

Amusements

Kit followed Warren into his office. They were still talking work and it wasn't a strange event for Kit to be there with what he was saying. It was Warren checking against the fact that he was headed off to work in the same clothes his crew had seen him in on Saturday.

As far as Kit was concerned, he'd showered, more than usual even he said with a sly grin as he insisted on driving Warren to his office before he headed out to work himself. They greeted Leigh as they came in and she gave them a nice smile.

Warren settled into his chair while Kit stood beside him still talking. He ran out of things to say and may have come back to an idea that Warren was already at work himself.

"Well." Kit said, "I should be off now."

"That would be good." Warren said, "I'll see you at lunch."

"Yes you will." Kit agreed and smiled at him. He then glanced out at Leigh who was waiting to address a few things with Warren. She kept glancing back. "Tell me if I'm doing this wrong after." Kit finally said and leaned down to kiss Warren goodbye. Warren smiled at him as he pulled away.

"I was waiting for that." He said.

"Out of here." Kit said suddenly heading out with speed since he was already behind schedule. Warren sighed. Kit had yet to leave his side for any longer than it took to use the rest room since he'd come over on Saturday night.

Warren had yet to catch his breath and was suddenly staring at his work load. Leigh got him on the intercom. "Warren, I know this is none of my business, but I just want to be sure my eyes are not playing tricks on me. Did Kit just kiss you before he left?"

“He did.” Warren answered. He then started to boot up his computer. He leaned forward to pick up a file from off his desk when he noticed that Leigh was gone. He got up from his chair. “Leigh?” he questioned as he stepped into his doorway.

She was gone without so much as a word. Normally he might look for her coat, but it wasn’t a day for it and she took her purse wherever she went. He ran his hand on his chin trying to decide what it meant. He frowned as he headed back to his chair. He’d already had it in his head she’d just left not to return. That maybe she thought his behavior at the office was inappropriate. He was avoiding his work just thinking along those lines.

Would she have reacted if it had just been his girlfriend? His memory was sketchy about Beth seeing him at work a few times. The two women didn’t agree with each other in general, but Leigh was always professional and perhaps a bit nice about it being his girlfriend at the time.

“Jesus.” Warren complained just thinking along those lines. That she might just be one of those people who would do whatever to avoid people who might be just a bit different. Then he decided she was just shocked to see it. Then where the hell had she gone? Warren glanced at the phone. Would he need a temp?

Leigh came back in the outer door and came to standing in Warren’s office door. “Sorry.” She said, “Just had to go, you know no time to chat, just go.”

“Ok.” Warren said. She then wiped at her eyes. “You ok?” Warren asked.

“Yes.” She said and acted like her nose was itchy.

“You don’t have a problem with who I chose to be affectionate with, do you?” he asked. She smiled.

“Absolutely not.” She said. “Maybe a little unexpected, but, no, I do not stand and judge. I’ll bring you those files now.”

He watched her as she sat down at her desk. She stopped dealing with the files long enough to get a tissue near her face, but he couldn't be sure if it was for her nose or her eyes. She finally did come in with the files and smiled again. She set them down on his desk. "Thank you."

"That's what I'm here for." She said and went back to her desk. Warren pondered the strange event some more before he finally got back to work.

"I should probably stop by my house tonight." Kit said off handily while Warren digested his paper.

"Long weekend?" Barnes asked.

"Yes." He answered.

"You could definitely use a change of clothes." Warren said. Kit looked at his shirt and pulled it away to smell it some.

"Not too bad." He said, "And I wasn't really wearing it at all yesterday."

"And your pants?" Warren asked.

"Good for at least three solid days before things get desperate." Kit answered.

"Oh my God." Barnes said and Kit started laughing.

"Do I look frilly nilly to you?" Kit asked, "Needing to change my drawers halfway through the day because there's a speck of dust on it?" Barnes started laughing.

"No." she answered, "So where the hell you been?"

"I'm sure its fine if you just go home tonight." Warren said.

"Uhm." Kit said glancing between them. He stopped looking at Warren as he flipped the corner of his newspaper down to look at him. "Too much?"

"Just take the day." Warren decided, "There's always tomorrow."

"Yea I guess your right." Kit said.

“Keep in mind I’m not use to this.” Warren said, “Allow me a moment to catch my breath between all of that, dealing with Nate and work.”

“Sure Warren.” Kit said. He looked back at Barnes who was smiling at him. “What?”

“About time.” She said.

“Oh I suppose you’re all happy now that you’re right.” Kit said.

“Why is this so difficult with you men?” she asked.

“I’m not finding anything hard.” Kit said, “Well maybe a couple things actually.” He smiled at her as she shook her head. “Everything’s cool.”

“Just say it already.” She said.

“Say what?” Kit asked.

“The l word.”

“To you?” he asked and got her laughing some more.

“No, to each other.” She said. Kit turned to look at Warren as he dropped his paper.

“Hey Warren.” Kit said.

“Yes Kit.”

“I love you man.”

“I love you too.” He said. Kit smiled at him.

“Anything else?” Kit asked looking at Barnes. “A marriage proposal perhaps? Is that what you’re waiting for?”

“That doesn’t sound like a bad idea to me.” She said. Kit laughed and looked at Warren.

“What? He’s not going anywhere. Best friend, been right there for years. I don’t need to marry the guy.” Kit explained. He stopped protesting to check it with Warren and they both started laughing.

“We’re fine, Barnes.” Warren said, “Whatever you suspect about it is probably true.”

“Exclusive?” she asked.

“Geez.” Kit said, “What is with you and monogamy? I tried the marriage thing twice, doesn’t work for me.”

“He did offer it.” Warren jumped in, “I refused.”

“Ok.” Barnes said holding her hands up, “Whatever works.”

“Uhm, maybe we should say something about it though.” Kit said, “I was thinking it but didn’t say it out loud.”

“What?” Warren asked.

“I’d like it this way, up to you though.” Kit said, “Where I’m your only guy and vice versa?”

“Trust me.” Warren said, “Even if I had it in my mind that there could be another, I wouldn’t want it. One guy is enough for me.”

“Cool, happy now Barnes?”

“That sounded like monogamy to me.” She said.

“Well there will be women for us, still.” Kit said.

“Your ex-wife?” she asked. Kit smiled.

“For now, yes.” He answered. She nodded. “What?”

“We’ll see.” She said.

“Oh come on, what now?” Kit asked.

“I got all my prying done.” She said, “We can go back to our usual banter.”

Kit went right into their sports talk allowing Warren to go back to focusing in on his paper.

2

Warren came into his apartment. He moved over to his chair and dropped into it. As he sat there Nate meandered past him and back. Warren was not really focused on him at all yet. He thought maybe he was getting a little under the weather. He finally looked up to see Nate leaning against the back of the couch.

“Hey.” Warren said.

“Hi.”

“Anything on your mind?”

“Like what? Like my best friend ditching me because my uncle is gay and I tried to understand it?” Nate asked.

“Anything else?”

“Yes.” Nate said.

“Go ahead.”

“What if he tells his mom?”

“If he does she will have to handle it however she sees best. Should that include questions she is more than welcome to call me and ask them to preempt another visit. I hadn’t really sat down and decided I would hide this from anyone. It was you saying you didn’t want anyone to know that I was trying to respect.”

“But you had to see it.” Nate said.

“See what?”

“Just like I said.” Nate said, “I told him you were gay and his first thought was you’d do something to me. When I told him you wouldn’t he started asking me why I had the book. I told him I was going to take it back to the library and forgot about it. Then he asked me why it was in my room. I said so I’d see it and not forget which I did. He said I was lying, he said it to my face. He said I was lying to cover for you, that we were already doing stuff and maybe you threatened me or something and the reason the book was in my room was so that I could read it and learn how to do it with you better.”

“Jesus.” Warren said shaking his head.

“That’s why he said all that to you. I don’t even think he cared that you were gay. I know I don’t really care. It’s all that other stuff. First thing he thought of.”

“At least neither of you are ignorant of the possibility. Not that I’m any kind of prime example of a child molester.” Warren said.

“If he tells his mom, Uncle Warren, all he has to say is you touched him. They’ll arrest you and take me away.” Nate said.

“Fine, let that happen.” Warren said, “I have nothing to be guilty about. And should it involve the police and they should force you out of my care, so be it. It will force your

mother to come back here and take care of you herself, like she should be doing anyway.”

“Are you ok?” Nate asked skipping right past the conflict and comments about his mother.

“Just a bit under the weather. Sometimes when you’re close to someone for the first time, you gather up a few more germs than you had before. Eventually you even out with them.”

“Huh?” Nate asked.

“Are you not aware of what I mean when I say close? Would you prefer me to be more specific?”

“You had sex?” Nate asked.

“Precisely.”

“That can make you sick?” Nate asked.

“How well did you read that book?” Warren asked. Nate stood up.

“Pretty well, but I didn’t know you just get sick right away.” He said, “You’re supposed...you’re supposed to be safe.”

“Yes.” Warren said, “That’s not everything. There’s probably some more medical documentation you need to read. But essentially, just like when you’re a kid and you go to school with new kids on a new year, you pass around germs a lot and get sick. After a while you’ve all had the same germs at some point. That’s just from touching the same things, breathing the same air. Sometimes some germs only pass when you’re touching each other. It’s nothing serious, but it’s making me a little under the weather, my temperature is up. I’ll be fine probably by tomorrow.”

“Oh.” Nate said.

“I don’t suppose you could get me a glass of water?”

“Ok.” Nate said and went into the kitchen to get it and brought it back to him. Warren drank some of it.

“Thank you.” He said.

“Maybe I should cook dinner?” Nate asked.

“Unless you want my germs, that is probably best.” He agreed. Nate headed off into the kitchen and started getting things out to cook with. “Do something simple, maybe some soup for me.” Warren requested.

“Just what I was thinking.” Nate agreed.

Warren dragged himself to the table and managed to sip at the soup Nate had warmed from the can. He didn’t even worry about cleaning off the table. He managed his feet and wandered off to his room. He got into bed and lay there for a while.

After some time he couldn’t quite figure out why he was having so much trouble getting to sleep when he was tired and under the weather. The only thing he could conclude was that only after two nights sleeping beside Kit he didn’t want to do it alone just then. He grabbed the pillow Kit had used and pulled it close to his face where he could smell his friend’s scent on it. He closed his eyes breathing it in and managed to go to sleep with it as a pacifier.

3

He came out of his room dressed and ready for work. He went to the refrigerator to get some juice when he noticed that coffee was on. There was also some old travel cup sitting near by. Warren looked around, but he got the impression Nate had already left. He smiled and filled the travel cup. He realized the coffee wasn’t blackened beyond reproach this time. He was sipping it as he headed for the door.

When he opened the door Nate was on the other side just reaching for it. “Hi.” Nate said.

“What’s up?” Warren asked.

“You feeling ok?”

“I’m fine, it was extremely temporary.” Warren said.

“Uhm, I didn’t know if you were going to stay home.” Nate said, “I went and got you a paper.” He handed it to him.

“Thank you, that was thoughtful. I’m fine and I have a few things to get done.” Warren said as he came out around him. “The coffee, just right.” He said as he sipped some more and headed down the hall.

“Bye.” Nate said. Warren waved the paper behind him as he descended the steps.

Warren took a little extra time getting into his office, looking at Leigh to see if she was going to do anything else he’d find strange. She caught wind of him stalling and looked up at him.

“Everything ok, Warren?” she asked.

“I don’t...” he started to say and stopped. “Perhaps you could shed some light on yesterday’s disappearance. Not that it’s anything I’m overly concerned about as far as you not being here and job performance or the like. But I am a bit mystified by the event.”

“I’m sorry. I’ll not make a habit of it. Mother nature sometimes gets the best of us.”

“In various ways even.” Warren agreed, “Such as last night I was bit under the weather for a while. I...I couldn’t help but think something further beyond that. If there is something I should apologize for?”

“Are you happy with your choice?” she asked. Warren smiled helplessly.

“I believe I am.” He said.

“Than there is nothing more to say about it.” she said.

“I’m sorry I’m not intending to embarrass you. My first thought was I had offended you out of hand. I seem to have an idea that this isn’t new in the world while everyone else disagrees. In my life I was taught to always expect the unexpected. Something tells me in this case you found this unexpected.”

“I did.” She agreed.

“And...?”

“You were only just speaking of a Miss Clarkson.” She said. Warren smiled again.

“Had she been approachable at that time, I’m sure she would make valid competition for my affection. Is that confusing?”

“It is only when I’ve never thought of it of you before.”

“And?” he asked. She looked away this time. “I’m sorry, I’ll stop.” He moved ahead on into his office and attempted to settle in.

He just got in his chair when she came to stand in the doorway. “You promise you won’t laugh?” she asked.

“Absolutely. I wish to ease the situation not further cause you any upset.” He said.

“I failed to hide that.” She said.

“I’m afraid so.” Warren agreed, “And although I might not have been looking for it then, I can look back at your hospital visit and conclude the same thing. You were very upset.”

“Would that I was only worried about job security.” She said.

“You do have three children to take care of.” He said. She looked back at the door.

“I’m still afraid you’ll laugh.” She said.

“I will not.” He promised. She took a deep breath.

“I’m such a cliché.” She said. Warren raised his eyebrows. “Oh alright, once it’s said we can both laugh about it. With me sitting here all these years doing the right thing and keeping it all professional while I slowly developed an affection for you. It’s not professional and I have beat myself up over it several times, telling myself that the most important thing was keeping my job and doing it well.

“When I saw that kiss.” She looked away and then back, “I could tell that you were extremely happy about it. And it hit me that my feelings could never compete with that.”

Warren could feel the corners of his lips going up as a smile was forming, not quite busting out laughing, but he understood her implication that it was hitting him

humorously. He ran his finger along his mouth trying to hide this. "I don't recall any reaction while I was seeing Beth." Warren said trying to sound even.

"That was some time ago." She said, "And although I might have had an idea about it then, I wasn't as bound by my idea. She didn't seem to make you happy, so I told myself she would go away. And it took a year, but I'm still here and she is long gone."

Warren struggled to keep his composure. He didn't want to trample on her feelings. But he had never imagined anything like that with her even if he could agree with Kit that she was an attractive woman. He'd seen her as a person first, an employee and never let it trail off elsewhere. "I'm almost getting the impression." Warren said, "That you think this is some how automatically then end of my search for love."

"Indeed." She said and did smile, "I may not be done with my tears yet, but just a few of them are of joy that you are happy."

"Why...why do you think that? Just from a single kiss?" Warren asked.

"I'm no fool." She said, "Even if I can act foolish. That man has been in your life since I met you. You bounce off each other constantly. The idea that you might ever stumble into one another's embrace." She smiled again. "I think that only goes one way. You're not going to just come back from that to the way you were." Warren face became less happy. "I see you don't agree."

"In that case, I'm the fool." Warren said, "Because I had as yet to think of it that way."

"Just stay happy and I'll be fine." She said, "There's no hope for me now anyway."

"I'm sorry Leigh." Warren said, "One surprise too many for me in regards to my changing things one from another. I had never dared the thought that you had anything less than professional admiration for me."

“I’ll be fine.” She said, “I’m guessing this will not put my employ in jeopardy?”

“Not at all.” he said. “You’re irreplaceable and I was overly concerned that when you vanished yesterday that you were gone for good and actually started to panic.”

She smiled and looked down. “Thank you Warren.”

“I’m sorry I didn’t get to be the one to sweep you off your feet.” He said.

“I’ll be fine.” She said, “If not you...then maybe he’s just under my nose elsewhere.”

“Now see when they say that.” Warren said, “You just don’t understand it until it happens to you.”

“I agree.” She said.

“Would you like the day off or something?” he asked.

“No.” she said and started to laugh. It allowed him to let his smile out too. “We will both laugh at this some day I know it. Perhaps when we go to see our kids graduate in a few more years.”

“Excuse me?” Warren asked.

“Well, your nephew.” She said, “He will graduate with Cal on the same year. I’m sure you’ll be there.”

“Sounds like a date.” He said. She laughed some more and he smiled again.

“Let’s get to work.” She suggested. Warren went ahead and handed her something to do.

4

“What are you laughing at?” Kit said pulling Warren’s paper down. He wasn’t actually reading it this time, but trying to use it as a shield.

“I shouldn’t be.” Warren said, “I feel quite bad about it.” he was laughing as he said it. Kit smiled at him.

“What is so funny?” Kit asked.

“It’s not, really.” Warren said, “And it should not be the source of humor from here on out. I should reserve myself from even speaking about it.”

“And?” Kit asked. Warren laughed again and glanced at Barnes. She raised her eyebrows.

“The results of your kiss yesterday at my office.” Warren began. Kit looked a little concerned. “Our witness.”

“Leigh?” he asked.

“Yes.” Warren said, “She had a reaction to it that she tried to hide from me, but I managed to get her to tell me today. I should not laugh, she begged me not to, but I can’t stop.”

“What did she say?” Kit asked.

“She came forward with a light confession that she in fact had some feelings for me. So her seeing our kiss had her just a little upset.” He explained. Kit’s expression became serious.

“We shouldn’t laugh at that.” He said, “That’s someone’s real feelings. That is not cool.”

“I agree.” Barnes said. Warren’s sober expression went right back into a smile and he laughed again.

“It’s what you said Kit.” Warren said.

“Oh so this is my fault you’re laughing non stop?”

“Yes.” Warren admitted, “It’s what you said about more people pulling me out of the crowd and bowing at my feet. I’d never expected her to do that. And if Garner were to call me up and ask me out on a date at this point I’d find it hard to be too surprised.”

Now Kit laughed with him as Barnes looked down at them for it. “Wonder what his wife would say about that.” Kit said.

“Never mind her, what about Ben?” Warren asked.

“Ben?” Kit asked. Warren laughed some more.

“Garner’s assistant, he’s completely incompetent. We very often work around him. He’s not a relative. I can’t imagine why else Garner would keep him on.” Warren said.

“It’s not a good idea to say things like that about people unless you’re sure.” Kit said.

“You’re right, but I can’t stop thinking it.” Warren said, “Especially now. I’m not sure what to do. I should smooth things over somehow, say something in reaction to buffer the impact, but I don’t know what. Barnes, can you help me out?”

“Don’t say anything.” She replied, “Definitely don’t laugh like this anywhere near her. All you need to do is keep it professional and she will see that you respect her for her work and she’ll get past this.”

“You sound like you’re familiar.” Kit said.

“Aren’t we all?” she asked spreading her hands towards them.

“Well.” Kit said, “I guess when we relate through work sometimes we relate in other ways.”

“Exactly.” She agreed. “And Warren don’t be overly nice or anything like that. She’ll think you pity her. Just keep it even, as you’ve been doing all along.”

“I’ll keep it in mind.” Warren said, “But I have the impulse to get her a card or flowers or something.”

“Don’t.” she said.

“Ok.” He agreed.

“So tonight.” Kit said as he started to get up to leave, “Perhaps I’ll stop by.”

“That would be fine.” Warren said.

“I suppose if I kiss you before I go it’ll start some other reaction somewhere.” Kit said. Warren busted out laughing.

“You guys are so bad.” Barnes said.

“Why you here?” Kit asked.

“Train wreck.” She answered and smiled at him. Kit smiled back and then leaned down and tenderly kissed Warren’s lips. As he came away Warren smiled at him.

“I’m off.” Kit said straightening his hat and then heading out the door.

“And he didn’t kiss you yesterday?” Barnes asked.

“You mean from here?” Warren asked.

“Yes.”

“Maybe because he kissed me at my office?” Warren asked and shrugged. Barnes nodded. Warren brought his paper back up but stopped long enough to see Todd leaning against the bar looking at him and roll tapping along the counter top. Warren went back to reading his paper.

“Why do I get the feeling your avoiding going back to your office?” Barnes asked.

“Nothing pressing.” Warren said.

“Don’t.”

“It’s not unusual for me not to go back to my office after lunch on any given day.”

“That’s fine.” Barnes said, “If you actually have some place else to be. In which case she’ll know, but not today. Today she is going to think she’s made you uncomfortable and you are avoiding her.”

“And if that is the case?” Warren asked.

“That will make her feel bad, so just got back to work, Warren.” Barnes advised.

“Alright, but tell me one thing.”

“What?”

“Is Todd still staring at me?” he asked.

“Yes he is.” Barnes answered, “After the kiss Kit just gave you I’m not at all surprised.”

“Not him, too.” Warren said as he folded up his paper.

“I gathered that he and Kit were friendly.” Barnes said.

“And how would you know?” Warren asked.

“It’s the way he looks at Kit from time to time. He’s not watching me, so it’s not hard for me to see him do it.” she answered. Warren looked to see Todd still looking at him. Warren got up and started towards him. “Don’t make a scene.” Barnes requested. Warren walked over to the bar as Todd straightened up his back at his approach.

“Is there anything I can help you with?” Warren asked.

“Does he tell you he loves you?” Todd asked.

“Yes he does.” Warren replied.

“He used to say that to me too.” He added.

“And that night you found his belongings and you called me?” Warren asked, “What did you speak about when I left the two of you in here alone?”

Todd looked at the bar. “He said he couldn’t see me anymore.” He answered, “At least now I know why.”

Warren turned and started to walk away.

“It’s always been you he really loves.” Todd said. Warren looked back at him. “The whole time, every time you’ve been here I become invisible to him. He doesn’t look at me at all. Pretends he doesn’t even know my name. He kept telling me it was because he didn’t want you to know that about him. Apparently that is not the case.”

“Not anymore.” Warren explained. He turned back around and walked over to Barnes, facing away from her and him, Warren put his hand on her shoulder. “I’m going back to my office now.”

“Take it easy.” She said.

“Maybe you can talk to him.” Warren said.

“I probably will.” She agreed. Warren then headed back outside and got a cab back to his office.

It was actually a lot easier to walk back into his office than he thought. He went right into work mode and Leigh didn’t show any more signs of being upset near him.

5

Warren went through his mail as he came through his door. He stopped to look around to see Nate sitting in one of the two chairs not doing anything. Warren walked over toward him and sat in the other chair.

“Hey.”

“Hi Uncle Warren.” Nate said.

“Your mother call you yet?”

“Nope.”

“Jake?”

“Nope.”

“Anything going on?”

“Nope.”

“Bored?”

“Yup.”

“Wear out all your games?”

“I guess.”

Warren finished sorting his mail and set it down in two piles on the table. He then looked at Nate. “You could get some kind of job. I’m sure there’s something somewhere a boy your age can do.”

“I’m not that bored.” Nate promised.

“Okay.”

“And you?”

“What do you mean?” Warren asked.

“Do you get bored?”

“Not very often. After pressing the world all day it’s okay to do nothing for a while. Just as sure as I get settled something will happen anyway.”

“Kit?”

“What about him?”

“That’s something happening.” Nate said.

“Well if you want to scope it that large, that would include you as well.” Warren said. Nate looked at him curiously after that. Warren tried a smile, but the kid didn’t accept it. Instead he got out of the chair and went over to the couch where he started to channel surf.

Warren kept his position, right up until he started making dinner. The phone rang in the middle of his preparation and he watched Nate look at him questioning whether or not to answer it. Since he had his cell phone

Warren found it unlikely the call would be for him. He went over and answered it.

“Hello.”

“Hey buddy.” Kit said.

“Hey Kit.”

“Just calling to let you know I won’t be there.”

“That’s fine. You don’t have to call me to tell me that.”

Warren said.

“Yes I do.” Kit said, “When I saw you last I left you believing I was coming over. I wouldn’t just not show up.”

“You’re right Kit. You should call me when you change plans. I just hadn’t heard it as a definite.”

“Okay, I’ll be more definite next time with you.” Kit said.

“Alright.”

“So, I’ll see you tomorrow.” Kit said.

“Sure, no problem.” Warren said, “I know you have other things to do.”

“Yea, well, she called.” Kit said.

“It’s fine Kit.”

“Okay, later.” Kit said

“Bye.” Warren said and hung up. He moved back into cooking mode. He served out the food and ate quietly with his nephew. After the clean up the door bell was ringing. Nate cruised over to it and peered out the peep hole. He then opened the door.

“Oh man.” Nate complained.

“Nate that’s enough.” Warren said.

“Hi Kit.” Nate said pretending a sudden exuberance about seeing him. Kit mimicked him.

“Hey Nate.” They smiled at each other for a second and Nate wandered over to the couch. Kit came over and sat down at the table next to Warren.

“Everything ok?” Warren asked.

“Sure.” Kit said, “After I got off the phone with you I just thought...well I called and told her I couldn’t make it.”

“You’d already said that to me.” Warren said.

“Yea, changed my mind.” Kit said.

“I don’t require you to do that.” Warren said.

“I know, I don’t require you too, either.” Kit said, “But I can still do what I want right?”

“Yes.” Warren agreed.

“Ok, I’m going to tell her I don’t want to see her anymore. I should have ended this already anyway.” Kit said as he looked at Warren, “Leave the way open for someone new.”

“I guess that’s your choice.” Warren said.

“Yea, well, you weren’t expecting me after all. I should go.”

“No, you can stay Kit.” Warren said.

“Yes?”

“Yes, I want you to stay.” Warren said. Kit smiled at him. Then he winked as he got up from the table and headed over to the couch. Nate eyed him as he came around to sit beside him.

“He call yet?” Kit asked.

“No.” Nate replied

“He will.”

“You shouldn’t say that unless you know for sure.”

“Is he really your best friend?” Kit asked.

“I think so.”

“Alright then, he’ll call.” Kit said, “Right now he’s probably stuck on what to say to you.”

“All he has to do is call and say hey.”

“He should make some kind of apology.” Kit said. Nate shrugged at him. “You can call him.”

“No, he left, if he doesn’t call me it’s because he doesn’t want to hang anymore.” Nate said.

“Yea, but if you call him it’ll put him on the spot to say something. Then you’ll know for sure.”

“No.”

“Your choice.” Kit said. They sat there for a moment quietly.

“Kit, you hungry?” Warren asked. Kit turned around to look at him.

“Uhm, yea I kind of missed dinner running around.” He answered.

“I can warm you up some leftovers.” Warren offered.

“Sounds good.” Kit said getting up and moving over to the table.

Warren warmed up his dinner and served it to him. He sat with him while he ate and Kit kept looking at him. Warren turned to look away for a moment and then back. They both broke out into smiles at one another.

“Let me get this cleaned up.” Kit said jumping up and cleaning up after himself.

“Night Nate.” Warren said getting up.

“Yea, night, whatever.” Nate called back. Warren looked at Kit again and led the way to his room.

“I’m crowding you.” Kit decided after he got the door closed. Warren turned to face him.

“Just take a few days here and there.” Warren said. “Allow me the chance to get used to you wanting to be around me a lot more. Nate needs time to get use to it, too.”

“Ok, after tonight, I won’t come by again until Friday.” Kit decided.

“That’s fine, Kit, but you’re here right now. What are you waiting for?” Warren asked. Kit came forward and started kissing him and walked him over to the bed.

6

Nate was smiling when Warren came in from his work day. It caught Warren completely off guard and he found himself smiling back at him. “Hi Nate.” He said.

“He called.” Nate said getting that out of the way.

“And?”

“And the first thing he did was tell his Mom about why he left.” Nate said. Warren looked at him expectantly. “He told her that you had to be rushed to the hospital because you had an infection from your gun shot wound and you got really sick really fast and that’s why he was standing outside when she picked him up.”

“And the rest?” Warren asked.

“He asked me if I was being honest. He was mad that I lied about why the book was in my room and wanted to know if what you said was true. I told him it was. Then he wanted to know why I’d read the book all on my own. I told him so I’d know something about it and wouldn’t look stupid if I had to explain it to someone else. I also told him it made me think that I didn’t have to worry about it.”

“What did he say?”

“He said he believed me. He was just worried about me being some place where something could happen to me.”

“That sounds like a real friend.” Warren said.

“He wants to come back this weekend.” Nate said, “He wants to apologize to you.”

“I’d appreciate that, Nate. But it doesn’t sound like he’s being honest with his mother about this.”

“If he told her the truth, she wouldn’t let him come stay here.” Nate assured him.

“That’s her choice.” Warren said, “Its one thing for him not to know at all, he would be innocent in regards to what he should relay to her. But now that he knows, he shouldn’t keep that from her. She should be informed and make her decision based on all available information.”

“That’s his choice not to tell her.” Nate said, “That’s not our business.”

“I still don’t think it’s a good idea.” Warren said. “I don’t feel comfortable with that.”

“Please, Uncle Warren, please don’t make a big deal about this anymore, please?”

Warren took a deep breath as he looked at him. One more slight from him and the kid might just leave all on his own. "Alright Nate." He said, "But make sure you tell him he's not to be rude to me about it. Last weekend his behavior was unacceptable. I won't stand for it again."

"Ok." Nate said, "He might ask questions though."

"As long as they are reasonable and well spoken I'll be happy to answer them in regards to things that I would tell to someone who is not my friend and not a relative."

"Ok."

"Ok then." Warren said.

"I'll go call him." Nate said.

Warren went ahead in to the kitchen to start organizing to make dinner. He was only just on time for it running late coming out of his office waiting on a return phone call. He stopped long enough to take his tie off, he set that aside and rolled up his sleeves.

Nate came over towards him and was standing really close. "His Mom's going to drop him off." Nate said.

"Okay." Warren said. Nate kept looking at him. Warren continued what he was doing and then stopped to look at Nate squarely. "Is there something else you want Nate?" he asked.

"No."

"You are, at present, in the way of what I am doing here." Warren said. Nate moved away from him some, but not too far. Warren continued what he was doing and stopped to look at him again. He hadn't quite expected a thank you and wasn't looking for one, but the kid wanted something. "You should just speak your mind." Warren said.

"Nothing to say." Nate said.

"If you're sure."

"I am." Nate replied. He sighed and then moved out of the kitchen. He sat down at the table and was still watching his uncle prepare dinner.

“I’m glad he called you back, Nate.” Warren said, “You have to admit Kit was right.”

“I noticed.” Nate said.

“And you’re happy?”

“I guess.” He said.

“And perhaps you’d like to express that, but just don’t know how to go about it.”

“What do you mean?” Nate asked.

“I was under the impression you came all the way over here to hug me.” Warren said, “You can do that.”

Nate looked at him skeptically. Then he got up from the table and went and sat on the couch and turned on the TV. Warren shook his head about it. He then went back to just being happy they weren’t currently yelling at one another.

They also managed a quiet dinner and evening which Warren had to also appreciate.

7

Warren was shoveling through some of the paperwork on his desk, going from one side to another when he noticed the document. He lifted it up and read that it was Leigh’s request for salary increase. He leaned back in his chair and started going over it.

When he finished he came up and signed off on it. He then got up and approached Leigh’s desk and handed it to her. She took it first as if it was just any other document that he might have her deal with. Then she looked it over and smiled at him.

“Warren, tell me this isn’t because what I said.” She said.

“No, its not.” Warren said, “It’s for your consistent job performance. It’s also everything that you handled while I was in the hospital. Keeping everyone informed as to why I wasn’t on top of things. You did an exceptional job. Your

performance kept Garner waiting for me. That's not easy to do."

"I thought that's what the bonus was for?" she asked.

"You deserved that bonus." Warren explained, "That was for not giving up in trying to get Mr. Ponsetter on the phone to talk to me. You called everyone you could so that someone would actually tell him what had happened to me. It was an impossible task that you handled. That's your job and you do it well."

"Thank you Warren." She said, "The kids have been asking me for some things. This should make that possible. I'm pleased."

"You just keep it up." Warren said, "You're irreplaceable."

"Ok." She said. Warren retreated back into his office and got back to his pile of documents to review. Warren glanced forward when he heard the phone ring. He heard her answer it. "Athena on line one." She said over the intercom.

Warren popped the receiver and hit the line. "Hello Mrs. Binsford."

"Warren." She said, "You forget my name?"

"No, how are you and the family?" he asked.

"You may have gone just a bit overboard with that saying hello to all of us." She said.

"Well, I hope I am making a successful move here." He said.

"And what's new with you?" she asked. Warren laughed. He then got up and stretched the phone cord to close his door. He moved to sit back down.

"I may be in love." He said.

"With your new friend?" she asked. "The mystery man?"

"It almost feels like I haven't talked to you in forever." He said.

“I’m sorry I didn’t call back sooner. I wanted to make sure I wasn’t going to end up being abrupt. I have the time to talk to you right now, so?”

“So it wasn’t him, however sweet the moment was. It has passed.”

“Oh?” she asked.

“Yes, I expect we may be friends at some point, but he’s no longer around.” Warren said.

“Well then who could you be falling in love with sweetie?” she asked.

“I can’t believe I haven’t told you this yet.” He said, “But part of my experience was my own. Up to now it’s perhaps a more public display of my choice.”

“Who Warren? Who?” she asked.

“Not a new friend Athena.” He said and left off there for a while.

“Kit.” She said.

“Don’t tell me you knew.” He said.

“About how much that man loves you?” she asked.

“Yes.”

“I’m sorry, Warren.” She said, “I’ve always known.”

“And that he would be available upon my reconsideration of what I was capable of?” he asked.

“I thought that might be who it was the first time.”

“And?” he asked.

“He’s slipped up several times in my company in the way he’s spoken about you.” She said, “For instance. There was a point of him telling me just how jealous he was of me. And baffled as I was when he said it off to the side with no invitation for further conversation about it, I could only conclude it was because you loved me and would be with me if you could.”

“And you never thought to mention this to me?” he asked.

“More lately than ever before.” She said, “But before I have always thought if I said something over him wanting

you to know himself that it might harm your friendship with him. You needed to become aware of this yourself. So what happened?"

"He made his move the moment he felt he could against knowing I was available to him for that. After my other friend left."

"And your already saying I love you?" she asked.

"That emotion has always been with us." Warren explained, "There's just a new way to express it now."

"Well if he's your lover now, that means I get to be your best friend, yes?" she asked.

"Which makes me curious after Ba'mosa's visit with me at the hospital if you've said anything yet?" he asked.

"I may have dropped a hint. I'm under the impression he would wait for you to tell him yourself." She said.

"No, you tell him." Warren said. "That way he doesn't have to worry about you and I anymore. I'm thoroughly engaged now."

"Engaged, there's a thought." She said.

"I'm pretty sure the prospect of an actual marriage would not agree with us." Warren said, "Also, this is still pretty fresh, it's not the time to even consider such a thing."

"Ok sweetie, we'll just let that stew for now." She said causing him to laugh. "I'm happy for you Warren. As strange as I think it is, I'm happy."

"Why so strange?" he asked.

"Oh nothing bad, just, you know how does he really compare to me?" she asked.

"I think he loves me just as much and just as well as you do." Warren said.

"You are absolutely right." She said.

"Are you ready for me to possibly ruin your day yet?"

"I doubt you could after this." She said.

"I'm sorry Athena. My reasons are my own at this point. I'm sure of my decision. I need to take that book back." He said.

“You’ve given in to the hysteria?” she questioned.

“I may have, but at this point I can’t shake the feeling. It’s too poignant for me. I need to keep you from harm in any way I can.” He said.

“Allow me just a little more time.” She said, “I’ve gotten most of my data collected. After that the only purpose of having it would be the proof. I won’t need that.”

“It’s not just the physical properties of it anymore.” Warren said, “My understanding is about the information contained within. I’m afraid at this point that it’s more than what I’ve made of it. I think Barnes is right, someone is going to come looking for it and I don’t know what intentions they will have. I can’t sit on this and allow myself to think someone would harm you to retrieve it.”

“Next week.” She begged, “One week, Warren. It’s been here a while now. One week and I’ll return it to you.”

“Do you not hear my concerns?”

“I do.” She agreed, “And I respect that. It’s also your property and I would return it to you when asked. But I’m asking you, one more week. I believe you when you tell me there is risk involved. I’m an adult, it’s my decision. I’ll risk having it in my care one more week. Plus, don’t forget it’s in here, the fortress of darkness. I think it’ll be ok.”

“I couldn’t live with myself if something happened to you, especially on account of something I did.” He said.

“I’ll take the responsibility off your shoulders, sweetie.” She said. “I’ll put it to you this way. You asked for it back and I intend to return it to you, it’s just going to take some time to get it to you.”

“Semantics.” He said.

“I know.” She said, “But what are you going to do?”

“Worry.” He said.

“You called me Saturday. You hadn’t banged down my door yet to get it.” she said.

“There’s been a build up to that.” He explained, “I might just do that if I have to.”

“It just sounds much more heroic than it really is.” She said, “And I love you for it, but we’re adults. Can we just look at the facts?”

Warren sighed.

“One week.” She said, “I will not argue for more time after that, I promise.”

“Against my better judgment.” He said, “And mark your calendar, I will be coming all the way out there next week to get it. So don’t get any ideas that you need another week after that, ok?”

“Yes sweetie.” She said. Warren sighed.

“If I believed in God I might be inclined to pray about it, to keep you from harm.”

“Well now we both think the subject matter is ridiculous, don’t we?” she asked.

“In regards to the almighty? Absolutely.”

“Good.” She said.

“I suppose the subject of time is relative to the time I get off the phone and actually pick up the damn thing.” He said, “I’m not any more secure in the next few hours than I would be with a whole week, in which case I’ve already put you at risk.”

“Stop.” She said, “Just relax.”

“I’m trying.” He said.

“Think of Kit just now.” She said. Warren smiled. “That make you smile?”

“Yes.”

“You are in love.” She said and made a kissing noise over the phone. “That landed on your cheek.”

“You know how much I love you?” he asked.

“Yes, I have the privilege of knowing that.” She agreed. Warren took another deep breath. “How about we all get together on Sunday for a nice barbecue?”

“Nate’s having company this weekend.” Warren said, “At this point it’s imperative that I make no move to alter his plans.”

“Well that doesn’t sound bad.” She said, “Maybe next weekend.”

“That would be nice.” He agreed.

“Anything else?” she asked.

“No, I guess we could both get back to work.”

“Yes, now that I’m pressed against a time limit I should hurry things along. Bye Warren.”

“Bye.” He said and she hung up.

8

Barnes sat down at the table last. Kit was busy looking over some documents at the table and Warren was focusing in on his profile. Since he was in work mode he wasn’t paying attention to much else.

Todd came over to take Barnes’ order and she requested some ice water to start. Warren glanced at him once and then back at Kit who was making tsk sounds while flipping through his paper work.

He then looked up to recognize Barnes and they smiled at each other. “You were right, Kit.” Warren said. Kit looked up expectantly towards him eager to hear about it. “Jake called.”

“That’s great.” Kit said and smiled. “They settled everything?”

“Yes.”

“Who is Jake?” Barnes asked.

“Nate’s best friend.” Warren said, “They had a disagreement on account of me.”

“Oh.” She said.

“That’ll tie up my weekend.” Warren said. Kit was already looking at his work again.

“Ok.” He said and Warren could tell he was not really thinking about it yet. He shuffled through another document and looked back at Warren. “The whole weekend?” he asked.

“Yes.” Warren said.

“Well he knows now, right?” Kit asked.

“Yes.”

“Maybe he’d be cool with me just hanging for a while. Maybe not the overnight thing.” Kit said. Todd had come over with a glass and a pitcher of ice water. He set the glass down. Kit was looking right at Warren. “We probably shouldn’t be making out in front of him either.” He said and started to smile. Warren was just returning his smile when Todd dumped the entire pitcher of ice water into Kit’s lap.

Kit jumped up knocking over his chair with his hands going up against the shock of the cold. He looked at Todd.

“You spiteful little bitch.” Kit said.

“Oh now you recognize me.” Todd said.

“Jesus, Todd, I’m sorry. Ok? I thought we finished this already.”

“You finished it.” Todd said. “Leaving me to hang out to dry.” At this point they were already the center of attention. “I waited for you. I waited for you to leave your wife.” Todd complained some more, “I respected you didn’t want your friend here to know. I’ve been just standing here the whole time waiting. And now what do I see? You casually talking about how you’re acting with him like it was nothing, when you made me step out of my own way not to say anything to anyone. Not to give you away. Not to let your wife know.

“And now you can kiss him in public?” Todd asked. Kit looked down at his wet pants again and looked up at the other man.

“I don’t know what you were expecting.” Kit said, “I never promised you anything against me being with my wife.”

“You said you loved me.” Todd said, “How was I supposed to interpret that? Why do you think I let her catch us?”

“Jesus.” Kit rolled out. “Didn’t see that one coming.”

“But no.” Todd went on, “She divorced you ok, but she never stopped coming around, did she? Meanwhile what am I doing? Hiding for you, hiding the fact that we’re together. And now you can kiss your boyfriend in front everyone here?”

“I could give a flying fuck what anyone else in here thinks of me.” Kit said, “I’ve had my reasons to make my decisions. Some of them may have been bad. I wasn’t lying to you about any of it. Things change Todd, they always do. I did love you, ok? There’re just decisions we have to make along the way. One of the hardest ones was to tell you goodbye. Take it like a man.

“I mean think about it. Is this really the face you want to have in your wedding album?” Kit asked.

“I did, yes.” He replied getting emotional.

“I’m sorry and that’s last time I’m saying it to you.” Kit said, “What are you going to now? Just harass me?”

At this point the manager was coming out from behind the bar. “Todd?” she called, “Can I have a word with you?” Kit turned to look at her.

“Don’t fire him on my account, Lena.” Kit called to her, “I’m sure I deserved this.”

“No.” she said, “We do not act this way towards customers.”

“But I’m not just a customer, am I Todd?” Kit asked him, “I’m somebody else to you and you just got carried away with your emotions. Can’t stand the thought that after hiding you that I’m open about this now. I’m still learning here.” Kit raised his voice, “Okay everybody just so you know. Todd wouldn’t just do this to anybody. I deserved this because I broke his heart. We were together and I never said a word about it. My bad. But now it’s over.” He looked back at Todd as he stood there holding the empty pitcher.

“Todd?” Lena was still calling to him. Todd walked over to her and handed her the pitcher.

“You don’t have to worry about firing me.” He said, “I quit. I don’t want to be anywhere near Kit anymore.” He went past Kit heading towards the door and left.

“I’m sorry Kit.” Lena said. “This must be pretty embarrassing.” Kit turned to look at her and laughed.

“I’ve done worse to myself.” He said smiling at her.

“Yes you have.” She agreed. Kit looked around at everyone still watching.

“Okay everybody.” Kit raised his voice again, “Should anyone else be interested. I’m not available, alright? I’m off the market. I’m in love with this gorgeous man right here. Thank you for your attention in this matter you may all go back to your own lunch now.” Kit righted the chair and sat back down. He folded his arms in front of him.

He slowly turned to look at Warren.

“Uhm.” Kit said, “Was that wrong?”

“No.” Warren answered, “A bit over done and perhaps you could have handled it better. But I’m not sure how I would react if someone had just iced my genitals.”

Warren slowly smiled at him and Kit smiled back. Then Kit turned to look at Barnes. “What are you laughing at?” he asked her.

“Hell of a way to come flying out of the closet, Kit.” She said.

“I never liked the fucking closet. It’s caused me nothing but problems. I’m done with it.” Kit explained. She laughed some more. “What?”

“Just thinking it was a good thing I didn’t just order a pitcher of beer.” She said and he started laughing with her, “That would really have them asking you questions when you get back to work.”

“I’ll dry off first.” He said.

“That washed the layer of dirt off.” She mentioned, “It’s going to be noticeable.” Kit laughed again.

“I’ll just say I laughed so hard at something I pissed my pants.” He said, “They’ll believe that.”

She shook her head at that point. Kit pulled himself back up to the table and looked at his work again.

"I'm in love with you, too." Warren said and Kit turned to look at him.

"I'm jumping the gun." Kit decided.

"No." Warren said, "I think we both know it already. It's nice to be able to say it, too."

"Marry me." Kit said smiling and laughing. Warren laughed at him. "Oh please, please please."

"Stop." Warren said laughing even more.

"Anything for you, Warren." Kit said and they both settled into a smile about it. Warren moved forward and held his hand for a while after that.

9

Warren opened the door to Kit. He was standing there with a tote bag. Warren smiled at him. "I was actually planning on coming by today anyway." Kit said, "So it's a good thing, I had something to change into with me, so the wet pants are in the bag now. I just...I didn't want to wait until Friday. And after today and knowing I might not get with you this weekend...is that ok?"

"Come in Kit." Warren said letting him in the door and then closing it. "I was just sitting here thinking it would be nice if you showed up. I didn't want to wait either."

"Good, we're on the same page." Kit said setting his bag down, "Kid?"

"Not home yet."

"Off schedule?" Kit asked.

"No, he just needs to be here for dinner." Warren explained. Kit moved in and wrapped his arms around him.

"Mmm."

"Comparable to good food?" Warren asked.

"Way better." He replied and started kissing him. The kiss lasted awhile and Kit pulled his face away and squeezed

him tighter. "Now let's just see if I can hold out until after dinner."

"That might require another kiss." Warren said and started kissing him. The door opened in the middle of it and Kit turned his head to see Nate coming through the door.

"Going to my room, pretend I'm not here, whatever." Nate said.

"No, we're okay for now." Kit said pulling away, "Told ya didn't I?"

"Yea." Nate said. He stood there looking at him for a moment. "You ever play on an X-Box?"

"I have nine nephews, what do you think?" Kit asked.

"Want to?"

"Sure Kid." Kit said, "Just afraid of your room."

"It's cleaner." Nate said, "Having company in my room and all of that."

"Alright a few games then." Kit said. Nate led the way into his room. Warren took Kit's bag to the end of the hall and threw his wet jeans in the dryer for a spin. He then came back out and started making dinner.

Kit found his way back over to him before he was finished. He wrapped him up in his arms.

"I was starting to think he wasn't going to like me." Kit said.

"He has trust issues." Warren explained.

"I can understand that." Kit said, "But you got to admit I'm just plain all around lovable, yes?" Warren laughed against him and hugged his head to his neck.

"Sit so I can serve." Warren said.

"You sit and I'll serve." Kit said.

"And act like you made the meal?"

"Sure." He agreed. Warren went and sat down. Nate came out of his room and sat down as well. Kit set the table and sat down in a chair between Warren and Nate.

"Should I get use to this now?" Nate asked.

"If you don't mind." Kit said.

“And this weekend?” Nate asked looking at Warren.

“If that’s what you need, Nate. Then he’ll stay away.” Warren said. Nate looked at Kit for a moment. Then he looked back at his uncle.

“Whatever, I don’t care.” He said. Kit smiled.

“Next meal I cook.” Kit said.

“No way.” Nate said.

“Way.” Kit argued.

“You not going to let him cook are you?” Nate asked. Warren started laughing.

“It’s not that bad.” Kit claimed. Warren continued to smile at him until Kit smiled. “Ok, I don’t get to cook. Be that way.”

“Thank you.” Nate said, “It took days for my mouth to stop burning the last time.”

“It did not.” Kit said. Nate sat there and nodded at him. “I can make something mild.”

“And then you can eat it.” Nate said.

“Nate don’t be rude.” Warren said. Nate shrugged. Kit started laughing and that rounded off the dinner talk. They let Nate clean up.

Warren went on ahead and advanced them to his room early. “Are we tired?” Kit asked.

“Tired of not having you in my arms.” Warren replied and smiled.

“Full board or do you just want to kick your shoes off?” Kit asked.

“Shoes, for now.” Warren answered and went to turn on some music. Kit pulled off his boots and moved up on the bed. Warren kicked off his shoes and crawled in up against him. “Are we going to make any more announcements to the public?” Warren asked.

“I’m sorry Warren.” Kit said, “I got carried away.”

“Retract your apology.”

“Why?”

“Because I liked it.” Warren explained, “And I liked how it was something I didn’t ask you for, but there you were telling everyone that you were with me. I like the way it made me feel.”

“Whew.” Kit said.

“I was just wondering if you wanted to tell your whole crew, too?” Warren asked. Kit laughed but Warren just looked at him. Kit’s smile evened out.

“You’re serious?”

“Sure.” Warren said, “I can show up at the job site sometime in the near future just to give you a kiss.”

“Well if you’re going to tell me about it.”

“Didn’t say what day.”

“You have any idea how many phone calls I will get after that?” Kit asked.

“I don’t know.”

“My mother will be calling me within fifteen minutes of such an event.”

“Well, the offer is there.” Warren said.

“Sure, if you feel froggy, jump.” Kit said, “I’ll tell them all just how lucky I am.”

Warren moved in closer and got deep into his arms for a while.

10

“Garner on line one.” Leigh announced. Warren picked up the line.

“Warren.”

“Hello Warren.” Garner said, “You ready for the almighty weekend?”

“Absolutely.” Warren agreed.

“Yea me too. Golf on Sunday?”

“I wouldn’t look for me Garner.” Warren replied.

“Alright then on to business. Once again I’m standing here teetering at the brink and you’re the only one who can help me.”

“Go Ahead.”

“Those documents you sent over. Ben...I don’t know what he’s done with them. You think you can dupe them and send over fresh copies?” Garner asked.

“I sure can.” Warren answered, “I’d also like to offer you some sound advice along with that.”

“If it will help my life, I’m all ears.”

“It may sound kind of harsh, because it’s my ‘from the hip’ kind of advice.”

“Fairly warned.” Garner said, “I can take it.”

“First, Divorce your wife.” Warren said, “Then take Ben home. Put him in the kitchen where I’m under the impression he will be much happier. Especially on the given of how happy he was the last time he catered a business dinner for you of which I attended. Now I understand that part of your reasoning in keeping him there at the office is to keep him in your daily life. I think you should move that requirement to the home front where you can spend your evenings and weekends together. Then of course there’s sleeping together every night which I’m sure you’re just going without right now. Then get yourself a competent assistance that can do the job, someone who won’t distract you from your work. You’ll be a much happier man.”

The silence on the other end of the line lasted so long Warren had time to review some of his work on his desk while he held the Phone. He wasn’t too surprised that the other man hadn’t just hung up on him. There was still a chance that he was dead wrong, though.

“Warren.” Garner started to say and paused again, “I...how the hell do you know about this?”

“It’s not really that hard to see.” Warren said, “The idea being you keep him around for reasons other than his job performance. Had you just told everyone he was a

relative you were trying to mold into a career as a favor to your family, they'd have all bought that. But since there's no explanation you have everyone scratching their head about it. I just made this conclusion myself due to understanding that sometimes people just want something so bad and don't allow themselves it. That they will settle for what they think they can get away with."

"Whew." Garner breathed into the phone, "For a minute there I thought you were bent against me about it."

"No Garner, you know Kit?"

"Yes, you brought him to our last business dinner which you just mentioned. We spent two hours talking shop and the differences between our two companies. We both agree we couldn't do it without you."

"Yes well, we've been best friends for a long time and it's just been recent that we are now more than just friends."

"*You?*" Garner asked sounding stunned.

"Why are you not as equally shocked about him?"

"Oh we've run into each other in a few places where it was overstated as to why we were both there. At such an event we both agreed that we'd just keep that among ourselves." He explained.

"I suppose." Warren said, "It's okay to be shocked about me, I wouldn't have known myself last month anything about it."

"Wow, me and you." Garner said, "You think I'd have had a clue."

"Nope, neither did Kit."

"Okay then. Well I have to admit what you're suggesting I do. Something similar along those lines had crossed my mind. You really think I should do that?"

"Immediately if not sooner." Warren replied. Garner paused again and Warren was still doing two things at once, working and waiting on him.

“I’m looking at him right now.” Garner finally said, “That’s why he’s here, Warren. I just sit here and look at him and that gets me through my day.”

“Take him home. Get a picture of him, put it on your desk right next to the one you have with your children in it, in the same spot you used to keep the one of your wife that disappeared several years ago.” Warren suggested. He heard Garner try and stifle a laugh.

“It’s your eye for detail, Warren, that’s what makes you so good at your job. I hadn’t had anyone ever mention it before.”

“Most people think it’s none of their business.” Warren said.

“I took that home after Ben started working here and began making faces about it. It wooed him.”

This time Warren laughed a little.

“I don’t know. Everyone knows me with my wife.” Garner said. “She actually requested a divorce two years ago. I raised her allowance and that settled the issue.”

“I can think of five people who know that you are just putting her next to you when appropriate as part of the face you show to people. I couldn’t say anyone else knows where your true heart lies, but that’s possible.

“Give her that divorce and you can stop calling it an allowance and call it alimony as it should be.” Warren said.

“But what would everyone think?”

“The kids are all out of the house. You’re not in love with her. The rest of your life should be your own. Do what you want to do and be happy. I really think you should celebrate what you have with him. Don’t keep holding him off to the side. You really don’t want to lose him.”

“Jesus.” Garner said, “That’s an awful thought. I never even think about losing him, he’s right here.”

“You know what I mean.”

“This could affect business.”

“There’s sure to be some reaction to it, Garner.” Warren said, “But the majority of people you do business with will keep doing business with you based on how well you do that. It truly is none of their concern of what you do with your personal life. It’s actually not my concern either and I have no right to say any of this to you, except I keep seeing it. We both work around him and I can’t help think that’s not the best thing for you to do with your company either.”

“I appreciate it Warren.” He said, “And I’ll be thinking about it from here on out. But if I do as you suggest, I’m going to need an assistant. And the first thing that comes to my mind is to make Leigh an offer she can’t refuse.”

“She’s worth every penny you give her.” Warren said.

“Hmm, those weekend getaways with him do get expensive, I could end up saving some money...Alright Warren, I’m taking that under advisement. You have a great weekend. Ah is it too soon to say congratulations?”

“Not as far as I’m concerned.”

“Well then I’m happy for you. Tell Kit I said hello, hadn’t seen him in a while and pass that all along to him as well.”

“Will do.”

“Don’t get caught in the rain.”

“Bye.” Warren said and hung up.

“I outed Garner.” Warren said as Kit sat down.

“Huh?”

“You know.” Warren explained, “When you make someone admit they are gay when they didn’t want to.”

“Why the hell did you do that?” Kit asked. Warren got an equally concerned look from Barnes.

“I just felt I should say something.” Warren said, “He wasn’t upset with me.”

“Ok.” Kit said. He was still looking at Warren skeptically.

“He had a mention of you.” Warren said, “Right after I told him we were a happy couple.”

“I’m sorry Warren.” Kit said, “It just something you do. Professional curtesy among people like us who run into each other elsewhere. You don’t pass it around. You can lose jobs and clients over this. I know it sounds asinine, it’s just the way it is.”

“But you were only talking to me, Kit.”

“Here.” Kit said, “In public, had we said the same things when it’s just us, I would have agreed with you. But we shouldn’t really be talking about it here, now, either.”

“I agree with Kit.” Barnes said, “If people don’t want to be out when it concerns their jobs, then the rest of us should respect that.”

“Ok.” Warren said, “But let’s talk about something else.”

“Sure.” Kit said. Warren looked around.

“Is this a gay bar?” he asked. Kit started laughing and Barnes was smiling. “Have you been bringing me to a gay bar all these years and I’ve just never known?”

“Yes.” Kit admitted, “But only for lunch. This place is so reserved at lunch time you can’t tell.”

“I’ve seen a few kisses along the way similar to our own.” Warren said.

“Yea, it’s mild in the day time. This place doesn’t get crazy until night time.” Kit said.

“How come I don’t see any of the associated paraphernalia I’d expect in a gay bar?” Warren asked.

“Not every place is like that.” Kit said, “Not everyone wants to scream it at the top of their lungs. Just like you, I’m sure there are several people who have come and gone from this place, enjoying the food, and never guessed it to be a very common location to meet people of the same sex.”

“Then how the hell do you know?” Warren asked. Kit smiled and got up off the chair. He went over to the bar and

got the bartender to give him something. He came back over and handed it to Warren.

“Gay Guide?” Warren asked. Kit leaned into him and opened the book to a marked page. “The Simple Grill, Bar & Tavern, excellent food, highly recommended, not loud, but gay friendly.”

“That’s how.” Kit answered and pulled away from him to return the book to the bar. Warren watched him as he came back over. “You ok?”

“Barnes.” Warren said, “How long have you known about Kit?” She didn’t answer and Kit looked completely guilty. “Come on guys, time to confess.”

“We met in a gay bar.” Barnes answered.

“Alright why the whole horse and pony show?” Warren asked turning towards Barnes. “Just think our first conversation had you lying to me.”

“Guilty.” She said, “It was a way to keep you from knowing about Kit. It was his idea, I played along. You caught me, I’m sorry, what do I have to do to make it up to you?”

“Not a damn thing.” Warren said and smiled, “I don’t blame you at all.”

“And the whole scam about Kit setting us up?” she asked.

“Forgotten.” Warren said. Then he reached over and grabbed Kit’s arm and got his full attention. “No more deception. Ok?”

“I’ve already done that Warren.” He agreed.

“Is there anything else I’m going to figure out later that you could tell me now?” Warren asked.

“Well we were married for a while.” Kit said. Barnes busted out laughing. Warren looked back and fourth between them.

“He’s kidding.” Barnes said. Warren shook his head back and fourth.

“I’ll spend the weekend trying to see if there’s anything important I should remember to tell you.” Kit said, “If it doesn’t come out until later it isn’t because I’m intentionally keeping it from you now. I’ve just forgotten about it.”

“Fair enough.” Warren said.

“You forgive me too?” he asked. Warren got up from his chair and forgave him with a kiss.

11

Jake looked at Warren when he opened the door to him. Nate was standing beside his uncle smiling at his friend’s appearance. “Hello.” Warren greeted. Jake looked at the floor than at Nate who was waiting.

“Hi Mr. Keith.” Jake said, “I’m...I’m sorry about what I said, but you have to understand I’m just looking out for my friend.”

“Yes.” Warren agreed.

“So...I can stay?” Jake asked.

“Yes.”

“Okay, so like miniature golf and the amusement park. I told Mom you’d be taking us.”

Warren smiled at him and let him in the door. “I’d like to bring my friend, too.” He said. Jake turned and looked at him.

“Sure man, the more the merrier, right?” Jake offered.

“Definitely.” Warren agreed. Jake looked at him one more time to see if he needed to hear anything else and then he let Nate lead him to off his room.

Warren went back to his chair and ordered pizza. He read some while he waited for it to arrive. When the door bell rang both boys came out of the room to see what it was about. Warren opened the door and pulled in the first pizza and held it out to the boys. They grabbed it up and took it back to Nate’s room.

“Thank you.” Warren said to the pizza guy. The guy smiled for a moment and hesitated at the door. “Tip to small?”

“Uhm, no.” the guy said, “Nice apartment.”

“It’s the neighborhood. I need to live here for work.” Warren said trying to infer with his hand that he wanted to close the door. The pizza guy peered around his arm at something. “I sincerely hope you are not casing my apartment.”

“No.” the guy said and laughed.

“Than what are you doing? Our business has concluded.” Warren explained. The guy looked at him and smiled.

“I just...never mind.” He said starting to withdraw.

“What?” Warren asked. “Are you having a personal moment at work?” The guy turned back towards him and smiled.

“It’s nice to see you.” He said. “I’m sure it means nothing to you, have a good weekend.” He suddenly bolted down the hallway towards the stairs. Warren stood there for a while watching the space he left. He then closed the door and locked it.

As he sat at the table eating out of the second pizza box he kept looking at the chair Kit had been sitting in the night before. He realized he wanted him to be sitting there just then, eating pizza with him. He finished what he wanted and leaned back and sat there thinking about it.

Nate came over to the table and Warren looked at him. “Any more?” he asked his uncle.

“Yes, I’m done.” Warren answered. Nate opened the box and smiled. Then he looked at his uncle’s expression.

“Why isn’t he here?” Nate asked.

“I hadn’t imagined him being here everyday.” Warren said.

“But it’s Friday.” Nate said.

“And you have company, I’m trying to not over run that by having my own.” Warren said.

“I told you he didn’t really care. He was just freaking out.” Nate said, “So call him, have him come over.”

“He was just here last night, its fine.” Warren said. Nate shrugged and headed back to his room with the second pizza box.

Warren whittled the evening away by watching brand name television and muting away the commercials.

12

Kit showed up just as the boys were starting to go stir crazy waiting to go. They were both looking at Warren with their arms folded in front of them. Warren had to laugh at it, because it looked rehearsed. They both groaned and Kit finally showed up against their waiting. They both barreled out the door past Kit and went on ahead outside.

“Where’s the fire?” Kit asked.

“You’re late.”

“Not that late.”

“Kid time, Kit. They’ve been bouncing off the walls since seven AM waiting to go. You were supposed to be here by eight, it’s now nine. So add an hour to your experience.”

“Are you mad?” Kit asked.

“Just pointing it out.” Warren said as he pushed him back out the door so he could get it closed and locked.

“I guess I don’t get a kiss then.” Kit said looking at the floor.

“That would be the other reason they ran on ahead.” Warren said, “So we’d be in the clear for this.” Warren pushed his head back up and started kissing him.

“Mmm.” Kit replied. Warren pulled him into his arms for just a hug.

“Holy shit storm.”

They both turned to look at the man who'd spoken as he came down off the stairs from the next floor up. "Hello Bill." Warren said.

"I didn't know you were all the way gay." Bill said, "I just thought you liked, you know, boys."

"No Bill. The boy in question is my nephew. He's just staying with me while his mother does something on her own and doesn't include him." Warren explained.

"But I just saw you kissing a guy."

"This would be my boyfriend, best friend, Kit." Warren said. Kit offered his hand. The big surfer looking guy moved forward and shook his hand.

"Au'right. Not bad Mr. Keith if I do say so myself and...well I'm not even gay." Bill said.

"You think I'm good looking?" Kit asked.

"Just something you say my man." Bill said and winked, "I could picture it though." he said looking him up and down. "Oh yea, if I were into it, yum."

He moved forward and grabbed at Kit's shoulder as he passed them.

"You guys take it easy, I'm going to hook up with a hottie, I think I remember her name, Janna or Gypsy, or something like that." He said then he looked back at them and smiled. "Do whatever I wouldn't do." Then he waved and headed on down the stairs.

"Ok." Kit said.

"His wiring is bad." Warren said taking his hand and heading down the hallway.

"It can't be that bad if he thinks I'm a hottie." Kit said.

"Let's just say you couldn't wear a tighter pair of jeans and you're showing off." Warren said.

"Oops." Kit said looking down at himself for a moment. "Better start thinking of Mom, that'll kill that off."

"Don't worry about it." Warren said, "You look perfectly natural like that."

"Yea maybe, but not for public." Kit said.

“It’s not going to bother me.” Warren assured him. They let go of each others hand as they stepped out the door. Kit had his four by four with him and the boys were checking it out.

“This is a guy toy.” Jake said as Kit came over to it.

“Tell me about it.” Kit said.

“I was expecting...something else.” Jake said.

“Like what?” Kit asked. Jake shrugged.

“This is cool, looks like we could run all the other cars over with it.” Jake said, “Can I drive?”

“I don’t think so.” Kit said and laughed at him.

“Shot gun then.” Jake jumped in.

“No, I got that.” Warren said, “Adult prerogative.”

“After this weekend I need to get this back in the garage.” Kit said as they climbed into it. “Have it on hand. Hate for us to be left with only your Saab.”

“Now see.” Jake said from the back seat, “that would be something more like what I was expecting.”

“Sounds like a stereotype to me.” Kit said, “Don’t get sucked into all that shit.”

“Please, no swearing.” Warren said.

“You’re in my world now.” Kit said. “Let’s see what this fucker can do?” The boys laughed but Warren didn’t look pleased.

“Just because he’s doing it doesn’t mean I’m going to be okay with the two of you swearing around me.” Warren said, “That clear?”

“Yup.” They both agreed.

“You’re a bad influence Kit.” Warren said.

“Yea right, like they don’t do it when nobody else is paying attention to it.” Kit said.

“It’s best to show a good example of proper manners.” Warren said.

“Hey do you guys swear when people like Warren or your Mom isn’t around?” Kit asked.

“Yes.” They both answered.

“See.” Kit said.

“It doesn’t qualify it as acceptable.” Warren said, “If it were acceptable everyone would be reduced to such talk at any given time.”

“Are you guys like having a fight?” Jake asked. The men both started laughing. “Guess not.”

“I’m not as well behaved.” Kit said, “You’ve been warned.” Warren looked back to see the boys looking at each other and Nate was nodding at Jake.

“Ok.” Jake said. “This thing go any faster?”

“Speed limit.” Kit said, “Gotta obey the laws.”

“How about we just go somewhere where you can make this go faster?” Jake asked. Kit looked at Warren and smiled.

“Maybe not today.” Kit answered and Warren slowly returned his smile.

“You must scare the hell out of people in the cross walk when your pulling up to a red light.” Jake said and laughed.

“Only had one heart attack victim from that.” Kit said, “They said she’d be fine.”

“You’re kidding, right?” Jake asked.

“Yes he is.” Warren answered. Kit smiled again. The conversation dwindled as they got out on the highway. When Warren checked the boys were keeping pretty much to themselves from his last ride with them. He couldn’t help but wonder if Jake had adjusted his behavior with Nate in that he didn’t want Warren to think anything more of them touching each other.

Warren sighed at the thought and Kit glanced at him. Then he went back to driving. Eventually they reached the miniature golf amusement park and Kit pulled in at an angle taking up two parking spaces.

“Don’t do that.” Warren said.

“What?” Kit asked sounding innocent.

“You think I don’t know what it means?”

“It means I can.” Kit said getting out and ending the discussion about it. The boys got out as well.

They came near one another near the entrance and Kit hugged Warren from the side. Warren smiled at him. Kit smiled at the boys who looked at him disapproving.

“If that’s going to bother you guys, maybe we should head out now.” Kit said. Warren turned to look between them. “I’ve been doing that to him since we met. It’s a guy buddy thing.”

“Okay, whatever.” Jake said, “But why not just kiss him, too?” Warren stopped moving to look at the boy. “Uhm, sorry.”

“What?” Kit asked.

“I was being rude.” Jake admitted. Kit looked between the two of them for a moment, shrugged and led the way to the booth to pay to get in.

They were quiet while they got started deciding what color golf ball they were each going to use.

“You sure you don’t want the pink one?” Jake asked looking at Kit.

“It doesn’t go with what I am wearing.” Kit said. The kid slowly smiled at him and Kit grinned. “I’m a red kind of guy.”

“Yea but I want the red one.” Jake said.

“I had it first.” Kit said.

“Kit give him the red one.” Warren suggested.

“Okay, calm down people we’re here to have fun, yea? I’m just teasing, kid. Ok?”

“Sorry.” Jake said, “I guess I’m not well behaved either.” He grabbed the pink ball. “I’ll use this one.” He headed to the first hole and laughed, “It reminds me of my girl friend.” Kit laughed, too. He then looked at Warren.

“Don’t get all bent up.” Kit whispered towards him, “He’s not being a jerk to me.”

“Alright.” Warren agreed.

“Just give ‘em room to get all their quirks out about it.” Kit said, “He’s actually pretty calm to the way some kids react.”

“Which would have been last weekend.” Warren said.

“Yea well, don’t lord it over him. He seems ok to me.” Kit said.

“You guys coming?” Jake called back.

“Don’t get your panties in an uproar.” Kit called back. The kid started shaking his head. Kit and Warren headed over to get their game started. Nate had already hit his ball and Jake was waiting.

“I go last.” He decided.

“Then I’m next.” Kit said. He set his ball down and got started.

For a while it was all about the game with the boys picking on each other’s shots. They both looked annoyed at how easily Warren managed his ball. It was a nice baby blue and it was leading them.

Warren almost thought Nate was taking it all too serious with his expression of concentration in trying to beat his uncle while Kit and Jake both just knocked their balls around just for fun.

Sometime after that Warren allowed himself to make some more bad shots. It allowed Nate to catch up to him some and he seemed happier for it.

Nate waited for Kit to finish his shot. He then got up in front of the man. “Uncle Kit?” he questioned. Kit turned towards him and started to smile, he then looked at Warren who smiled as well.

“Yea Nate?” Kit asked.

“Can you go get us something to drink?” Nate asked.

“Just beer or you need something harder?” Kit asked. Nate smiled.

“Soda, we both like cola.” he said.

“Sure thing.” Kit said handing him the golf club. Kit shuffled off down the path heading for the concession stand.

“Would he really get us beer?” Jake asked.

“No.” Nate and Warren answered.

“Ok.”

They finished their round of turns and Kit came back with drinks all the way around. He gave Warren one first and then took out his own leaving the two for the boys in the carton which he passed to Nate.

“Is that beer?” Jake asked.

“This?” Kit said holding up his cup, “No, I’m driving. It’s cool to get so drunk you can’t stand up, can’t see, piss your pants, puke, say and do things you regret. But it’s never cool to drink and drive. My sister did that once. Ran over someone’s family dog. She then went to their doggie funeral to watch three little girls sob their eyes out about their beloved Miss Tess as part some kind of grief awareness program. You don’t want to do that, it’s not cool. Not to mention it could have easily been one of those little girls she killed.”

“I’m never going to drink.” Nate said.

“Good plan, kid.” Kit said, “But should that fail, just don’t drink and drive.”

“Ok.” Nate said. They moved another round of turns and come up close to the general path passing by the golf course.

“Hello Kit.” A woman called out. Kit snapped his head.

“Violet.” He said smiling big. He moved over to Warren to grab his right shoulder with both hands. “The one that got away back when I was dating my ex-wife.”

“Go say hello.” Warren suggested. Kit was still looking after the woman on the path and not at Warren.

“I think I will.” Kit said, “I’ll be right back buddy.” He handed off the golf club and shot out over the fence to run down the path after her.

“I’ll play his ball.” Warren said when the boys looked at him.

“That’s not going to make you jealous?” Jake asked. “Him running off after some girl?”

“No.” Warren answered.

“I thought he was like your boyfriend, did I get that wrong?” Jake asked.

“I’m sure it’s not been explained well enough.” Warren said, “What Nate probably hasn’t made clear to you is that Kit is my best friend, just like the two of you are best friends.”

“Not that kind of best friend.” Jake countered.

“Very much like it.” Warren said, “We’ve known each other a long time. It’s not unusual for him to run off and leave me to go talk to some girl. I’m sure that will happen to you some day. Since it’s something he’s always done, it’s not that strange to me. It’s only been recent that I have started to consider him to be my boyfriend over all of that.”

“So he is your boyfriend now?” Jake asked.

“Yes.” Warren answered, “But even so I hope he gets a date with her. It will make him happy.”

“Okay, that would be like my mom going out on a date and leaving my dad home.” Jake said, “I’m sorry Mr. Keith, even to me that’s just weird.” He shrugged. Warren didn’t know what to say to it and looked out in the direction Kit had run off in. He then got back to the game, playing his and Kit’s ball for one round.

Kit came back catching up to them and the boys were looking at him strangely. Kit made a face at them and then turned to Warren holding up a napkin. “She gave me her number.” He explained.

“Good.” Warren said and smiled at him. Kit’s smile slowly faded as he looked at Warren against the napkin he was holding.

“Oh man, that was so stupid.” Kit said.

“It’s fine Kit.” Warren said.

“No, I’m sorry Warren.”

“You don’t have to apologize. I’m okay with it Kit.” Warren said.

“Well I’m not.” Kit said. “I thought we could both do that and it would be cool. But now...now it just feels wrong.” He crumbled up the napkin and looked around until he found a garbage can to toss it in.

“You don’t have to do that.” Warren insisted.

“I know.” Kit said coming back to him. He pressed his chest against Warren’s right shoulder from his side. He then put his right hand on Warren’s left shoulder. “I’ve been telling myself all along. I all I ever wanted was you. If I were ever that lucky that I would never want for anyone else. And here I am screwing that up already.”

Warren started to smile at him.

“No Warren, I’m done with everything else. From now on the only one for me is you.” Kit said. Warren moved in towards him and started kissing him.

“Oh man.” Jake said looking around, “Nate is anyone watching this?”

“Yes.” Nate replied, “I am.” He smiled at his friend. Then he shrugged. Jake looked at him and then back at the men still making out. Jake put his head down and Nate laughed at him.

“Stop.” Jake said.

“You’re not the one doing it.” Nate decided, “So what?” Jake slowly lifted his head up.

“Damn, take a breath.” Jake said. Warren and Kit pulled apart laughing.

“Sorry Kid.” Kit said, “I warned you, I’m *not* well behaved in public.”

Jake took a deep breath looking at them and smiled. “See.” He said.

“What?” Kit asked.

“You just impressed him.” Jake said.

“And here I thought we were just embarrassing you.” Kit said.

“Well, within limits, ok? A peck kind of kiss, not the swallowing each other whole kind out in public.” Jake said. “I hate it when my parents do that shit, too.”

“Easy with the choice words.” Warren said.

“Sorry.” Jake said, “You get me though, right, uhm, Kit?”

“Yea.” Kit said. Then he smiled, “All the more reason to do it to ya.”

“Oh man.” Jake said. He looked at Nate.

“I’m fine with it.” Nate said.

They finished out their game and Warren had calculated it just right so that Nate ended up tying him. They moved on out into the park. Kit and Warren stood around while the boys rode some of the rides. They ate what was available for lunch, which Warren didn’t think to highly of. He then insisted on eating at a nice restaurant for dinner before heading back in to town.

They pulled into an Italian restaurant and Warren won out over Kit taking up two parking slots with his four by four before he could just do it. They then went inside and sat down at a table where there were two chairs each to a side so that the open ends made for walking space between for the servers.

A woman came over and filled up their glasses with water and looked strangely at the way Kit was leaning to one side off his chair against Warren’s side. She then glanced at the boys who were busy actually drinking the water.

“Hi.” Kit said.

“Hello.” She said sounding reserved. She also didn’t shoot into a spiel like he expected. Instead she just held out an order pad and looked at them expectantly.

“Menus.” Kit said to her. She looked around for a moment.

“Be right back with them.” She said. Kit watched her go and turned to look at Warren.

“I think she’s nervous or something.” Kit said, “I wonder if it’s like her first day or something.”

“Maybe.” Warren said.

“Can we order whatever we want?” Jake asked.

“Your Mom make you pick out only certain things?” Kit asked.

“Sometimes.” Jake said, “So?”

“Yes.” Warren said, “I’m buying, order whatever you want.”

“Even lobster?” Jake asked incredulously.

“Is that any good here?” Warren asked.

“I don’t think they serve it nor do I think it’s the kid’s point.” Kit said. Warren looked back at Jake.

“Yes, whatever you want.” Warren said, “My treat.”

“Cool.” Jake said and smiled at Nate. Nate smiled back as the server came back and handed out menus.

“Thank you.” Kit said taking it from her. She made another funny face towards him and then headed off. They looked over their menus and Kit pushed Warren’s head with his own and got him laughing. “Ooo this looks good.” He said showing it to Warren on the menu he was holding. Warren set his down to look at the one Kit was holding up.

“Looks spicy.” Warren commented.

“I’m set, you?” Kit asked turning his head to face him behind the menu. Warren started to smile at him.

“What are you doing?”

“Hiding behind the menu with you.”

“Okay, but its extremely childish.” Warren said.

“You like it.” Kit said and moved closer to kiss his cheek. He stopped when the menu got yanked out of his hand. Kit turned to look at the woman glaring at him. He slowly sat up some more like a kid getting caught in a classroom for slouching.

The boys were too busy reading their own menus to really notice. “Ready?” she asked.

“Yes.” Kit said and gave out his order. Warren gave out his and they both looked at the boys who dropped their menus against the quiet. It took them another moment before they passed her their orders. She took their menus much more congenially.

“I’ll be right back with your drinks.” She explained and walked away.

“Not her first day.” Kit said, “But it might be her last.”

“Easy.” Warren said, “We’re not alone here.”

Kit looked at the boys as they looked around the restaurant. He sighed next to Warren’s ear.

“Thank you.” Warren said.

“I’m not promising anything.” Kit said.

“Let’s just enjoy some good food.” Warren said, “Once it’s here she won’t be around that much anyway.”

“What’s the problem?” Jake asked.

“We’ve put that woman on edge.” Kit said.

“How?” Jake asked.

“Some times it doesn’t take face sucking for other people to see two people being a couple.” Kit said, “There’s still a lot of people who think that gives them the right to be assholes towards you.”

“That lady?” Jake asked.

“Yea she seemed nice to you didn’t she?” Kit asked.

“Yes.” Jake agreed.

“Watch.” Kit said. Jake looked at Nate suspiciously. Warren felt Kit locking his left hand into his right under the table. Warren frowned at him. “I’m just being me.” Kit said. He waited until the woman came back with their drinks. Just as she moved to set one down Kit pulled up their joined hands and set them on the table so he could lean forward and smile at her.

She almost spilled the drink. She then made a noise of discontent at her misplaced cup. She straightened it up and glared down at the men. She then quickly smiled at the boys and headed off.

“You gotta be kidding me?” Jake said.

“Unreal, isn’t it?” Kit asked.

“Why?” Jake asked.

“You said some pretty harsh things yourself last week.” Warren reminded him.

“I’m sorry.” Jake said, “I was razzing you on purpose. I told Nate to tell you I didn’t care. I’m not like her. What’s her problem anyway?”

“She’s probably thinking something not quite so different.” Warren said, “In regards to it, she thinks our display of affection for one another, in of itself, would harm you.”

“That’s so stupid.” Jake said.

“Yea.” Nate said, but at a much lower volume.

“That’s enough though.” Warren said relaxing his fingers so that Kit would let go. “Let’s just focus on eating.”

“I am hungry.” Nate said. Kit let his hand go and slid his chair over some more away from Warren.

“We eat first.” Kit said as he smiled at him. They were quiet until their food came to the table. The woman stayed focused on what she was doing and without any further distractions she did it quickly.

“Ketchup.” Nate requested.

“Sure.” She said smiling at him. She then headed off and came back with Ketchup.

“You got any Tabasco sauce?” Kit asked.

“I don’t believe we do.” She answered.

“You think you could ask back in the kitchen?” Kit asked.

“I guess I can do that.” She agreed. Then she left. Kit lifted his head in Jake’s general direction.

“What?” the kid asked.

“She won’t look for it.” he said. The kid pushed his lips off to the side for a moment and then went back to his food. They didn’t see her again for the duration and Kit relaxed against Warren’s side again.

“I am having the best time, Warren.” Kit said.

“Me too.” Warren agreed.

“You guys having a good day?” Kit asked.

“Yes.” They both answered.

“Fasten your seatbelts, it could be a bumpy ride from here on out.” Kit said and smiled. They looked at each other questioningly.

“I don’t suppose it would help if I begged?” Warren asked.

“Did she come back and tell me she couldn’t find me any sauce?” Kit asked. Warren sighed. “That’s what I thought.”

They were actually sitting there a while with empty plates that hadn’t been picked up and Warren was getting annoyed at that, never mind waiting on their check. Kit finally looked at him. “I love you.” Warren said, “Just the way you are.”

“I love you, too, Buddy.” Kit said. Kit pulled his chair right up next to Warren’s and wrapped his arm around his shoulder and leaned his head against him.

She eventually came back to the table, check already in hand. Kit looked at her and smiled. “No luck?” he asked.

“Excuse me?” she asked back trying to make a quick get away.

“Nothing, not a big deal.” Kit said, “I think we all enjoyed our meal. Especially my man here and he’s hard to please.” Kit leaned over and caressed Warren’s neck with his lips.

“I can’t believe you.” She said. Kit snapped back to look her. “This is inappropriate behavior in front of children. You are ungodly and irresponsible to act in such a manner. You will leave immediately.”

“I think I want desert.” Kit said. She bolted away from the table leaving the check on it and not bothering with their plates. Kit smiled at Warren and raised his eyebrows.

“Did she just say that?” Jake asked.

“Yes.” Kit said.

“Has she not been watching television or what?” Jake asked. “I mean come on.”

“It’s the part where she said ungodly that gives it away.” Kit said, “Fresh from Sunday school, not ready for the real world.”

“I go to church.” Jake said, “They don’t teach us how to act that stupid there.”

“Sounds like a good kind of church to me.” Kit said, “And you couldn’t get me to step foot in one of them. I’d instantly erupt into flames anyway.” The kid laughed with him. Warren was looking at Nate who wasn’t too pleased. He’d begged Warren not to make a big deal out of it anymore and although Jake was favorable with Kit’s playfulness, Nate was not.

A man eventually came over to their table sporting a tag that identified him as the manager. He glanced at them, the state of their table and the check. “Is there a problem here?” he asked.

“You know.” Kit said, “I’m glad you came over. The food was excellent. I think the boys enjoyed it, too, but the server. Look at this table? This should have been cleaned up already.”

“She seems to be under the impression that you’re acting in an inappropriate manner over here for being in public.” The man said.

“What could she possibly mean by that?” Kit asked looking around and then at Warren. He then looked back at the guy and laughed just a little. “No, she couldn’t...She couldn’t be going on about me giving my boyfriend a kiss, could she?”

“Is that it?” he asked.

“Maybe.” Kit said. He pulled up his hand holding Warren’s. “Perhaps this made her uncomfortable, too?”

“I’m sorry.” The manager said as he went ahead and grabbed up some of the plates. “I’ll be your server now. Is there anything else I can get you?”

“You guys want desert?” Kit asked.

“Yes.” They both answered.

“The boys would like desert.” Kit said.

“Very well.” The manager said, “I’ll bring desert menus and get someone to bus this table immediately. Again, please accept my apology.”

“No problem.” Kit said, “I’m sure to come back myself.” The man smiled and shuffled away with the plates. “The odds are in our favor.” Kit said to Warren, “That the manager of a nice restaurant would end up being a gay man.”

“That’s a stereotype.” Warren said.

“Yea, but it’s also true.” Kit said smiling at him. “That spoil your whole meal?”

“No, I’m fine.” Warren said, “Nate, everything ok?”

“I guess.” He answered.

“The point being.” Kit said, “You need to be willing to stand up for what you think is right. Within the limits of the law of course, even if you think it’s cool to steal, they will still arrest you for it.” He smiled and both boys smiled back at him.

A bus boy came and cleared the table and offered the boys desert menus. The manager put their deserts on the house and refused any kind of tip.

As they got out the door Warren stopped, “Nate wait, Kit go ahead with Jake to the truck. We just need a minute.”

“Alright.” Kit said heading over to the truck with Jake walking beside him. Warren looked at Nate.

“I’m sorry. I failed to advance your request to Kit in you not wanting me to make a big deal out of this anymore.” Warren said. Nate considered it for a moment.

“He was right, she was an asshole.” Nate said and led the way over to the truck. Warren wasn’t sure if he’d accepted the apology or not. He went on into the passenger

side of the truck and got seat belted in. He looked at Kit to see him grinning.

“Alright who wants to go off road?” Kit asked.

“Me.” The boys answered. Kit smiled more at Warren.

“Thirty minutes tops.” Kit said, “Take us a few to get somewhere to do it. That’ll give us time for our dinner to settle.”

“Alright.” Warren said.

“It relieves stress.” Kit said and winked.

“I doubt that.” Warren said.

“You just relax. So you bounce off onto a forty-five degree angle a few times. It’s nothing but a thing.” Kit said. Warren continued to look at him. “Trust me.” Warren started to laugh at that point. He looked back at the boys as they seemed to be excited by the prospect.

They eventually got off road and Kit drove around like a manic causing the truck to bounce and heave all over the place. Warren continued to look back to see the boys laughing and having a good time and he suffered the event for a full hour before his eyes pleaded with Kit to bring it to a close.

Kit came all the way back into the apartment with them. The boys sat down on the couch and started scanning channels. “Well I should be going.” Kit said.

“Alright.” Warren said.

“Thanks for including me.”

“You made the day.” Warren said, “You’re always welcomed in my day.” Kit smiled.

“You better be careful, you might just be stealing my heart.” Kit said.

“I thought I had that.” Warren said. Kit gave him a hug and moved back to the door and opened it. Jake popped up on the back of the couch.

“Hey.” He said. Kit looked back at him.

“Yea Kid?”

“You don’t have to leave because I’m here.” Jake said.

“It wouldn’t be appropriate for him to stay.” Warren said.

“Okay, whatever.” Jake said, “But if you think about it, if you’re busy with him what do I have to worry about?”

“There is a certain sense of logic to that.” Kit said.

“Nice try.” Warren said smiling at him.

“Uncle Warren.” Nate said joining Jake backwards on the couch, “I want Uncle Kit to stay.”

The two men looked at each other. “We could pretend we were married.” Kit said, “Then I definitely wouldn’t be leaving.”

“You have nothing to change into tomorrow.” Warren said.

“I got a bag in my truck. I figured, you know, maybe?” Kit said. Warren looked back at the boys. The idea that they were actually enjoying Kit’s company over his own was apparent. He could interact with them better. And then when it was time for bed, he could interact with Warren.

“Go get your bag.” Warren said.

13

Between playing games, channel surfing and eventually a long series of distasteful dirty jokes, the boys kept Kit busy right up to around midnight. Warren was past trying to keep his eyes open himself and was sinking into his chair when Kit finally left the boys to their own devices and approached Warren. He dramatically hefted him out of the chair with both arms intending to carry him to his side like the walking wounded.

Warren opened his eyes taking his own feet. Then he turned the heft into a hug and they walked back to Warren’s room. “They wore me out.” Kit admitted.

“Yea, perhaps we could just sleep at this point.” Warren suggested.

“Yes.” Kit said. He kissed Warren for a moment and then started undressing him. Warren stood for it eyeing him as he went and coming awake just a little from his touch. Then Kit quickly undressed himself and moved into Warren’s embrace.

“Perhaps sleep can wait just a few.” Warren said.

“Time to just ride it like a wave.” Kit said bringing him on to the bed. “Just be still and don’t act on it. You ever do that before?”

“I don’t recall.” Warren answered. Kit got him tangled against himself.

“Just be still, fall asleep and enjoy the ride.”

“I don’t feel any motion.”

“Not that kind of a ride.” Kit explained and nudged his head some.

“You’ve adjusted your position with me again.” Warren said, “Once again by saying it out loud in front of people.”

“Had to.” Kit said, “I couldn’t let it go on being unsaid. I wasn’t actually that tempted. I was on auto pilot.”

“Well, just to be sure. Do you want me to reciprocate that move?” Warren asked.

“I want you to, yes.” Kit answered, “But I can’t just keep changing it all by myself. You have to have some say.”

“Not to be truly exclusive to loving you.” Warren said, “But you’re the only man for me, too. I’m not going to be interested in a woman as long as you’re occupying my time. That only leaves me with one concern over how you’re going to feel if we...keep on like this.”

“What’s that?”

“Nathaniel.”

“Of course Warren.” Kit said.

“I need to make sure that it’s clear.” Warren said, “Should I so choose do so, that you’re not going make any demands against it. If I in fact start to love Nate again.”

“You don’t love him now?” Kit asked pulling away to get a look at him. Warren sighed and managed to get his hand on his forehead.

“I thought I let this go.” Warren said. He pulled his hand away and looked at Kit. “I needed to. I needed to disengage from him just to be able to walk away. After the last time he stayed with me I was pretty clear that I hated him. We said as much since he’s been back that we hate each other.”

“That doesn’t sound right.” Kit said.

“I left him, Kit. I’m sure deep down he still resents me for it.” Warren said, “He’s made a move to want to love me again, but I just couldn’t bring myself to that yet. I don’t know what to do.”

“He’s just a kid, whatever he’s done wrong, how can you not love him?” Kit asked.

“Need I remind you that you have yet to have the same experience?”

“It can’t be his fault.” Kit said.

“In regards to what happened to him, no. In how he seemed to listen to me and respond to me where he would do what was right, for himself, for his mother and myself. And then have him turn it all around back on me, making me out to be the bad guy. I don’t care how forgiving you are. It broke me in half.”

Kit hugged him tightly. “Ok.” Kit said, “You need to work that out for yourself. And if you can, I’m not going to interfere with you and Nate. To me he’s part of who you are. He’s the kid. And me loving you extends to him.”

Warren hugged him back. “I just don’t know if I can.” Warren explained.

Warren moved to get some air in his mouth. He pushed his hair back as he did and Kit climbed over him to

look at him. "Is it just me, or is that getting better?" Kit asked. Warren took another deep breath.

"I think you're on to something with that move." Warren said. Kit pushed his hair back smiling at him.

"I'm starting to just enjoy looking at you, especially right now." Kit said. Warren looked at the clock.

"It's almost ten." He noted.

"Hello?" Kit said waving his hand in front of him.

"I'm right here." Warren said and laughed. "I think you've had my undivided attention for a while here."

"Just making sure your listening to me when I have something to say for sure." Kit said.

"Yea, I heard you." Warren said, "Ditto."

"No way." Kit said curling his head against a pillow. Warren moved again to come up some and looked down at him, his eyes moving up and down him the way he was curled up.

"Way." Warren replied as he remembered the appropriate response to the childish talk.

"Prove it." Kit said smiling. Warren dropped back down and put his right hand up in the air.

"What we just did? That wasn't proof?" he asked.

"I think we'd do that anyway." Kit said and smiled again. Warren moved over to him getting entangled with him again and getting him in a strong hold. He then kissed the top of his head and stayed there for a while.

"Okay now we definitely need a shower." Warren said, "And see about breakfast."

"Brunch." Kit corrected.

"Whatever label you wish to use at this point is fine with me. I'd just like to eat something myself." Warren said.

He led the way to the shower. They got cleaned up and Warren came out of the bathroom trying to decide if he could get away with his usual Sunday state of undress or not. He looked at Kit as he pulled on his jeans and then put on a t-shirt from out of his bag.

“You got another one of those?” Warren asked.

“What?” Kit asked.

“A t-shirt.”

Kit ran his hand through the bag and pulled one out. Warren walked over to him and took it. He then pulled it over his head. It wasn't a perfect mate for him, but it would do. Kit smiled at him as so far it was the only thing he was wearing. Warren went through his dresser drawers until he found a pair of pants that were the least like slacks. He set them aside and managed his briefs and then pulled them on. This pair didn't have a built in belt. Warren pushed the edge of the t-shirt inside and turned towards Kit.

“How is this?”

“You're you.” Kit replied.

“I don't want to get fully dressed, but I promised the kid I'd not run around in my...pajamas.” Warren said.

“Yea, next week.” Kit said. Warren turned to look at him, “Uhm, maybe?”

“No, not maybe.” Warren said. He smiled, “You should be here every Saturday night at the very least.”

“And Sunday night?”

“Sure.”

“Monday?”

“Especially Monday.” Warren agreed, “But leave Tuesday out. And Perhaps Wednesday.”

“And Thursday?”

“Optional, but definitely Friday night as well as Saturday.” Warren decided.

“Did we just commit to a schedule of when to be together?” Kit asked.

“You were participating, how could you have missed that?”

Kit got up and walked over to him. “I love you.”

“I love you, too.” Warren said, “Let's go start the day.”

“I already started it.” Kit said and grabbed at Warren's behind, “Not let's get it moving.”

“As long as it involves food, call it whatever you like.” Warren said. Kit made a sudden rush for the door.

“I’m cooking.” He said.

“I doubt that.” Warren said.

“Whoever gets to the kitchen first, cooks.”

“You’re not suggestion we run through the house like children.”

“Ready...set...go.” Kit said and Warren battled him to get through the door and they were wrangling each other all the way out into the kitchen where Kit held Warren back and stuck his foot out for it to reach the tile first. “Counts.” Kit said relaxing.

“Just try not to kill me.” Warren said. He turned to see the boys watching them from the couch. “Good morning.”

“Hey.” They greeted.

“You guys eat?” Warren asked.

“Hours ago.” Nate answered.

“I guess it’s our turn.” Warren said and looked at Kit as he started pawing through the cupboards and refrigerator. Warren went over to his chair and sat down.

Nate got up from the couch and walked near him. Nate smiled at him and then opened the door to get the paper. He closed the door and brought it over to his uncle. “Thank you.” Warren said.

“Likewise.” Nate said. He went back to the couch and Warren decided he was talking about him wearing pants and some form of a shirt.

Kit took his time and by the time he got done what he was doing he started to call it lunch. Warren had resorted to eating fruit in the interim. The boys eventually had to come over and watch what Kit was doing.

He loaded the table with food. Warren decided he’d stocked a few things when he’d stayed there while Warren was in the hospital. “Looks like I went to a Mexican restaurant.” Jake said as he took a seat, this time next to Warren against Nate sitting in his usual chair.

“A guy has to know how to cook good food.” Kit said. Nate looked at it skeptically. “I made yours mild.”

“Why do I think it won’t make a difference?” Nate asked.

“Just take a bite.” Kit suggested. Jake was already trying some himself. His eyes went wide and he started flapping his hand in front of his mouth. “What?” Kit asked.

“Hot.” Jake answered.

“That’s not hot.” Kit said and offered him a bite of his own burrito. “This one is hot, wants some?” Jake shook his head no and Kit smiled at him. Nate tried a bite himself and had the same reaction Jake had had. “Are you crying?” Kit asked.

“Stop.” Warren said. Kit smiled.

The boys continued to brave bites of food and eventually Jake was complimenting Kit’s cooking which only made things worse. Warren had gotten used to it over time, but never requested it. He was able to get through it without over reacting like the boys, even though he was thinking the same thing that his mouth was on fire. Beyond that he agreed with Jake that it tasted pretty good.

The boys cleaned up together and ditched some of the leftovers down the garbage disposal when Kit had his back turned. Warren frowned at them and they shrugged.

They spent the afternoon watching movies. Jake was pretty excited when Kit offered to drive him home in the four by four. He wanted to look cool stepping out of it when he got home. He was also no longer acting strange to Warren’s eyes and had gone back to shoving Nate in the back seat like he’d done before. He might just have stayed reserved as long as the trip was short. Warren took the opportunity to read his paper along the way while Kit told unbelievable stories which the boys laughed at as being ridiculous.

Jake jumped out of the four by four and stood at Warren’s window. “Thanks man, for giving me a second chance.” He said.

“Sure.” Warren said.

“You guys are pretty cool and not like I expected.” Jake said.

“I’m just glad I’m not in the way of your friendship with Nate.” Warren said.

“Yea, don’t think anyone could be.” Jake said and smiled. He then stepped back to Nate’s window. “Later dude.” They slapped each other’s hands and Jake headed towards his door and turned back to wave as Kit pulled out of his yard.

“Being way out here, I’m closer to my house than not.” Kit said, “I should swing by. Warren you want to drive my work truck back? That way I can get this in the garage?”

“Sure.” Warren agreed.

“Alright.” Kit said. It was more time on the road. When they got there Kit did a quick inspection of the house and came out with some more clothes. Nate stood next to the four by four looking at his uncle.

“Do you care if I ride with him?” Nate asked.

“Not particularly.” Warren answered. Nate nodded. “Something else on your mind?”

“Is he going to start living with you?” Nate asked.

“No, he has his own house. We should have Tuesdays Wednesdays and most Thursdays to ourselves.” Warren explained. Nate looked at him strangely for a while after that. “You’re having some difficulty with this?” Warren asked.

“Just the idea you’d make a schedule for it.” Nate said.

“You have an alternative?”

“No.”

“Should you think of one, I’d be glad to listen to it.” Warren said. Kit finally came back and handed Warren his keys to his work truck.

“I’m with you.” Nate said, “I want to ride up front.”

“Ok.” Kit said.

The ride was quiet for Warren and Kit occasionally yanked his steering wheel from side to side trying to impress

the kid while Warren complained about it from within Kit's work truck while no one else could hear it.

After getting the four by four into the garage Warren retained the driver's seat of the work truck and Nate stood at the passenger door looking in. "You should just fit between us." Warren said. Nate looked at the back seat to see it loaded with too many things for him to get back there. Warren lifted the center compartment and Nate finally climbed into the truck. Kit came in after him, and Nate was squished between them.

"Not that much room." Nate said.

"Get your arm over him." Warren suggested.

"My arm." Kit said. He lifted it up behind Nate so he could turn facing forward. Kit's hand landed on Warren's shoulder and Nate was left to lean back against his arm.

"I feel five." Nate complained.

"That's probably because when you were five, you were sat between us in Kit's old work truck." Warren said.

"Oh man, you remember that?" Kit asked. "Running around in that rust bucket just hoping it stayed moving long enough to get to work?"

"Yes." Warren agreed, "Now you have this bran new sports model truck."

"It was on sale." Kit said and got them both laughing.

"Why was I with you?" Nate asked.

"You wanted to go to work with us." Warren answered.

"I did?" Nate asked.

"Sure you did." Warren said, "Then you were going to ask our boss for a job."

"Oh you remember his sorry ass?" Kit asked.

"Unfortunately." Warren said.

"What happened?" Nate asked.

"He wouldn't let you out of the truck on the site." Kit answered, "You spent the whole day in the truck."

"Ok." Nate said.

“We plied you with ice cream and candy after that.” Kit said, “You forgave us for thinking we’d lied to you about not letting you get out of the truck.”

“Oh.” Nate said. Kit let his arm down and hugged Nate for a moment. Nate jerked in the seat as a reaction and caused Warren to swerve in the road.

“Calm down.” Warren said regaining the road. When he was able he looked back to see Kit with his arm way up in the air and Nate staring at him. Warren pulled the truck over at the nearest opportunity and stopped.

“I’m sorry.” Kit said.

“I never said you could touch me.” Nate explained.

“Nate, there’s hardly any room.” Warren said.

“I was fine with his arm there.” Nate explained, “It didn’t give him the right to hug me.”

“Jesus.” Warren complained and sighed. He looked at Kit’s shocked expression. “He forgot, Okay Nate? He forgot you freak out when people try and touch you and you’re not expecting it.”

“I’m sorry.” Kit said again.

“Kit put your arm down.” Warren said. Kit slowly put his arm back where it was and Nate slowly relaxed. “We okay now?”

“Yes.” Nate said.

Kit kept catching Warren’s eye the rest of the way back to the apartment where Warren pulled the truck up curbside for parking. Kit climbed out immediately letting Nate out. Nate got out and headed on up into the apartment not waiting on them. Kit slid back into the truck.

“You’re right, I forgot.” Kit said. “I’m having trouble believing that that’s the same kid who used to side right up next to me.”

“You’re also forgetting that his father requested that I not let you anywhere near him. All Nate knew about it then was you just disappeared.”

“That bastard really screwed him up.” Kit said.

“You’re lucky he didn’t hit you.” Warren said, “He hit me pretty hard the last time I touched him.” Kit looked at Warren for a while.

“He’s needs counseling.” Kit decided.

“There’s nothing I can do about that as long as Juliana insists that he doesn’t. She’d like to go right on believing that she was the only one who got beat. By allowing him the help he needs she’d have to admit that she failed her child and let him be abused. It’s just easier to believe that I’m the liar and he just got a few bumps and bruises all on his own, or worse I did it to him.”

“She doesn’t believe that?”

“She said it once.” Warren said, “She then thought better of it in realizing if that were true than I’d need to leave when she didn’t want me to. She wanted me there to keep caring for her kid while she studied for her doctorate.”

Kit climbed all the way back into the truck and pulled Warren over towards him getting him into his arms. Warren grabbed his hand in response and they stayed there for a while with a few evening pedestrians looking at them through the open door.

Kit kissed his head and got out of the truck. He grabbed his bag from the back and waited for Warren to come out locking the truck. He gave him his keys and they headed up into the apartment.

Kit took his bag to Warren’s room. Warren walked over to where Nate was sitting on the couch doing nothing else. “You going to be ok?” Warren asked.

“I’m fine.” Nate said.

“I think you need to recognize that he only did that because he was remembering doing it when you were younger. I realize you don’t remember any of it, but you used to adore Kit as much I do.” Warren said, “He cares about you, too. Him hugging you is affection.”

“Whatever.” Nate said.

“I know this sounds weird to you. But he’s apologized for startling you. You need to do the same.” Warren said. Nate slowly came up on the couch to look around as Kit came to stand halfway towards them in the middle of the floor space.

Nate looked at Warren and then got up and walked over to Kit. He held out his hand offering a handshake. Kit took it. “We cool?” Nate asked.

“Yea man.” Kit said.

“I get jumpy. Ok?” Nate asked.

“Yea.” Kit said still holding his hand. Nate slowly pulled away letting his hand go. He then headed to his room, closing the door behind him. “I just want to hug him.” Kit said. Warren walked over towards him.

“I know how you feel.” Warren said. He then went on ahead and made dinner.

Closer to the end of dinner Kit tried a few jokes on Nate and eventually got him laughing about something. Kit smiled at Warren about it and the rest of the evening went pretty well as far as Warren was concerned. He was definitely glad for the company that night.

15

The newspaper guy nodded his head up as Warren approached. “Yes?” Warren asked as he handed over his money to the man.

“He spoke to her.” the old guy said.

“Damn it.” Warren said looking back towards the apartment. He then slowly came around to the newsstand man. “Did he go anywhere with her?”

“For about twenty minutes.” The guy agreed.

“When?”

“Last week. Didn’t see you Friday, so on Thursday.” The guy said. “They spoke and he left with her. He came back alone and went back over your way.”

“Thank you.” Warren said.

“Sure.” The guy said. Warren headed on to work.

He wasn't having a good day. Kit called to let him know he wasn't going to be around for lunch and Warren didn't bother to show up himself. He tried to stay focused in on his work, but he kept coming back to what Nate had done and getting angrier about it each time he thought about it.

The walk home had him stopping and taking a few deep breaths trying to stay calm. He only had Leigh asking him four or five times if he was okay to which he responded he wasn't having the best day.

He stopped at his front door and hesitated to unlock it. The minute he did all hell would break loose about it. He slowly unlocked the door and then opened it. Nate was cheerily eating potato chips on the couch watching TV. Warren set his bag down and slowly walked over to stand in front of the TV.

“Hey.” Nate said. The idea that nothing gave his betrayal away only made Warren that much angrier. He hit the power button on the TV and Nate's last bite slowed down until he nervously gulped it down. “What?” he asked.

“Why don't you tell me?” Warren asked. He realized his tone betrayed how bad his own control was over his emotion about it.

“I have no idea.” Nate said even sounding innocent and turning his head back and fourth.

“Venture a guess.” Warren said raising his voice, “Of what it would take for me to get this upset with you?”

“Just tell me already.” Nate said. He was unconsciously crawling backwards up the couch in reaction to Warren's stance.

“It would be best if you confessed.”

“Confessed what?”

“What have you done wrong lately, Nathaniel?” Warren shouted, “What have you done against me lately? After all our negotiation on the matter you came back

through my door with a promise on your lips. Do you know which one I'm talking about?"

"No." Nate said.

"I should not have to spell this out for you, how many promises have you made to me lately that you haven't kept? Are there so many you've lost track?"

"No." Nate said, "I didn't do anything."

"Yes you did." Warren said, "In the end you would betray me, so easily."

"What are you talking about?"

"Mindy." Warren clarified and all the guilt about it came rushing across Nate's face, because he hadn't associated what his uncle was talking about to what he'd done yet.

"How do you know that?" Nate asked.

"I hear your denial loud and clear." Warren said, "It matters not how I know. I'm an intelligent man. Are you going to deny that after you made a promise to me to never have anything to do with the girl that you saw her?"

"Just for a minute." Nate said, "Just to say hello."

"No, no hello. You said your goodbye in your e-mail." Warren said, "That should have been sufficient."

"You read my e-mail?"

"The occasion for me to do so happened, so yes. And I was proud of your method. Now, now I'm not happy with you at all. This has been the last time I will stand for you to walk on me like *I'm nothing*."

He pulled away from the couch and headed towards the phone as Nate trailed after him with his eyes. Warren yanked the phone up and made a call. He was breathing hard and wasn't steady in his voice.

"Kit."

"Kit." Warren said, "I seem to recall that you have an uncle. Runs a pig farm if I recall correctly."

"Yes." Kit said, "Warren what's going on?"

“Nathaniel.” Warren said, he turned to look at the kid, “He’s broken his promise to me that you were a witness to. At this point I *can’t stand* to look at him.” Nate sagged down on the couch. “I was thinking should your uncle need the help, we could offer up Nathaniel as a worker. That should keep him busy and out of trouble.”

“Warren.” Kit said, “I like my family and all, but even I wouldn’t put Nate out there. I don’t care what he’s done. I’ll take him, ok?”

“Fine.” Warren shouted.

“If I do that, if I’m keeping him away from you, then we won’t spend any time together.”

“Your right, that’s not going to work.”

“Just calm down, ok?” Kit asked, “I’m right in the middle of something, running late. Just sit down, breath and I’ll be there as soon as I can. Don’t do anything, just sit.”

Warren moved to sit down. “Sitting.” Warren said.

“Good, stay put. Let me get out of this as fast as possible. I’m on my way, ok Buddy?”

“Yes.” Warren said. Kit hung up and Warren dropped the phone on the floor. Nate was looking at him from over the back of the couch with his eyes just barely high enough to see. Nate slowly went down on the couch out of sight.

Warren had been sitting there a long time just breathing. He was trying not to think of anything, but his emotions were doing what they wanted to regardless. Nate finally came up off the couch looking at him.

“Are you going to make dinner?” Nate asked. Warren turned to look at him.

“No.” he shouted.

“Okay, then I’m leaving.” Nate said and started to come around the couch.

“You will not go anywhere near that door if you know what’s good for you.” Warren said.

“And what are you going to do?” Nate shouted at him, “Hit me?”

“No Nathaniel, as I have never done so before I wouldn’t start now. No, I’m not going to hit you. I’m going to hug you, what do you think of that?”

The kid came around the couch to stand and face him. “Go ahead, I’m right here. I suppose you want to kiss me, too?”

“Yes.”

“On the lips?”

“Yes.”

“How is that any different from what he’s done to me?” Nate asked.

“It’s very different.” Warren said.

“Come on then.” Nate said, “Because if you just sit there and do nothing, then I’m going out that door.”

Warren got up and moved closer. Nate was dancing like he was ready for a fight. Warren came in and quickly got his arms around him, one hand on the back of his head and the other on his back. Nate resisted for a moment, shaking from the contact, but he had his head down already as a sign of being defeated. He didn’t really want to battle. Warren pulled him tight against himself. Nate shucked his shoulders once, letting his face come against Warren’s shoulder.

Then Nate hugged him back. He hugged him hard and Warren could feel his strength in how hard he was grabbing on to his back. The shuck became a sob and he cried out once, loud and clear that he was in pain. Then he stopped. Warren caressed his head for a while.

“I’m sorry.” Nate finally said.

“You have hurt me again.” Warren said.

“I’m just a kid, I screwed up.” Nate said. Warren heard him talking about something that wasn’t about the girl. “I...wanted him to love me, too.”

“He can’t.” Warren said, “He’s incapable.”

“Why?” he asked letting his pain out again.

“I don’t know.” Warren answered reacting to his emotion with his own. Nate sobbed one more time.

“I won’t ever talk to her again.”

“You said that before.”

“I know.” He said, “I wanted to come inside. I didn’t care either way if you believed me. I want you to believe me now. I will not speak a word to her again, ok?”

“You need to understand, I’m not trying to deny you a friend. She’s not your friend. You don’t know her. I understand something about it beyond what you can. You need to trust me. She’s dangerous to you. I don’t want you to get hurt, Nate. Not ever again, not by anyone, not even me.”

Warren rested his head on top of Nate’s and they held on to each other for a while longer. Warren looked up when he heard a key go into the lock and Kit opened the door. As Kit took in where they were at Nate went ahead and pulled away from Warren looking away and at the floor he ran into his bedroom closing the door.

Kit closed the door and came over to Warren, looking into his eyes. “You guys ok?” Kit asked.

“No.” Warren answered finding himself to be calm. “We’re not. I don’t know if we ever will be.”

Kit put his hands on Warren’s shoulders. “You think you can work it out where he can stay?” Warren shook his head no, but his eyes weren’t telling Kit the same thing. He gave a confused look in return.

“Why anyone would ever dream of having a child is beyond me.” Warren exclaimed, “They are nothing but the greatest potential for pain.”

“Do you love him?” Kit asked. Warren looked off into the kitchen as tears started coming out of his eyes about it. He looked back at Kit.

“Yes.”

“That’s why.” Kit said. Warren shook his head no.

“That’s not the answer to the riddle.” Warren said, “It’s the problem. The irony here is I can’t have a child, so be it. Why then must he keep coming back into my life?”

“What do you mean you can’t have a child?” Kit asked.

“I’m not allowed. My body doesn’t produce seaman than can impregnate a woman. I’m sterile.”

“I’m sorry Warren.” Kit said.

“No, I can accept this.” Warren said, “Because it’s the best thing to ever happen to me, because at the moment I’m pretty sure.”

“You’re just upset.” Kit said, “You’ll wind out of this.”

“No, this is my final say here.” Warren said, “I’m not allowed so therefore let it be known that I don’t want a fucking kid.” He raised his voice at the last pushing his head forward with his emphasis. Kit’s eyes trailed off his face to look over to where Nate was then standing in his open doorway. Warren looked after that. Nate turned his head and went to the bathroom, closing the door.

Warren put his palms to his forehead and went and sat down.

“Jesus Christ.” He complained. Kit came down in front of him and got one hand on his shoulder and the other covering his hand.

“Look at you, your breaking all your own rules.” Kit said, “Swearing, calling out to the lord.”

“I don’t believe in God.” Warren said.

“Well, we don’t need to run that over again.” Kit said, “I think we killed it.”

“I can’t do this.” Warren said, “I told you, I’m not the right person for him.”

“Well, you got a hug in, that’s probably a first.”

“As a means of conflict and showing him who was stronger, making him think he’s weak. That’s not good.” Warren said.

“I’ll talk to him, ok?” Kit offered.

“No, not ok. Don’t talk to him, leave him alone for now.” Warren said. He pushed back to his feet getting Kit to move back, “I think you should leave me alone for a while, too.” He then passed him and went into his room where he crawled into bed for a while.

Kit eventually came into his room regardless of his request to be left alone. When he did Warren got an eye on the hour and realized it was well past bed time. Kit crawled into the bed beside him and got his arms around him.

“I fed him.” Kit said, “Hadn’t said a word.”

“Ok.” Warren said.

“How we doing?”

“I wish Juliana would come home and take him away.”

“No.” Kit said, “You’re just upset.”

“I’m done trying.”

“No you’re not.” Kit argued, “Maybe its time to get custody so you can get him the help he needs.”

“You are not hearing me.” Warren said, “I don’t want him.”

“I don’t believe you.”

Warren moved around to make eye contact. Kit took the opportunity to caress his face.

“You were just talking about him the other night.” Kit said, “About loving him, you just told me you love him.”

“Against all of this?” Warren said, “It’s not enough.”

“It’s as you said, you’re emotionally involved. You care so much it...it hits you hard when he upsets you.”

“Tell me how that’s good for him?” Warren asked.

“You’re a good man, Warren.” Kit said, “Anyone who knows you past a casual acquaintance has said the same thing.”

“You failed to hear me raising my voice towards him so well that he was actually cringing in fear.” Warren said.

“After what he’s been through with his dad, after the way he reacted to my hug that sounds about right. You know as well as I do he needs counseling. That’s not a pure child reaction to a parent shouting at him.”

“I’m not his parent.”

“Okay, reality check.” Kit said and smiled, “Uncle extraordinaire, whatever. Before you left, all I ever heard about was Nate did this, Nate did that. You are a parent to him. You don’t have to be his mom or dad to fill that position. I mean considering what you have said about his mom and his dad. You were his only parent.”

Warren turned his head away. “Tell me how she managed the past four years than?” He asked.

“Because she had to. Plus he can eat, cloth, and use the bathroom all on his own now.” Kit said, “Whatever else needed to be done probably isn’t much more past paying for things. It seems to me it wouldn’t be that hard to lead him around with a dollar.”

“She has no real money.” Warren said.

“Off topic.” Kit said, “My point being what else could he do? As long as he was getting food and clothes.”

“He didn’t have any clothes when he got here.” Warren pointed out.

“I’m sure it wasn’t a priority for him.” Kit said. “Traveling the world, you don’t want to drag around a whole wardrobe.” Warren sighed in Kit’s arms.

“I can’t get past leaving him.” Warren said, “I see it in his eyes when he looks at me. He won’t forgive me for it.”

“You told me he made a move towards you in whatever he did. That tells me he can forgive you.” Warren curled up. “You don’t have to do this alone anymore.” Kit said hugging him and shaking him in his arms. “I’m with you now. The idea that you called me when things got crazy for you...” Warren rolled in his arms to completely face him. “That felt right.”

Warren began hugging him back.

“Okay, time to get naked and get some sleep.” Kit said. Warren pulled his head back and began kissing him. Kit smiled when he stopped, “Or sleep can wait just a little longer here.” He started kissing Warren.

