he was a good kid. “I never thought I would sit at the same table as my dad’s boyfriend.”

“Boyfriend.” Sid smiled, and Tom’s heart made a quick leap as he watched him.

“I have no idea what’s the right word,” April said under his breath as he examined the food on his plate. “Lover?”

“That sounds sort of old-fashioned,” Sid commented.

“We’re partners, son. How’s that?” Tom cursed at himself internally for using his usual harsh tone.

April didn’t appear as put off by it, though. “Partners, okay,” he said with a nod.

Now that the cat was out of the bag, Tom needed to consider how and when to tell Jett everything. “I am going to tell Jett everything myself. So I’d appreciate it if you didn’t call him,” he pointed his request at April.

“No chance of that. I think he went to an area where the signal is poor. Plus, it seemed like he didn’t want to be disturbed.”

Tom smiled. It looked like April had managed to get Jett during their short time together. “You understand my son pretty well.”

“They’ve been living like boyfriends for several weeks now. Although April still didn’t find the courage to tell Jett a pretty big secret,” Sid said, and it looked like the atmosphere was getting a bit warmer.

“Dad!” April protested right away.

Tom quirked an eyebrow and stared at April. The boy appeared flustered, all of a sudden.

“Do you use grenades and stuff?” April asked and looked at Tom.

How was that the kid’s mind worked? “Grenades?” Tom looked at Sid for some additional explanation.

“Way to deflect, April,” Sid said in a stern voice. “April and Jett have known each other for many years.”

Now that was a bit of a surprise. “Really?” Tom asked, and he turned his attention to April right away.

“It was that summer,” Sid explained.

That summer. He knew very well what Sid meant by that. Tom grunted instead of saying anything.

“They found some common ground, I believe,” Sid continued. “Like us.”

And that, indeed, explained many things. Still, the only answer he could offer was another grunt. His entire range of human reactions was reduced to that when he had to think of his feelings.

“Only that April,” Sid stopped for a moment and let out a small sigh, “told Jett at that time that he was called Theo.”

“Theo,” Tom said slowly. That sounded familiar. For sure, Jett had mentioned that name, but when? “Theo, Theo, Theo,” he said the name, as his mind focused on the slippery memory. Then he snapped his fingers. “The missing boy!”

“The missing boy?” Sid and April both asked in surprise.

“Jett kept pestering me at that time about how one would go about finding a missing person. My mind wasn’t quite on how to help him find such a person. But he mentioned the name many times at the end of that summer. For a while, I thought it could be some imaginary friend. And you two just met again?” Tom asked.

“By accident,” April admitted, “yes.”

“And didn’t he remember you?” By how much Jett had pestered him about that Theo boy, Tom would have expected Jett to see some resemblance in April. That was strange.

“He thought I looked like someone he knew. But I told him that no, I wasn’t Theo.” April’s voice grew so faint that Tom and Sid leaned over the table to hear him.

“Then you should tell him,” Tom said solemnly.

“Exactly what I told him,” Sid said.

“Great. Now no one’s on my side,” April complained.

“On this topic, I’m not, not the way you want me to be, at least,” Sid replied. “I think it’s long overdue, April. Not telling him is the wrong thing to do.”

“All right, I will,” April promised.

“Just curious,” Tom started, “why did you choose not to tell him?”

“I thought he would kick my ass,” April replied promptly.

“They had a bit of a falling out,” Sid explained. “They didn’t part as friends that summer, although April has had a crush on Jett ever since.”

“Dad!” April moaned. He was such a daddy’s boy, Tom mused.

“Funny thing, I thought Jett, too, might have had a crush on his imaginary friend. He was talking about him way too much to be only friendship, although, at that age, one can never know. Kids obsess over so many things. I believe the distraction was good, even if it lasted so little.” At the time, it had been good for Jett to be distracted by anything, including some friend Tom hadn’t really thought he existed in the first place.

“I will tell him,” April said softly. “Just don’t give me away, please,” he begged.

“I would never do that,” Sid promised.

“And it’s not my job to do that either, so it’s all fine by me. God knows I have my own secrets to tell,” Tom added.

Now that had been a hell of a dinner. Tom had had no idea about Jett’s and April’s shared past. But now he could see it, the unbreakable bond that existed between the two boys. And he understood why Sid had been so adamant about Jett and April having real feelings for one another.

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“So, our sons,” Tom said with a strained smile as soon as they were alone. “Why didn’t you say anything?”

Sid seemed a bit embarrassed. He ran his hands through his short hair, and Tom felt a small familiar jolt. He liked to do that, too, and then kiss Sid.

“It was April’s secret. It would have been wrong to say anything before he finally decided to reveal it all to his boyfriend.”

“It could have explained some things,” Tom added. “Do you think April is okay? With us, I mean?”

Sid nodded. “I think so. I still feel sort of strange, but now that he knows it, that we’re together, I’m fine.”

“Okay. Now, do you care to tell me why you were so wishy-washy about us?” Tom came dangerously close, but Sid didn’t back down and stared at his lips as if he needed to focus on Tom’s words to hear them.

“Wishy-washy?”

“Well, if I hadn’t been present, you would have told April that we’re not serious. Why’s that, Sid?” Sid didn’t reply. Tom felt a small shard of ice going slowly through his heart. Could it be that Sid was having second thoughts? After all, he was a straight man who had just happened to have a gay experience. Maybe after two weeks with Tom and going through the shock of having to admit to everything in front of his son – his gay son – he now saw things in a different light.

“Why don’t you say anything?” He didn’t want to beg, but that was how his words came out. He was no longer in charge of them. “Is it something that still needs fixing? In me? Well, damn you, Sid, just put in a bit of work and fix me if that’s what you think!”

He was about to move away when Sid caught him into his arms and hid his face into the crook of his shoulder. “I love your smell,” the muffled words came.

“I’m glad, what can I say,” Tom mumbled, although he felt the need to grab Sid and shake him.

“We’re really doing this, right?”

“What?”

“Once the kids know, there’s no turning back.”

“Why would it ever be a turning back? Wasn’t I clear these two weeks? I want to be with you, Sid.”

Sid moved and then looked him in the eye. “There’s nothing that I need to fix in you, Tom.”

“Oh, so I’m not worth fixing now?” Tom revolted. He didn’t understand one thing about what Sid thought or wanted.

“That was not what I said, you big oaf. What I meant is that I think that, for me, you’re kind of perfect.”

What? Tom couldn’t quite believe his ears.

“I know it’s only been two weeks, but sometimes, I think you just know, you know?”

“Know what?” Tom asked carefully.

Sid looked straight at him. “Tom Huntsman, I think it’s safe to say that I --”

Tom grinned. He shut Sid up with a kiss.

“Hey, I wanted to say is --” Sid protested.

“That I love you,” Tom completed the sentence.

“No,” Sid insisted. “I love you,” he said, pointing at himself.

“Well, I beat you to it. I said it first. What are you going to do?”

“Sneaky!” Sid exclaimed. “I might want to get into a fight with you.”

“You don’t have to. We love each other.” That was such a liberating thing to say.

“Yes, but I heard makeup sex is everything, as young people say today.”

“Well, I’m sorry, but it won’t happen now. We will get into a fight someday, don’t worry about it. Then we’ll see just how good makeup sex is between two guys like us.”

“Promise, and I’ll forgive you for stealing my right to confess first.”

“I promise.” Tom wasn’t exactly sure how he would honor that promise since, right now, he felt so happy, but maybe he could insist on putting the tallest glasses the farthest in the back until Sid got mad at him.

## *Epilogue*

*Six years later*

“Are you ready?”

Tom grunted in reply. Some things never changed, and that included his unavailability to talk when he felt nervous for some reason. He continued to struggle with his bow tie, although he was pretty sure the damned thing refused to sit straight, most probably because it hated him, as inanimate as it was.

“You look perfect, dad,” Jett added.

Apparently, Jett didn’t care to read the signs and leave him alone already. He turned and stared at his son, but Jett ignored him and got closer. With steady moves, he fixed the bow tie for him.

“There,” he added. “Don’t tell me you’re nervous.”

Jett had changed so much during the last years that Tom sometimes thought that time did fly, and only the day before, he must have worried about his son not being able to live a proper life. But, right now, when Tom looked at his boy, he had every reason to be proud. Jett wore his hair short now, and with the long hair, the boy had gone, too, leaving the man to take his place. The tailored suit looked good on him.

In the end, it looked like Tom had worried for nothing. Jett ran a security company and made good money with it, his husband was a computer engineer, while his son, Jay, was growing every day, and he seemed to be as much as his father and grandfather as a kid could be. Of course, that meant that he was starting his very rambunctious phase. Tom knew all about it, and, this time, he thought he was ready.

The kid’s mom, Carina, lived close to Jett and April, and that was a blessing. The husband she had gotten was too good-natured to handle such an energetic kid. That was a cause for Jay to come with a different ‘dad of the week’ award all the time, depending on who gave in the most to his demands. It didn’t matter. Tom knew who Jay loved the most of all his dads. It was April. But he would never disclose that secret to Jett.

“Hey, earth to dad,” Jett called for him. “Oh God, you really are nervous.”

Tom grimaced. “I’m not nervous, stop talking like that.”

“Seriously, what’s the worst that can happen? He won’t say ‘no’ at this point.”

Tom grunted. “I’m not nervous, son. I’ve been through this before. Only that now, I know what I’m getting into.”



Jett stood there, baffled for a second, and then he started laughing. “I keep on forgetting how Sid taught you how to be funny. That was a joke, right?”

Tom offered a thin smile in return. “Maybe.” Inside, he was already laughing.

“You know, it was a surprise when you two told us that you’re going to tie the knot, after all. I thought both of you were pretty much set against it.”

“Well, we were --”

“But, Sid changed his mind.”

“That wasn’t how things happened,” Tom said sternly. Actually, it had been precisely how they had happened. Only that Tom had nudged Sid carefully into that direction, and he didn’t want anyone to know that he had been the artisan of that particular decision.

“Yeah, I’m sure. Now let’s go already. Sid might start to think that you changed your mind. Who knows how he might react to that?”

That was enough to make Tom forget all about whether his bow tie was still crooked or not. Sid had been clear on so many occasions that he wanted him, with all his minor imperfections. It was pretty funny, at his age, to feel butterflies in his stomach. And they were pretty strong, too.

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Tom knew that there were moments in life that he would want to keep with him forever. Sid, all dressed up to the nines, in a cream tuxedo, as opposed to his black one, with a white bow tie to match – another of his ideas – was waiting for him to walk up to where he was standing.

That moment was worthy of a picture in the book of one’s heart; Tom was convinced. As he walked toward Sid, he was only aware of a single thing: his partner’s smile. It was so big and bright that everything else seemed far away.

He took his rightful place, face to face with Sid. He held his hands and said the words, words he believed from the bottom of his heart. The audience was silent; even the air was still.

“Why didn’t you tell me your dad is secretly a poet?” A hushed whisper broke the silence.

Sid half-turned toward his son. “April, remember me to ruin your big moment when you and Jett are going to renew your vows.”

“Do we need to do that? I thought it was a one-time thing, and only cheating couples renewed their vows,” Jett intervened.

Sid rolled his eyes and turned his attention on Tom. “Sorry for the boys. They don’t understand the solemnity of the moment. Could you please go on?”

Tom laughed. “Maybe I should let you do the talking now. It looks like I pretty much managed to make everyone fall asleep.”

The audience laughed. That didn’t seem to be the case.

“All right, but you will have to tell me everything once we’re alone. Did you truly write all that?”

“Yes.”

A soft cough from the minister let them know that they were pretty much messing up the ceremony. Sid squeezed Tom’s hands and looked at him fondly. He was barely through his first two phrases.

“When are we going to eat cake?” That came from the front row.

Sid made a funny grimace. “And that’s our grandson, of course. I guess this is what we get for wanting to have the family with us on this special day.”

“What did I tell you?” Carina whispered angrily at Jay. “You won’t get any cake if you interrupt your granddads like this.”

“I’ll tell dad if you don’t let me,” Jay said stubbornly and crossed his arms over his chest, with a big pout. He didn’t look too happy being forced to wear a suit, too, and having his hair brushed to a shine.

Tom could hardly hold in a laugh.

“No, I’m going to tell your dad not to let you have cake at all.” Carina fought on her side of the barricade.

“April will let me. Scott, too.”

“I’m talking about your dad-dad, you little brat,” Carina insisted.

Jay pretended not to hear and set his chin up defiantly. Tom shook his head. The kid was so much like Jett; it was uncanny.

“Jay, buddy,” Jett intervened.

The kid looked at him right away. If there was someone in the world who could convince Jay of anything, it had to be Jett. It was toward his biological dad that Jay had the most admiration. Sid had a theory that it had all to do with physical size. Tom wasn’t so sure. One of the many reasons he was proud of Jett was that he proved to be a great dad.

“We’ll have half the cake to ourselves if you’re good for another ten minutes or so.” Jett had a broad grin on his face. His son’s defiance was, obviously, to his liking. Maybe the boy wasn’t all gone, after all, and he was still up to some mischief.

Jay beamed. Carina scoffed. “I really cannot believe you, guys.”

Tom shook his head, but he was smiling. Nothing could ruin a day like that. A kid wanting cake actually just made it perfect because it proved so much that he had a loving family.

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“Are you really sure? You’re leaving your military career behind,” Sid pointed out as they laid in bed, sweaty and tired. Well, it was the good kind of tired, and Tom had thought it had to be the perfect moment to break the news to his husband. They had been married for forty-eight hours already, so it seemed like a good idea to spill the beans.

“I think I’ve given my career enough of my life. I’m not sure if it was worth it, after all,” Tom said as he slowly caressed Sid’s arm, which was possessively thrown over his chest.

“It’s in your blood. You might miss all the action, ordering people around --”

“I could always order you around.”

A snort followed. “Just try it.”

Tom fell silent for a moment. He enjoyed this, no, he loved it immensely, how he could stay there, listening to the sound of Sid’s breathing, and feeling completely at home. As much as April and Jett had insisted that they should go on a honeymoon somewhere, they had been both adamant about spending their first days of marriage bliss at home.

“You know, I don’t think I said the correct thing just earlier,” Tom started. “It’s not that I’m not sure if my career was worth everything I sacrificed for it. I’m certain it wasn’t.”

Sid straightened up a little so that he could look at him. “You sure?”

Tom looked back at his husband. “Yes. I’ve never been surer of anything else in my life. All I can think of, every day I’m there is how I want to be here, with you. And while I’m here, I only think of how fast the days go by, and it’s, again, time for me to leave.”

“Aww, I didn’t know you loved me that much,” Sid said with a small laugh.

Tom pretended to wrap one hand around Sid’s throat to strangle him. Instead, he caressed the sweaty skin. “It’s been six years. How come you haven’t gotten bored of waiting for me?”

Sid shrugged. “I guess I feel like I’d been waiting for you for years before you happened in my life. This is nothing. I have you with me every year, and that’s what matters.”

“So, you don’t want me to come home and live together forever?”

“That is not what I meant,” Sid protested.

“Then ask me. Tell me you want me home with you.”

“I thought you already took the decision.”

“I want to hear you.”

Sid moved to straddle him and looked at him from above. It was a pretty sexy sight if he thought much, Tom mused to himself. “Come home, Tom. Come and stay with me. But if you get bored because of your early retirement --”

“Bored? With you around? With this house that needs so much mending?”

Sid rolled his eyes. “I had to know you would barely wait for the ink on our marriage papers to dry, and you would pester me about renovations.”

“You know me well. But I won’t become inactive and boring, don’t worry. I’ll find something to do, a workplace. I won’t let you be the only breadwinner in the house.”

“Like that would be a problem. Although you eat quite a lot,” Sid said and made a pensive face.

Tom bucked his hips up and made Sid lose his balance. “Then, I’ll cook, and you’ll just eat.”

“Ha! Like that will ever happen.”

Tom made both of them roll on the bed until he was the one on top. “We really did this, didn’t we? We tied the knot.”

“Yes. But don’t tell me you’re surprised.”

“Why shouldn’t I be? We talked about how we didn’t think marriage is for people our age.”

Sid snorted and then set his eyes on Tom. “I may be in love with you, Tom, but I’m not blindly in love with you. I know you wanted it.”

“Seriously?”

“Yes.”

“So you just played along, all this time, without saying anything?”

“It was fun to let you think you could manipulate me.”

“I had to know nothing would get past you,” Tom moaned.

Sid kissed him sweetly. “So, you know me.”

“And? Is this something that you wanted, too?”

“Sure. And now you want to come home and stay forever, so mission accomplished.”

“Wait, are you saying you manipulated me into wanting that, too?”

Sid shrugged, but his eyes were playful. “What can I say? I’m a wizard.”

“You wish,” Tom said and kissed Sid back. “Although we can safely say that you did charm me.”

“As I said.”

“Do you want to have the last word, always?”

“Not always. You can always shut me up. You know how.”

Tom pulled Sid closer. Of course, he knew how. That was his husband, and he knew everything about him.

THE END