

# Absence and Presence

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“Absence and Presence” takes place months after *Threshold of the Year*, and is a Control the Smutwriter prompt that got a little out of hand. It’s 20k words, ahem. It was meant to be 5-6k, but I couldn’t resist the urge to play out Truman, Will, and Hugh in first person. NSFW.  
*For Judith.*

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Truman.

Will hugged Hugh desperately before turning away and closing himself into the car. He was crying.

“Ah...” My husband paused.

God. I could watch his brain work forever. In fact, I plan to.

“We’re having nothing but cheap fast food until you come home,” I told him, and kissed him again. “We will miss you terribly, Hugh.”

“Don’t miss me. Call. Text. Email. Whatever. I’m really not sure this was a good idea.”

*Yes, but I talked you into it. It’s okay. I know you’ll blame me if things go horribly wrong and pretend you aren’t.*

I just smiled at him, because when we both know what he’s thinking he gets this slightly rueful expression that I love.

“Hush,” he murmured. “Love you.”

“You too.”

I wasn’t crying, not really. But sending him to Paris—even for an incredible conference for sex educators, sex therapists, and other people in the business of generally improving all things sex-related—unsettled me just a little.

Once Hugh was through the doors I got back in the car, where Will had taken up a statue-like position staring out the windshield.

“Pizza,” I said.

“Lanesplitter,” he replied.

“Deal.”

We toasted expensive local microbrews as we waited for our dinner and Will looked around like he’d never been in the place before.

“Usually I’m here with Jer and Ads and the cousins. I don’t think I’ve ever not sat at the

loudest table.”

“Do you want us to be louder?”

He rolled his eyes. “Uh, yeah, actually I was just thinking about how not being the big table full of douchebags feels kind of adult for once.” A blush stole across his skin and if I were Hugh, I’d mention it. But, being me, I only caught his eye and smiled.

Smiling and not-saying something works well on both of my men.

Will was saved by the pizza arriving. He’d asked if he could stay for the entire time Hugh was gone—a no-brainer—but he got nervous almost immediately after asking. (Hugh waited until he’d gone to brush his teeth before telling me he’d leave me the joy of working out whatever troubled our boyfriend.)

It wasn’t quite time yet.

We ate and walked back to the car, but I saw an ice cream shop and took his hand. “Mint chip on a sugar cone?”

“Um. Sure.”

His fingers tightened, then released.

“William,” I said.

“Uh, nothing, just—did you just hold my hand?”

That blush again. So I took his hand without answering and we walked to the next block. I paid using the grandparents’ account. It would please Hugh to buy us ice cream.

I didn’t completely work it out until we were in the car heading for the house.

“Wait. Can we go by the marina?”

“Of course.”

Eight p.m., but still light out here at the water. This time Will took my hand as we walked.

“So there’s a thing. I have a thing. And I didn’t even really think I should say anything, but Moll told me if I didn’t, she would.” He shook his head. “Which is, like, probably a lie? But I guess I’m gonna tell you anyway.”

“Okay.”

The wind picked up, blowing his hair into his face. Sometimes he looks impossibly young to me, like he did when I met him. Young, vulnerable in some sense (though I later realized he was vulnerable with Hugh, not necessarily all the time).

“You have a thing,” I prompted, squeezing his hand.

“So like, with him? I kind of got a crush on him immediately, you know, because he was the only person who was...safe, I guess. Like, he knew my shit and it was all right, so I thought about him all the time. But he still—you know—he was still difficult. And it wasn’t exactly like I wanted to have sex with him right away. It was more that I wanted him to have his hands on me, I wanted to stay in the little sphere of my life that was all Hugh’s hands, Hugh’s voice, nothing else.”

I nodded. Will never used to speak about the time before we met, not specifically. I'd heard a little from Hugh, of course, but this was an interesting treat.

"But like, it's not as if the second we met I thought about kissing him a thousand times a day." Will glanced over and I still wasn't sure what to think. "Anyway, I have a thing."

"Are you going to tell me? Does Hugh know?"

He huffed a laugh. "He always knows. He knew right away. You remember that night I came up when Ally was in town? Real early on?"

How could I possibly—ever—forget that night? "Of course I remember, Will. I thought you'd be happy to get rid of me for the weekend, but you weren't." Oh, wait. I stopped walking and pulled him around to face me. He had a very slight smirk, but didn't meet my eyes. "Will."

"Uh, yeah. So um. It was different, with you. It's always been a little different with you, Tru."

As much as I wanted to ask all the questions, I held back. There would be time for questions later. Right now I needed to kiss my boyfriend standing on the sidewalk at the Berkeley Marina while his hair blew in both of our faces. Which just gave me a good excuse to put my hands on his head to hold him still.

"Different how?" I whispered in his ear.

The shiver, god, I love Will's shiver.

"This. I wanted this. The second we met, you know? The second we met you were—someone I wanted. Kind of like I wanted Hugh, but different because he's always about pushing and prodding and poking, and I knew you wouldn't be."

I kissed him again, stepping closer. "Tell me more."

"You trying to get me hard standing here?"

"I'm not worried about that outcome."

He laughed. Then said, "I know he'll probably be fine and everything, but I hate that he's going to be gone for a whole week, Truman. Like, I *hate* it."

"I know, sweet boy."

He shivered and leaned his face again. "I love it when you say that."

"I'm still not sure what your thing is, Will."

"Yeah. Well. So." He sighed, the sound of his breath almost lost in the wind. "So when it's just he and I, without you, it's a little weird, but mostly we revert back to sex and kink, and intimacy, you know, deriving from sex and kink."

"Sounds lovely."

He wound his arms around me in a way Will rarely, if ever, did. "Uh, yeah. It's good. But you and me, that's different. I don't know what we do without him. Because that's usually only for a few minutes at a time."

I sensed an *and...* there. But standing with Will pressed against me wasn't an

inconvenience, and he always eventually told us what was on his mind.

At least, he always eventually told Hugh.

“Things are changing a little,” he said, very close to my ear. “I love you kind of a lot, Tru. Anyway, I hate that he’s gone, but you and me, we’ve never really done this out in public before without him, this thing where we look like we’re together, and it’s—like, it’s kind of—it’s kind of awesome. I mean, probably more for me than you because obviously you’re, like, married, so it’s not that big a deal to be out in—”

I kissed my way to his mouth and held him there until he looked me in the eye. “Does this seem like something Hugh would do? Kiss at the edge of the Bay? Hold each other like lovers out in the open?”

Will’s head shook slightly, back and forth.

“This is wonderful. And I love you too, Will.”

“Yeah. Good. I mean—good.” He shifted, kissing my neck. “Because I’ve got three lovers, and you’re the only one I can make out with like this, Truman.”

“Mm. Hopefully we’ll be doing a bit more than making out back at home.” *Home, yes*, I thought at his body when he trembled.

“Yeah. ’S good.”

We didn’t really make out. But we stood there for a long time, both of us swaying a little in the wind.

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When Hugh told me, weeks into dating, that he had a close friend visiting for the weekend who he planned to have sex with unless I objected, I didn’t object.

The truth is: I was fascinated.

I’ve never been with someone as simultaneously transparent and unfathomable as my husband. I couldn’t even imagine him with other men, since every time we went out he maintained an air of detached politeness that invited everyone he met to—politely—fuck off.

Yes. All right, yes, the challenge was part of the attraction. Being one of the few Hugh lets in was, and continues to be, a tremendous pleasure. Watching him dismiss a conference presenter who tried to pick him up made me respect him (because the man was a fool), but also made him just a little bit of a challenge, and I like a challenge.

I was delighted to watch him interact with someone else in the very small group of people he seemed to trust, and Will didn’t let me down. Will was sweet, and guileless, and responsive. Even eating dinner, he was responsive to Hugh, and yeah, that intrigued me.

Hugh always says he didn’t pretend to be vanilla. But he did, a little. He presented himself as someone who enjoyed a little bit of kink, but didn’t identify as kinky. Which would have been

a lie, except it was more like a wish he thought he could make true by pretending.

Thank god for Will.

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On the way home we didn't talk much. It was clearer, now, that Hugh wasn't with us. Will and I might occasionally share dinner without him, but we've never spent the night together without Hugh, not in seven years of being in this relationship. We've gone to bed alone (while Hugh read or did other things without us), and we've woken up alone (while Hugh drank coffee in the kitchen), but we've never spent the entire night together without Hugh.

I reached for his hand. "Can we skip tea? I think it would just depress me."

"God, yeah, no way I can make it without him. I don't know why I'm so sad. Like, he'll be back in a week, it's not a thing. I don't wig like this every time Moll goes somewhere."

"Hm," I said.

"It's not the same."

"No. But you wouldn't want it to be the same, would you?"

He shook his head, still looking troubled.

All right. This is when the penny dropped, right here, with Will in the darkness of the car, face still and sad.

I mentally planned the rest of our evening, searching out candles and matches in my internal map of the house, wondering if we had an unopened bottle of wine and if the wine glasses were clean. Hugh and I rarely drink, though we always have something in the house. I don't need the calories and he doesn't particularly like the loss of control.

"One of these days we should get Hugh very, very drunk," I said.

Will's head snapped toward mine. "Oh my god. Why have we never done that before? I've never seen him really drunk. I've seen him get to the point where he can feel it and stop, which just makes like no sense to me at all. Like, in my family? The Derries do not stop when it starts to feel good. But then again, we're pretty much all headed toward rehab, so maybe Hugh's way makes more sense."

"You worried about Adam?" I didn't really want to derail the night, but Adam's mental health had been a little touch and go lately.

"Nah. Nick's got a pretty close eye on him."

"Good."

"Jer, though. Jer and Frank—I don't know, Tru. I worry about them a little. Like Frankie cracked this 'family discount for rehab' joke and they all laughed, but it wasn't really that funny, you know?"

"Yeah." I navigated the garage, pulling Hugh's Mercury in carefully beside my Toyota. "If

we can help, even if it's just to hear your concerns, tell us, Will."

"Yeah, sure. I mean, I know that." He shrugged. "It's just one of the things that's on my mind."

"What else is on your mind?"

The car, having decided we were done for the night, clicked off its interior light. Will blinked in near-darkness and I wasn't shocked when he leaned in to kiss me.

"You, Truman. I'm kind of anxious about tonight like there's a chance we don't work as well alone as we do when he's here."

"Mm," I said. "I'm not even a little bit worried about that."

Will laughed. "Good. Okay. That's good."

I waited just long enough for him to regain his confidence before adding, "Plus, if we just don't turn each other on, Will, I'll just blindfold and edge you until his plane lands. I hope he has enough battery in his phone to get you off quickly."

He didn't groan, as I expected. He kissed me again. "Sorry, just, I love you so much. It feels like pressure."

"Love isn't pressure. It's presence. And I think Hugh would find it amusing that you're equating more love with less compatibility, considering the kinkiest thing about you is how much you love to be in love, William."

"Yeah. Jesus. Yeah, that's—" He interrupted himself to kiss me again.

This was the moment I'd usually look to Hugh. One of the glorious things about having three people was that there was always someone to exchange a glance with.

"We're going in now, Will. You're going to sit in the library until I come get you."

"I am?"

"Yeah."

Light from the dirty side window glazed his teeth as he smiled. "Yeah, okay, Tru. You want me to call you 'sir'?"

"No. No, I love it—absolutely love it—when you call me 'Tru'."

"Yeah, 'cause it fits. It's so you. I, like, owe Jase a cup of coffee for calling you that."

"He told me if anyone else tried to use his nickname for me, he'd clobber them. But when you do it he thinks it's cute."

"Aw. Jase. I'm glad. I like having a nickname for you. So, uh, the library?"

"Yep. Go."

"Okay." He snagged another kiss before opening his door.

I sat in the car until he was safely inside, thinking about Hugh and Will and all the many things we've done together. Some of them in this car. Some of them upstairs.

Right, then. Candles. Romance. Will was an absolute sucker for romance.

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It's tempting to think the three of us magically work together, that we were born wanting complementary things, and that it's all easy. But in real life I think it's more of an evolution.

And it's definitely not easy, though it's not...volatile. Sometimes I check myself before saying something because when you're juggling the emotions of two other people, it's almost always best to err on the side of saying less. Plus, we have Hugh when we need someone to endlessly analyze every possible thing.

Our candles were dusty. All of them. I grabbed the fancy candleholder from the China cabinet in the dining room and put it on Hugh's dresser (which is far neater than mine, and has space for a candleholder). I had to root through both of the bedside tables before locating a lighter (don't ask).

Not enough light, so I went fishing for more candles.

Of all unlikely places, I found an ancient cache of those religious candles in the glass holders in the downstairs bathroom. I'd have to ask Will later if he knew what they were doing there. Hopefully he'd blush and stammer and tell me a story about them, though Hugh had very specific ideas about candle use in sensation play.

When I was done with the lighting the bedroom looked transformed. It looked...romantic. Which had, yes, been my goal, but I'd never turned this particular bedroom into a romantic boudoir, so I was a little unprepared.

I stripped off the sheets and blankets, replaced only the bottom sheet with a deep red sheet I'd had to actually buy, because when I met him Hugh only owned dark blue (nearly black) sheets, and went in search of wine glasses.

The only unopened bottle in the house was a merlot. Not exactly Will's favorite, but I decided to count on the trappings of the evening to make up for it.

I was halfway down the stairs before I realized I still wore my work clothes. What uniform would be appropriate for tonight? My house pants, yes. A T-shirt. I planned, a little later, to be naked. (Ally told me once that candlelight is supposed to be forgiving to body shapes; as much as I hate to seduce by Cosmo Magazine standards, *candlelight is forgiving to body shapes* was about the only thing I had to hang onto when contemplating nakedness.)

Hugh, of course, would notice it if I took off my clothes. And he'd feel honored by it, to whatever degree he understands bone-deep physical insecurity. But Will? Nudity was a gift to him, and he'd receive it in full understanding of how hard it was to give.

Good plan, I assured myself. I stopped in the guest room for a blindfold (Will would like that bit), then continued down to the library.

He was reading. In Hugh's chair. He looked up, slightly guilty, and stood.

"Hey, Tru. Uh. So. Blindfold, huh?"

“Come here,” I said. (And he flushed. Even though I wasn’t Hugh. Even though I had no dom voice.)

“Yeah. Yeah, okay, this is good. But I mean, y’know, it’s not like I actually need all the, uh, you know. All the BDSM stuff.”

I wrapped his eyes and connected the ends of the blindfold. “I know exactly what you need, William. Are you ready to give over to me?”

“Oh fuck me. Yeah. Shit.” He paused, inhaled, exhaled, leaned his head into my hands. “You used to do him. But now you don’t have to do him. Now you just do you, and it’s hot as fuck, Truman.”

Was I doing me right now, or Hugh? I’d meant to do Hugh, but Will was right; I’d made no effort to change my voice, or use his words.

“I adore you, Will Derrie. Trust me to lead you up the stairs.”

“You know I do.”

Will knew the way through the house almost as well as I did, if not better—he’d learned it specifically, as opposed to just acquiring the knowledge through osmosis—and he hardly hesitated. Up the stairs, through the kitchen, through the sitting room. Up the stairs again and into the bedroom.

His nose flared as he stood in the center of the room. “Huh. Is that—did you light candles? Do you even have candles?”

“Shh, Will,” I said, and removed his clothing.

I should be able to undress, to be with him naked, and not think about it. Not sweat, nervously, as I pulled off my clothes. Will’s seen my body in various stages of dressed for years, and I still nearly backed out at the last moment before taking off his blindfold.

Music! A reprieve.

I hooked my phone up to the little speaker/charger station on my bedside table and turned on a generic Spotify “romance” playlist, adjusting it until it was very low.

Will swallowed when I touched his neck. He didn’t speak. He kept his eyes closed for maybe ten seconds after I took off the blindfold, and when he opened them he only saw me. In the entire room—candles, the bed, the music—Will looked at me and took in my body like a man dying of thirst would take in a waterfall.

“Oh my god, you are so fucking hot. Tru. Jesus. Listen, at least tell me that the second I leave you don’t strip off and walk around the house like this, because if Hugh gets to see you naked all the time—”

“Will.”

“Can I touch?”

“You’ve seen me naked before.”

“For like five seconds. Can I touch?”

I was so tempted to say no. I may not have a dom voice, but I wanted to make this scene for him, this romantic scene, this thing no one gave him but me.

Instead of saying no, I took three breaths. And gave Will what I would give no one but him.

“Yes.”

“Shit, shit, shit. Fuck me.” Will continued mumbling curses as he stepped forward, as he ran his hands up my arms. (My arms were all right.) He placed both hands on my chest, fingers dragging through my chest hair, the sensation somewhere between itchy and achy.

“God, you are—Tru, this is how I thought I’d grow up to look. Like you. All manly and strong and shit.”

“I’m not strong,” I said. “You think I look manly?”

“Uh, yeah. What clued you in?” He tugged my chest hair, ran one hand up to brush over my beard. “You’re incredible. I don’t get it, Tru. It’s not a gay thing. Gay guys like manly hairy dudes.”

“Will—” I sighed. I couldn’t do this with him again.

“Fine, never mind. I’ll love on your body even if you can’t.” He kissed me, still twirling and tugging the dark hairs he usually ignored. (Or, all right, I hardly ever exposed, and he knew better than to pay attention to.) “But seriously, fucking *look at you.*” Will kissed down my neck and his hands moved up my back and I’d seen him turn the tables on Hugh before, but I couldn’t remember if he’d just never done it to me, or if he made it so good by the end that I never noticed.

“Mm,” my boyfriend said, chewing on my chest. He tugged a nipple with his teeth and I gasped. “Fuck yeah. Oh Jesus. This is like all my birthdays at once, having access to you like this, Tru.”

I would have said something dry and funny (but not laugh-out-loud funny), if I’d been able to think of anything. Or speak.

“I love your dick, Tru.” One of Will’s hands demonstrated his statement. The other cupped the back of my head, probably not all that consciously, but it had the effect of making me look down. At myself. At him, tugging on my nipple in his teeth.

Okay. Probably he knew what he was doing, forcing my head to that angle. He’d been hanging out with Hugh for way too long.

I reached down to encircle his wrist. “This isn’t how I had this planned.”

“Uh huh.” Will kissed the nipple he’d been teasing and straightened up. “Lie down on the bed, Tru. I’m going to fucking lick every inch of your skin before you come tonight.”

Hugh wouldn’t have let it get this far.

I pulled him in close and kissed his hair, pressing our bodies together. “It doesn’t bother you that it makes me uncomfortable to hear you talk that way?”

“Bed, Tru.” I let him push me back, and down, until he was kneeling over me. “You know

how many times I've been uncomfortable in this house? In this room? Tru, the first time he ever fucked me I asked him if he wanted me to douche first. Like, while lying here. Naked. He was thinking of sex and I was thinking of shit."

I dragged my thumb across his lips and he sucked the tip inside for a second before letting me have it back.

"Embarrassed, humiliated, ashamed, uncomfortable, aroused." He kissed me deeply, and when he spoke, his lips stayed on mine. "You lit candles for me. You put on music."

"There's wine. On my dresser."

"You trying to seduce me, Mr Jennings?"

"That was the plan, though you managed somehow to completely upend it."

"I can't control myself. You're hot. I'm gonna keep going now. With my plan, not so much your plan."

"Do you want a glass of wine?" *I want a glass of wine. Or one of those joints Jase used to buy from the RA. Or poppers, for that slide away from the edge of awareness anywhere by my ass and my dick.* Just the sight of poppers turned me on back in college, when Jase and I used them possibly more than was healthy.

"Huh uh. Want to be sober and remember every millimeter."

"You act like you've never—"

"Because I haven't. Because you don't let me. But if this is gonna be a theme of Hugh going out of town, I'm totally looking at the silver lining right now." He leered at me.

"Me," I said. "I'm your silver lining. You realize you get me all the time, right?"

"Do I, though? Because we'd never be lying here with candles and music and wine if he was here, Tru."

"If we want to, we can."

He shrugged. "But we don't. Anyway, it doesn't matter. I love your body. Not like I have a type, not of girls or guys, but if I see a guy like you in a porn video, I watch it."

"I—I'm not sure what to say about that, Will."

This time I got an eye-roll. "Say you understand I think you're hot. You don't have to agree, Tru. But you sure as hell can't tell me that I don't know what I think is hot."

"I understand you are *deluded*—" I said, just so he'd punch me. "Ow, Will! And I'm naked."

"Oh yeah. Fuck yeah, you are."

He was on me fast, all over me, kissing my neck, pinning my wrists. *Hello, Tippy Will.* I love both of my men in all of their roles, but Will feeling toppy always made me think of those nature documentaries with David Attenborough's smoky narration: "When Will is feeling particularly feisty his alter ego, Tippy Will, makes an appearance. Tippy Will is best known for his emphatic yet playful tone, and a significant shift of his physical strength..."

“Have you been lifting weights?” I murmured over the music.

He laughed into my skin. “Shut the fuck up. Jerk. Don’t tease me.”

“It’s true, though. When you play like this”—I tried to lift my arms and he redoubled his hold—“you’re stronger than when you don’t.”

“Not like I’m stronger, just that I’m trying.” Will rubbed his cheek over my beard. “You are so fucking sexy. You lit candles. *For me.*”

Of course we weren’t just talking about the candles. But in another way, we were.

“We should do this more often,” I said, arching into him. “He can watch if he doesn’t want to participate.”

“Mm hm.” Lips on my throat, tongue tracing my trachea. “That’d be hot. Not as hot as having you all to myself when you’re naked.” He lifted his head. “Unless you’d let me have you naked with your husband in the room?”

I looked at him without answering, knowing the right thing was “yes, of course” and the truth was more in the neighborhood of “if you blackmailed me or won a bet, *maybe*”.

“S okay. I get it. I’m not real into him knowing I get mushy about candlelight either, though he probably already knows. Your thing’s a little different.”

“And he already knows that I—” It wasn’t that I was more comfortable with Will. It was that Will could see my body and only think of himself; when Hugh looked at me, he was searching for my emotions, my past, my intentions on my skin. “He already knows that I don’t mind you looking.”

“Tasting, touching, fucking.” Will bypassed my nipples and had to let go of my wrists so he could move lower.

I closed my eyes when his lips landed on my navel. Apparently even candlelight’s no match for self-disgust.

Will hummed against me, nuzzling in close, hands gripping my sides. “I could, like, live here. Not—shit—not here-here, I mean—”

“Of course you could live here.” I had to look down. But seeing naked Will curled against me took a lot of the sting out of seeing *me*. “William. I know you’re perfectly happy at the house, but you understand that the person controlling the distance between us and you is—you, right?” I stroked a finger down his cheek. “You only add to us, Will. You have never, ever subtracted. And that’s an opinion we share, not one I’m just assuming.”

He kissed my belly button and avoided my eyes. “Anyway, I meant I could stay like this, I could sleep like this, all safe and warm. It’s like the sweet side to the thing we do where we pretend I’m your boy. This is like, not that you’re older, but that this is who you are. You’re the big brother, the protector, the guy who’s stable. You’re the rock.”

“Thank you,” I said. His hair was recently trimmed, but I combed through it with my fingers anyway. “Will?”

“Yeah?”

“I want you inside me tonight. Okay?”

“Oh, fuck yes. *Fuck yes*. Condoms. Lube. Brain cells.” He got up, kissed me, went to rustle in Hugh’s bedside table, leaving me naked and exposed, lying on top of a bed with no blankets. “The first time I ever looked in here, there were restraints. Ha. Oh, here.”

When he turned back, though, he paused.

“Shit. Truman. Um, can I—can I like—”

“What?” I held out my arm and he came to me, burying his face in my neck again. “What, love?”

“Um, yeah. Can we do it like, y’know, like I’m making love to you? Shit, that sounds so, so stupid.”

I kissed the side of his face. “It doesn’t sound stupid. And yes, any way you want. I did go to the trouble of finding candles and everything.”

“And music.”

“And wine, though I have to apologize. It’s red.”

“Ugh. Never mind about the wine.” This time when he levered himself over me, there was no power play. There was only Will Derrie in candlelight, staring down at me, expression utterly gobsmacked. “You, uh, just, thanks, Tru. Thanks for doing all this.”

“Thank you for wanting it. Make love to me, William.”

“Oh fuck yeah, I really think I will.”

And he did. But the thing I remembered most later was the way we took our showers after, and by the time I came out he’d already re-made the bed. He stood there sheepishly, not quite daring to get in on Hugh’s side until I had gotten in on mine.

Will topky was hot; Will romantic was sweet; but bashful, cuddly Will might actually be my favorite of all.

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Will.

This is what I love most about my boyfriends. This moment, right here. Truman smiling at something Hugh said, Hugh pausing just long enough for Tru’s approval before escalating. Both of them just about to look at my reaction.

Or anyway, Tru’s about to *look*, and Hugh’s gonna have to wait for the report because he’s in Paris right now being smart and well-respected. Not that he isn’t those things here, but it’s kind of like our opinions don’t count, so I guess it’s really like he’s off somewhere actually *believing* that objective strangers think he’s smart and deserving of respect.

“The big one,” Hugh says. “The very biggest. And send me a picture.”

“I hate both of you,” I lie, because that’s what they expect me to say.

“I don’t know if I can use the biggest one.”

“Truman, you’ve fisted Will.”

“That’s different. When I’m fisting him, I can feel his responses. I’m more...in tune with him.”

I grin at him and Hugh laughs.

“Both of you can be quiet. You know what I mean.”

“Oh, that’s what I like about it. You’ll have to rely on Will using his words. I *love* making Will use his words.”

“We might do that,” Tru says, blushing a little and holding my gaze. “Or we might do something else. I look forward to your arrival home, Mr Reynolds.”

“Mm, planning something?”

“You’ll hate it,” I tell him.

“That’s not even remotely possible.”

“Is that a challenge?” Tru pulls me in for a kiss. “Will, I believe Hugh is challenging us.”

“Sweet. We’ve got, what, four more days?”

“I’ve changed my mind,” Hugh says. “I want you to edge each other until I text, right before my next session. Then you’re not allowed to touch, even casually, until I text your next instructions.”

The fuck? Not touch Truman? But he’s, like, my fix for casual touching. Way more than Hugh and Moll.

“He’s trying to get to us, William,” Tru stage-whispers at me. “We can’t let him win.”

I want to argue, but I can’t do that either. Because just about five minutes ago I said I’d do “anything”, and when you say that shit to Hugh Reynolds, even if he’s halfway across the world, you can’t take it back because of something dumb like not being able to brush against Tru on the way to the bathroom.

“Cock rings mandatory. And you might as well go out to at least lessen temptation.”

“And what punishment do we receive if there is an accidental touch?” Tru asks, voice totally chill. (Punishment is kind of a joke to Tru. He doesn’t take it seriously. Partly because it’s not really his thing, and also partly because he doesn’t need Hugh’s approval like I do. Even though I know intellectually he’s not actually punishing me, taking his punishment always makes me feel more deserving of his approval. Which I get is maybe a little bit fucked, but whatever. Orgasms are involved, and consent, so it can’t be *that* fucked.)

“The paddle,” Hugh replies, like he’s already thought it out.

Aw, fuck. I fucking hate the paddle. So, so much.

“Mm,” Tru says. “Will’s never paddled me before. This could be fun.”

“I might make you wait until I get back. I almost certainly hit harder than Will. Then again, Will would find it almost impossible to hit you, so I win regardless.”

“Fucking I hate you guys so much right now.”

“Take off your clothes. Both of you.”

We take off our clothes and for a few minutes Hugh tells us what to do, then he has to start walking to his thing so he makes me tell him what each of us is doing, and then he has to go for real.

“Rings,” he says, in his normal voice. Like he’s not telling his husband and his boyfriend that they gotta stay hard for him until he fucking feels like letting them get off. “No touching.”

See, to me *Rings. No touching.* is pretty fucking obvious. But then again: sex conference. Maybe they’ll ask him to present.

I groan, Truman laughs, and Hugh hangs up the phone.

\* \* \*

So me? I try everything possible to follow the rules. Kind of because I hate the paddle, but also kind of because I like to obey Hugh. But Truman? Tru’s clearly feeling pretty fucking invincible right now, because he’s up to seven fucking touches, and we haven’t even got to Peet’s yet.

“Oh my god, that’s *eight*. Tru, I don’t fucking want to paddle you all night. Come on, quit it.”

“You call me that more when no one else is around, you know.”

I blush, which is dumb. “Yeah?”

“Mm hm.”

“Well, whatever. Anyway.”

He grins, all wicked and sexy like the other night when he told he he knew what I needed, and brushes a totally fucking imaginary piece of dust from my shirt. “Oops. That’s nine.”

It doesn’t end at ten, which I had my fingers crossed for, or even twelve. By the time Hugh texts three hours later, Truman’s managed to touch me fucking seventeen times. And I touched him *twice*. Because I’m, like, a good boy, okay? Shut up, I am. At least, I try.

We’re almost back to the house when Hugh calls and this time he calls my phone, so I pick up. Maybe, yeah, a little petulantly, because sometimes I don’t know which one of them is playing me more. (And also because they’re both pretty good at knowing what I need, which apparently Tru thinks is to paddle him, and no, dude. No. Just no.)

“Was he bad?”

“You married a monster.”

Hugh laughs in my ear and yeah, it makes me smile, and miss him, and wish like hell he

was home, no matter how many he wanted me to take with the paddle.

A thought I regret about a minute and a half later, when we're sitting on the bed with Hugh's voice on speakerphone in between us.

"Choose," he says.

"Um." I'm staring at the phone like it's gonna pop up my order, like this is Kinky McHugh's, and whatever the fuck he just said is gonna flash up on the screen so I can double check I know what I'm getting. "What were my choices?"

"Choice one. You give Truman the two you earned, and when I get home I give him the seventeen he earned."

"No, the other one." I'm not *choosing* that Truman takes fucking nineteen smacks with the paddle, okay? Fuck that.

"Choice two. Truman gives you all nineteen, right now."

I slump. Because fuck.

"Oh, that's easy. Let me take them, William. That's why I did all that, you know."

Yeah, I know. I know he's fucking with me and he's fucking with Hugh. But like always (or almost always) Hugh fucks us back just a little bit harder.

"Will," Tru says, kissing my hand. "This is a no-brainer."

But it's not. Which Hugh knows.

"Truman, please go get the paddle. Whichever one feels best in your hand."

Even that, even that little touch: *Whichever one feels best in your hand*. Hugh knows there's no world where I choose Truman to take pain when I could take it myself.

"I'm getting this for *you*," he hisses at me. "Do not let him play you."

*I'm not. He's not. He's giving me what I need.*

"Tell me why you're punishing yourself," Hugh says when a few seconds have passed. I don't know if he's gauged how long it takes for Tru to be out of earshot down the stairs, or he just happens to nail it.

"I can't yet." Even though Moll is getting antsy. She said the other day that she feels way more my beard now than she ever did before.

"Soon, please. You have to let it go after you take this, Will. Can you do that? Can you at least let yourself relax if you take a paddling from Truman?"

It would be better if it was Hugh, because he gets it. He gets I have to go to this place sometimes in my head where I'm not good enough, and that the only way to get back is through...I guess it's kind of a fear/pain/courage cocktail. I gotta take what I don't want to take, feel what I don't want to feel, and accept all of it even when I want to run like hell.

"And you will explain to him that you want it."

"He won't believe me," I say, which is slightly more accurate than saying I don't want it.

"He will if you tell him."

God, I miss Hugh so fucking much right now, in this moment. I miss him like missing him is a feeling I can touch, a glassy piece of obsidian sharp enough to cut me.

“I miss you,” I whisper, leaning toward the phone.

“I spend a great deal of time talking myself out of flying home early and surprising the two of you,” he says, voice a little on the rough side now.

I can’t really say anything to that but *why the fuck haven’t you done it already?* Which doesn’t feel all that grown up of me.

“I object to this plan,” Tru says, coming back from downstairs empty handed. “I’m not paddling Will for something I did. This is not that game.”

“Kiss Will. Forget the paddle.”

Truman blinks, takes in me looking teary, and comes to a totally incorrect conclusion that still leads to kissing, so who the fuck cares.

I love it when he hovers over me like this, one hand on my neck, kissing me slowly. It’s so good. It’s like one of those super fancy desserts you get at a place like Andrew’s, where you don’t even know where to start with enjoying it because every fucking aspect is perfect: the weight he puts on my waist when he throws a leg over me, the smooth little circles of his fingertips on my throat, the insane scent of Truman, Truman, Truman *thisclose*.

“I could never hurt you, you know.”

Which is a tiny white lie because this one time? He fucked me *up*. But he hates to think about that, so I don’t remind him.

“He’s not upset because he’s afraid of the paddle,” Hugh says. “But upon mature reflection, I’m tabling the paddle. Use your hand instead, and take him over your knee.”

So spankings with a bare hand? Not, like, a total nothing on the pain scale. I mean, maybe if whoever’s doing it doesn’t want to make it sting—like I guess if you’re into a sweet erotic spank, all right then—but when my boyfriends spank? It hurts. And it also feels so much better than almost anything else because oh my god, have you ever just fucking lain across someone’s lap and taken it? Spread your legs when they told you to, let them touch you when they felt like it? It’s like the most intimate fucking thing this side of fisting. I swear, I’ve had sex that was way less intimate than a spanking under Hugh’s hand.

But I’ve hardly ever felt Truman’s.

He’s still over me and he kisses all over my face until I can open my eyes. I don’t know what the fuck Hugh’s doing right now (I’d like to think he was jerking off listening to us, but knowing him he’s browsing in a bookstore somewhere, looking totally not like he’s inciting us to spank).

“I love you very much, Mr Derrie.”

I swallow. “I know.”

“Spanking sounds like fun.” He’s testing a little, trying to make sure this is what I want.

This is what I love about my boyfriends: this moment when Hugh is certain and Truman checks in, even though he knows I'm down for something. Sometimes people check in way too much. Like, especially early on. Too much checking-in: huge turn-off. But Tru looking at me like it's the hottest thing in the world, me saying *Yeah, spank me, Tru*, is a huge turn-on.

"I want you to spank me," I tell my boyfriend. He rewards me, not with spanking, but with kissing.

"Over my knees, love."

*Oh, fuck me. Anytime.* I get over Tru's knees, and I'm a little misty, like I get when things are all emotional and we're mixing that with things that are physical.

Hugh clears his throat and says, "Put me next to Will, please."

He's got the "I'm about to touch you" tone in his voice, like if he was here this is the moment he'd brush my hair back or something, and I feel warm inside like that's what he's doing, even though he's like four timezones away.

"I appreciate that you followed the rules, Will. Which is why I'll allow you to take the punishment on Truman's behalf. Nineteen. Truman's count."

Oh good. Because I can take—let's be clear—a hell of a lot more than nineteen. But counting makes it harder to just drift inside the sensation, to really let it pull me into myself, so it's awesome I don't have to keep track.

Also awesome? Tru's hand rubbing over my ass like it's a fucking genie's lamp.

"So my punishment is not being permitted to accept my punishment," Tru muses.

"Fuckin' sadist," I say into my arms.

"He really is. Honestly, I thought he'd find a way to mess with us, but I admit, this is twistier than I imagined."

"Begin, please." (That's Hugh's *we are not amused* voice, even though it's obvious he's at least a little amused.)

"I'll begin when we're ready." Tru's definitely smiling, which I can hear, even though I can't see it.

"Are you nervous, Truman?"

Tru's hand skims up over my spine, then all the way down my crack. I spread my legs and he rolls my balls. I groan.

"You, my husband, are a cheater."

The first smack comes down and I gasp, even though I figure it's coming.

"One," Tru says, and drags his fingernails down my thighs until I'm writhing.

"I do wish we had all this on video. I'll have to make better preparations before the next time I travel. Someone should have to tell me, in detail, what's happening."

I'm starting to get to the point where I want to kick, I want to move, and Truman gets me with three smacks all at once in the same spot, barely pausing for his count in between.

The sting rises hotter on my skin and yeah, I arch into his hand, into his touch. I like this feeling, and I especially like the way his left arm is across my back, like he's holding me down even if I'm not actually trying to get away.

I want more, but what Tru gives me is a tickle-light touch down the insides of my thighs to my knees and back. I hold out for what feels like five minutes (and is probably about thirty seconds) before begging.

"Please—Truman—please more—"

"You are so beautiful like this, William. You are a note rising clearly over every other instrument until it's the only thing I can hear."

He starts again while I'm still thinking about music, and if he means my voice, or is he taking it to a totally metaphoric place? Except his hand comes down again, shifting, getting my entire ass, and he counts them: five, six, seven, eight, nine.

Nine, the invisible lint on my shirt.

I can feel his hand holding my ass open, but it's still a shock when he blows across skin. I shudder like he's just goosed me, or kissed me.

"We will play this game again when I'm present for it," Hugh says. "I want to hear him make a sound now, Truman."

"Try not to make a sound, Will," Tru says, and reaches past my head for the lube on his bedside table. (We're more messy than Hugh is; when Hugh's here, all the sex stuff and kink stuff disappear before we even fall asleep, but Tru and I...leave stuff out. It's so weird, the shit you notice like that when you reconfigure. We also bring the coffee carafe up into the bed with us every single morning, even when we gotta get to work.)

Was I just thinking about coffee? Now I'm definitely thinking about Tru's fingers, twisting in my ass. I bite down on my tongue, but we all know I'll break. Because they want me to. Because I want to.

I hold out for three fingers, but when he starts in on my prostate I'm done.

"Uh, uh, uh, uh, Truman, *fuck*—"

"Shh."

Then, like nothing, he's spanking me with lube-slicked fingers (and I'm pretty fucking happy about all the work we did on my ass in the shower earlier, because at least shit's not flying around).

"Ten, eleven, twelve." The arm over my back lifts and I miss it for exactly point-three-one seconds before it's around my neck, an elbow vice choking me just enough to feel it. Tru leans across my body so he's in my ear, and I didn't even know he could hit this hard, but here he is, pounding down with everything he has: "Thirteen, fourteen, fifteen, sixteen, seventeen, eighteen, *nineteen*."

He's out of breath, which is funny, and my ass is burning over the deep ache of those hard

fucking smacks, every bit as hard as a paddle.

And it's *Truman*, so I'm crying, even though his arm's still around my neck.

Okay, sputtering, but shut up.

"My love," Hugh says softly, and it doesn't matter that it's softer through the phone, it doesn't matter that he's a million miles away. I feel Tru's forehead press against my back, his hot scratchy beard lower than that, and force myself to breathe more slowly.

"M okay. You—kicked ass."

I don't think he's crying, but he's definitely a little fucked up.

"Hey," I say. "Tru. Thank you."

He laughs against my skin, sounding more choked than I do. "Will, I—don't know what to say."

"Say you'll do it again when all three of us are together."

"I'm never doing it again without him here. This was worse than that time in the hotel room, Hugh."

"Because it's Will?"

"Because you begged. I didn't know what I was doing, but you begged for it. This—felt more like relying on my own initiative."

Hugh makes a sound, and I think if he was here with us it'd be a chuckle, sort of. "Your initiative serves you well."

"Let me up," I tell Truman. He does, but doesn't exactly meet my eyes, so obviously I climb back into his lap, but straddling him this time, and pick up the phone. "If you were with us, what would you do right now, Mr Reynolds?"

"Blow Truman while you fucked him," he says, you know, like he's got a reel in his head playing this out right now, like he doesn't even fucking have to pause to know that's what he'd do.

I kiss Tru's forehead, his eyebrows. I tilt his head up so he's looking at me. "I love you so much. I would never hurt you. How's your hand?"

He laughs. "God, it wasn't too much?"

"Hugh, your husband just wrapped an arm around my neck, choked me, and beat the shit out of my ass. He wants to know if that was 'too much'."

"Next time we'll use a spreader bar and maybe those interesting gloves Lucy just bought."

Tru shudders this time, already shaking his head. "Never. You and Will can play with the gloves. I'm not going anywhere near them."

"Good to know," Hugh says.

"Uh oh," I whisper loudly to Tru. "I think you just bought yourself some glove experimentation there. He's got that *tone*."

"The *I could let you get away with this, but I probably won't tone*," Tru agrees.

I just goggle at him. “Huh. You name them too?”

“Oh, of course.”

“Name what?” Hugh asks.

“Your tones,” I tell him, ducking in to kiss Tru’s jaw. “Your husband and I catalogue your tonal shifts in order to better prepare for your moods.”

“And what tone am I using now?”

We look at each other, grinning.

“It’s mostly *we are not amused* with an undercurrent of *really, I don’t take myself that seriously, except sometimes I do*,” I say.

“I think of that second one as *pretentious with a heart of gold*,” Tru adds.

“I...”

“Is he speechless?”

“Hugh? You still there?”

But he is. For a moment, Hugh’s speechless.

“I don’t have a nickname for this because it’s never happened before,” I whisper as loudly as possible.

“Oh, shut up. Both of you. I know the face you’re making, Truman.”

“Yeah, he is. It’s a great face. You know, my favorite thing about you guys is all the faces you make.”

“Surely that’s not the only physical attributes we have for which you feel affection, Will.”

I reach down, because it’s what I’d do if Hugh was sitting here, and fondle Tru through his pants. “Nope. Love all your physical attributes. Hey, did you know I got to play with Truman naked the other night—”

Tru slams his hand over my lips. “Classified, Will. Never mind about that.”

Shit, yeah, I almost spilled the whole candlelight trap we’re gonna spring on him. Oops.

“Will.”

I straighten up. Tru mocks me with his eyes. “Yes?”

“Make love to my husband. Love him so thoroughly he can’t hold himself back, in whatever configuration pleases you.”

“Oh fuck yes. Yes, yes, yes. Can I have him naked?”

Tru’s eyes narrow at me.

Ha. See, Hugh’s hesitating. He wants to say yes—he thinks he can get away with it—but he can’t see Truman right now, and there’s always a chance this will push the bad line, not the good one.

I can see, looking at Tru, that he isn’t sure which line it would push either.

“Actually, I think I want him clothed,” I say, like I just changed my mind.

“He responds very well to enforced clothing.”

“And knives,” Tru mutters.

“Did you say *knives*?”

“No edged weapons when I’m not in the room. Or, I suppose, Lucy.”

I laugh a little at the look on Tru’s face. “I don’t think Tru’s comfortable having Lucy in the room while we have sex. That’s weird, right?”

“Well, considering that the second you were occupied with him, she’d be on you with a strap-on, he’s probably right.” He keeps talking, but obviously I’m still working that out in my head: me, occupied with Tru, fucking him, dick-deep, balls slapping balls, in for a really good thrust and then—what? She’d hold me in place, nudge it up against me, look for just the right—

Tru’s clearing his throat. Again. I don’t know how long he’s been doing it, but my brain definitely knows it’s happened more than once.

“Um. What were we saying?” I ask.

“Not going to happen. If you want to have sex with Lucy, you’ll first have to petition Molly, then Leo and Eddie, then us. And then, naturally, Lucy, though I doubt she’d say no.”

“Um...” Actually, I wouldn’t have to ask Moll, but I can’t say that. Yet. Since I’m not ever having sex with Lucy, it’s a moot point.

Nudge it up against me, look for just the right spot, and I’d feel the pressure of it so I’d bear down—

“*Will.*”

I blink. “Sorry.”

“Hugh, your boyfriend is sitting on my lap thinking about Lucy.”

Hugh laughs and I kiss Tru until we are the only thing we smell, the only thing we taste.

“Never mind,” he says breathlessly.

And Hugh laughs again. God, I really wish he was here with us. Not like he’s the most laughing kind of dude, you know? I hate to waste it over the phone.

“Tru,” I say. “Lie down.”

Me, I’d ask for clarification; Tru takes this as a reprieve and lies on his stomach. Hey, I’m not picky.

I stretch myself over him, careful to tuck the phone next to his head. “Talk to your husband.” I don’t tell them who I’m addressing. It’s way more fun to wait it out.

“I met a young woman doing fascinating research in her local sex therapy groups,” Hugh says. (I watch Truman close his eyes, and yeah, I think he needs Hugh’s voice. I think both of us miss him and I mope and Tru tells himself Hugh will be home soon so he doesn’t really have to feel it.) “She’s been thinking about doing a more organized survey of non-monogamous committed relationships...”

That’s us. I spend a lot of time kissing and chewing on the back of Tru’s neck while Hugh talks to him. I stretch his arms out to the side, remembering a million times I’ve seen Hugh do it

this way, using Truman's body in exactly the way he needs. I half-ass massage him through his shirt, then push it up enough so I can fuck with his back, sucking and using my teeth.

His breaths come in a little sharp and Hugh pauses.

"Keep going," I say.

"She's found the degree of commitment, contrary to expectation, is reportedly higher..."

I knead Tru through his pants, and it's gotta be frustrating, but I don't care. Or I do. That's the point. When I finally pull them over his ass, down to his knees, he's relieved.

At least, until I start in on his thigh.

This one time, years and years ago, one of the first times we ever played together, Truman had me mark Hugh. Because I'd never ask him, and Tru was in charge. (Like, sort of an apprentice to in-charge, except he was so fucking good at it we were stunned stupid. *Stupid hot.*) I marked Hugh right here, where his ass and his thigh connect.

I chew on Truman, remembering that, and wonder if he'll know the significance. Except I was nervous back then because I'd never really marked anyone before, and I'd never really played with him before, and I definitely, definitely, had never done anything like that to Hugh. This time? Totally not nervous. This time I chew on Truman until he's panting against the phone and Hugh pauses in his whatever-he's-talking about to listen.

"What's happening?"

I mumble, "Tell him." But I don't move away from Tru's skin.

"We are re-living the past," Tru says, all sexy-breathless. "Do you remember the first time you told me to run the scene?"

"How could I forget?"

"Will is leaving his mark on me."

This is what I love about my boyfriends: they're so fucking quick. And they remember everything. (Sometimes that last thing is what I hate about them, too.)

"Harder, Will. I want it to hurt a little."

I go in just a little more, grinding his skin in my teeth, and Tru reaches back to touch my head. He's not pushing me away. He's saying, *Thank you*. Or maybe, *I'll get you, my pretty, and also thank you*.

"That's all."

So I stop. Kind of. And by "stop" I mean I kiss my way up to Tru's ass and pull it open so I can rim the fuck out of him, because now I'm so turned on I can barely see.

Okay, you're lucky I'm mature. Because I almost thought *rim the shit out of him*, and revised at the last second, because that'd be gross. And actually, I'm not super-freaked out about shit anymore, because: Hugh. But still, I'm glad we worked on Tru's ass in the shower earlier too, because he's self-conscious about body stuff.

Rimming Tru is kind of amazing, because he wants it, and he also feels like there's a weird

power thing there with me, specifically, because usually when we do this Hugh's talking up all that daddy play shit where he's teaching baby boy to eat ass. And whoa, hot. But also, this is pretty hot: me loving Tru's ass because he amazes me, because I trust him more than life, because he kisses me for like no reason, at all, except he likes kissing me.

And he looks at me like I amaze him, too. Which is just the greatest feeling in the history of all feelings. Except maybe for sex, but not all sex, just the really mind-blowing kind.

"I love you, love you, love you," I murmur in his ear, and maybe I wouldn't do that if Hugh was sitting in front of me, not because he doesn't know I'm crazy about his husband. Both of them know. Everyone knows.

"Make love to me, William. Right now."

"Jeez, I don't know, I might have—"

He turns his face and kisses the word "plans" out of my mouth, then bites down on my lip.

"Make love to me, like Hugh said."

"Yeah, okay." And, like one of those flashes of inspiration, I know what I'm doing. I know what I wish I was doing, too, but it doesn't matter. Not tonight. I'll just have to make this other thing as good.

"I miss the two of you very much," Hugh says, and he can make his voice as even as he wants, but I hear the strain in it.

I kiss Tru again. "We miss you too. When're you coming home?"

"In eighty-three hours."

Tru and I smile at each other.

I press him down and pull his arms way out to the side. I don't know if it really turns him on to have his arms like that, or if it turns Hugh on, or if they just do it because they do it. It's a way of saying, *You just accept, Truman. You just take what I give you.* The second I have the thought, my dick wakes up like, *Oh, hi, did you miss me? Less thinking, more sex.*

I don't shove his shirt up, just push it until it's over his ass. I leave his jeans on. Me being ass-naked and Tru being dressed is always fucking hot. I drip lube over my fingers and play them up and down his crack, getting his cheeks, dipping down to his balls (even though his legs are tight like this, stuck in his clothes). Then I lube the unholy hell out of my dick, by which I mean I totally do not start jerking off staring at his ass, because hi, I'm fucking busy, all right?

"Is it intermission?" Hugh asks.

"Shut up."

"The second act is just about to begin, I think. At least, I'm slick, Will, if you'd like to—"

"You shut up, too," I say, and line up with my knees on the outside of Tru's. God, he's so close. So. Damn. Close. "I want to be inside you, bare, like this." I press against him, letting my dick slide into his crack.

He shudders.

“I want to be so deep you can’t breathe,” I say, even though I don’t have that kind of length. Doesn’t matter. A lot of it’s totally psychological. (Shut up, it *is*.) “I want to feel your skin on my skin, Truman.”

“Yes, yes, please—”

“But we’re not gonna do all that because I’m, you know, not safe to do that.”

Tru groans, this sound of abject need that makes me grin, even as I press harder against him. “Will, come on, you and Molly use condoms, I’m sure it’s fine—”

“No,” I say, and begin to move. I intentionally didn’t stretch him because I don’t want to, uh, accidentally, um...give in to temptation. But I do take a second to pull him open and slide in as far as I can, dripping more lube over both of us so I can glide.

And oh god, oh fuck, I must have done this before, but never as the main course, and it’s different this way. I lean over him kissing the back of his neck, fucking up and down his crack.

“Just like this, Truman,” I say. “Bare, and you’ll be so fucking tight, you know?”

He tenses his muscles against me and I suck in a breath.

“Yeah, like that, that’s good. Jesus, I love you so fucking much—” I try to make out with him, but the angle’s awkward, and anyway, I’m concentrating on important stuff, like not sliding down too far or thrusting up too far or ohgod, he’s tensing and releasing like he’s fucking milking me, he’s milking me and I’m not even inside him.

“Just fuck me, Will, dammit, I’m not worried about the risk—there’s practically no risk—”

“I *am* fucking you. Hugh? Doesn’t it sound like I’m fucking your husband?”

“You better be, or you’ll be taking a hell of a lot more than nineteen.”

“Boring,” I say, and I’m about to say something really clever, you know, bring him to his knees with the kind of smartass remark he pretends he hates but really finds endearing, when—  
“Argh, fuck, Truman!”

Tru rears up, taking me with him, and I slip out, but also this way, with both of us kneeling, we can kiss.

“I love you,” he says, looking me dead in the eyes.

“Save that shit for your husband.”

He reaches for the lube and takes hold of me between his legs. For a second I think he’s going to try to force the issue, try to get me inside raw like this, but he doesn’t. He draws my dick between his thighs, lubing everything in its path, and squeezes his legs tight enough to keep me in place, but not so tight I can’t move.

The pressure, the strangeness of it, the feel of my dick and his balls just chilling out together. “Oh my god,” I whisper, kissing him harder. “That’s nice.”

We can’t totally fuck this way, but we can rub, and kiss, and I can use my hands on his body, one of them slipping over his dick like maybe I forget how to jack him, the other one fucking with his nipples through his shirt.

Both of us are making noises, which I register in the back of my head until Hugh moans through the fucking phone.

“You’re driving me insane. I’m desperate for an orgasm.”

“So come,” I say.

Tru grins into our kiss. “Oh, he’s not coming at all this week.”

“Why?”

“Because I told him not to.”

I have to take a minute on that, because one) holy shit; and two) Tru’s totally a secret sadist and I gotta remember not to fuck with him, even though obviously he saves his badassery all for Hugh.

And also? Holy shit. Again.

“Are you telling he he’s been torturing us all week and—he’s not allowed to come?”

“Well, I’m hardly there to enforce it.” But the way Tru smiles as he says it? *I want. I want more. I want in.*

And I know I *am* in, except there’s still space between us, space that has to do with me, not them.

“I obey, as per usual,” Hugh says. “Finish what you were doing.”

“Mm, dom voice,” I say to Tru. “You’re so fucking hot.”

“Then fuck me already.”

I kiss him, then push him down to the bed and dive in, sliding between his thighs again, thrusting hard and fast.

It’s not like, *Oh, this is just like being in an ass, or a pussy.* That’s not what it feels like. But it doesn’t *not* feel like that, either, the way that a hand job doesn’t feel like being inside an ass or a pussy, no matter how good it is. Fucking Truman’s thighs is slick and warm and different.

Reaching around him to grab his dick makes him moan, and at this point I’m gonna blow in about ten, fifteen seconds, and it might be dumb, but I’m totally attached to the simultaneous orgasm.

“Come with me,” I pant in his ear. “You have to, please, please come with me, Tru, I’m—I’m so close—”

“I want you inside me.”

“Not yet—”

“*Yet?*” both of them say at once, and I’m done, I’m going over. I go hard and fast for three breaths, and then everything stops and my balls tense and I come with my eyes shoved hard into Tru’s shoulder, making my hand keep going on him, wishing like a little kid on a star that he—

“Oh, god—*Will*—”

*Yes, yes, yes, yes, do it, yes.* Tru comes all over my hand and I love everything about this feeling. I bring him down as well as I can, not too much, not too little, and both of us kind of

tumble to the bed.

And I roll him over so I can lick him, because he tastes good.

He moans deeply and pulls me up to kiss. “You are incredible. I still maintain we could have done that the other way, but that was amazing.”

“You’re amazing.”

“Don’t deflect.”

“And please feel free to explain to us what you meant by ‘not yet’,” Hugh says.

I hide my face again in Truman while he brushes fingers through my hair. “Not now.”

“Clues,” Hugh says. “So many clues. I am going to solve you like a crossword puzzle, boyfriend mine.”

“I could get used to Hugh’s archaic endearments,” Truman murmurs.

“I love you, too,” Hugh replies. “Both of you. Very, very much.”

“Eighty-two hours,” I say.

“Eighty-two hours. Goodnight.”

This is what I love about my boyfriends, right here: Hugh says “goodnight” and pauses.

We wait.

“Kiss our boy for me, Truman.”

Truman kisses me and we hear Hugh hang up.

---

Hugh.

I have always thought that there were things I could never tell them. I am the kind of person who needs my secrets, who needs that wall between myself and everyone else. Or perhaps I learned it from my mother, who carried her secrets to the grave.

Perhaps she is the reason why I fell for Truman, a man who somehow allows me my secrets while never allowing me the illusion of mystery. He knows me without knowing everything about me, a gift for which I can never repay him.

It wasn’t always this way, but now I can hear his understanding in the spaces between the words on the message he left me just before the plane took off for Paris: “Pizza doesn’t taste as good without you watching us eat it.” Each morning I woke to find a message from him, timed for my morning, his evening. He left them by himself, despite the fact that Will was with him. I imagined him waiting for Will to brush his teeth, or perhaps going downstairs for something and dialing me from the kitchen. “Good morning, love. Send us pictures today.” Or, one day: “Have an espresso so you can tell Antony about it.”

I thought I’d miss his scent, or his smile, and I did miss those things. But Truman takes time

for small, mundane details. He appreciates moments that I barely recognize passing. He knew, he somehow predicted, that the hardest part would be waking up alone, and so he made certain I didn't.

I didn't marry the man of my dreams. I didn't dream this, or anything like it. I fully intended to die alone, without bitterness, having lived a life with enough joy to justify getting out of bed in the morning, and enough darkness to appreciate the joy.

There are things I can never tell them. Truman already knows them all.

\* \* \*

My flight landed at 2 p.m. on a Thursday. Only Will was there to meet the plane, and he apologized about it as if he'd personally added clients to Truman's day in order to get me to himself.

"It should be him here," he mumbled into my shoulder. We'd been embracing long enough to start gathering *move it along* looks from Security.

"Can you drive or shall I?"

"Yeah, no, it's like what, midnight for your body right now? I'll drive."

As I watched him pull himself together—the tightening of his mouth, the smoothing-down of his hair, the shifting of his shoulders that wasn't quite a squaring-off, but more of a resettling—I reflected on all the years we'd lived apart, in different parts of California, and how odd it seemed to me now.

"Would you have come if you were still in Santa Barbara?" I asked. One of my ridiculous questions. Will gave me his *why do you ask such ridiculous questions* look.

"Course. Dummy."

I hooked him in for a kiss, then pushed him toward the car. My car, in fact. "Can we go? I'm eager to get home. To be home."

"Sure, yeah. And tell me everything about Paris. Moll was desperate to come meet up with you, especially because she knew other people at the conference, but she couldn't get a ticket on the high-speed train for the only day she could get away."

"We spoke by phone." I watched him load my luggage in my car as if he was my chauffeur. They were up to something. Easy to tell when Will couldn't look me in the eye.

At least, I hoped they were up to something. I pulled out my phone. *Our boyfriend is skittish. Please confirm that you have plans in place to counteract his nerves.*

Truman wouldn't get the message for another forty-five minutes at least, but texting him made me feel just a little more in control.

Will relaxed a little once we were moving. He steered with his left hand and used the right to navigate the radio, filling me in absently on the doings in his household (though I didn't think

he'd been there since I left), and the seemingly endless planning involved in Ally's wedding.

"And the groom has what to say about all this?"

"Oh, you know. He mostly just sits there looking at her like she's the only thing on the planet until she ramps up to crazytown. Then he says, 'Do you think?' and she stops talking." Will shook his head. "Don't get me wrong, I love both of them, but like how long does it take to plan a wedding? It feels like it's been forever. It didn't take this long to plan your wedding."

Paul would have married her the day they met (or at least within the week). Ally needed to get used to the idea that she was an adult and didn't need anyone's approval to do what she wanted, not even her parents', or Truman's.

The most interesting thing about having such a large family is watching all of them grow, and change. When I pictured my future, it was static. I could never have imagined it would be so full of color, full of life, full of seasons that brought with them more changes than I could predict.

And Will. I certainly never predicted Will.

I reached for his hand and brought it to my lips, more Truman's gesture than mine. "I missed you."

"Yeah, well, I missed you, too." Grudgingly. "We had fun. I mean, I know you wanted us to, but I guess I thought we wouldn't."

"Does it feel disloyal?" I asked, ready to defend them both.

"Not really. Not as much as I expected it to." His fingers squeezed mine. "Actually, it was good. Because I thought we might not work on our own, and we did. It's good to know that, I don't know, like all three of us are more stable because we can work in all the pairs, or something."

I narrowed my eyes until all I could see was his face. "Will."

His profile smiled. "Nope. Not yet.

"Out of curiosity, if I growled at you and threatened punishment—would you give in?"

"Not even a chance."

I pretended to pout. "Fine, Will. But know this: you will tell us. Whatever it is you aren't telling us."

"I know."

It would have to do. For now.

\* \* \*

The house. My grandparents' house. My mother's. Mine. Now ours.

I stood just outside the library and inhaled my entire life. Will's arms wrapped around me.

"So you can't come, right? I mean, Tru hasn't released you yet."

How blissful the two of them are with their nicknames: Will shortening Truman's name until it feels more like his; Truman performing the opposite operation on Will's. I couldn't wait until I heard Truman's voice—command and affection and love—*William*.

"Are you going to take advantage of me, Mr Derrie?" I asked.

His arms tightened. "That'd be pretty fucked up."

"It would."

"So I guess you should nap."

"I should."

"Uh huh." His lips pressed to my skin. "Thing is, I'm not a sadist. Or I'd edge you until he got home."

"I might fall asleep."

"Doubtful, Mr Reynolds."

I closed my eyes into his kisses, reaching back to coax those lips forward. Not on my neck, damn you.

Will chuckled. "Tempting. But anyway, let's get your stuff sorted out and decide on dinner."

"Dinner?"

"We're ordering in." He unraveled me and picked up my suitcases.

"Ordering in?" I made a very small attempt to not sound disappointed as I followed him up the stairs. "Will, I've eaten nothing but other people's food for a week straight. Is there any possibility—"

"Check the fridge. God, he knows you so well it's creepy."

Single portion of marinating skirt steak, red potatoes also bagged with rosemary and garlic and who knew what else. Cauliflower, already prepped. I shut the door to the refrigerator and pressed my forehead to it, chest tight, throat dry.

My phone vibrated. *I have plans inside of plans. I'm so glad you're home. Xo.*

Truman's standard sign-off, but I blinked at it for a second longer than necessary.

"I know." Will's voice. Will's presence at my back. "Because you read my mind all the time, so I know, exactly, what it feels like."

"I'm gaining a new appreciation for just how exposed you feel. And, perhaps, how—hungry." I let him turn me, pressing me back against my refrigerator, in my kitchen. "Should I apologize?"

"Maybe for not understanding. Come upstairs, Hugh."

I inhaled slowly, savoring my name in Will's voice. "I am unduly moved by everything right now. Aside from sleep away camp, I've never been out of the house that long."

"Didn't you live in the dorms?"

"I never went more than a day without seeing Mom, though. I made myself sleep in the dorms, but I was always here." Mom and I, standing in this kitchen, laughing. I buried my face in

Will's neck and tried not to let whatever tidal wave this was overwhelm me.

"I love you," he said, fingers sliding into my hair. Seven days with Truman, physical boundaries lowered, emotional boundaries lowered. I took advantage of it and let Will hold me. I let myself think of my mother's laughter, tried to hear its echoes.

"Don't think, just follow directions. I wish he was home already."

"Me too. But this—you—are wonderful." I took a last breath before pulling away.

"Upstairs?"

"Yeah. And I was serious about the directions. You can text him if you want confirmation."

"I don't need confirmation, Will. I'm yours to command."

"Oh man. Yeah. I'll just beat off now."

"Is that allowed?"

"Technically, there's no actual restriction on me coming like there is on you coming."

I raised an eyebrow.

"Yeah, well, okay, so I'm probably not gonna come without him telling me I can, but whatever. Anyway." He tugged my hand. "Upstairs."

I followed, leaving as much emotion as I possibly could behind us.

\* \* \*

Will and I have showered together many times. I could count them, but what would be the point? I remember them.

None compared to this particular shower, not even the one we took on my honeymoon, when Truman directed us.

One of the cornerstones of our friendship has always been words. I use them to unsettle him, I force him to use them to get what he wants. I've gained a deeper understanding of myself through conversations with Will.

And on the day I returned from Paris, we showered without speaking.

He undressed me, piece by piece, returning my tie to my closet, putting away my shoes, freeing my belt and everything else from my pockets to the top of my dresser. He was gentle, and firm, and he didn't look me in the eyes but permitted me to watch his face.

Will's well-loved face. Eight and a half years, and both of us have changed. Will's face displays his age more than it used to, all the tiny lines, the ways his skin is no longer as fresh as it used to be; he's a man all the way through, though I can still see his twenty-one year old self peeking through.

He led me into the bathroom, turned on the shower, pushed me into its spray.

I closed my eyes and allowed him to wash me. He was careful with my hair, with the shampoo, as careful as anyone washing a child's hair, tilting my head back, shielding my face.

His fingers soaped my neck, my shoulders, my back and chest, each arm individually.

Will went to his knees and I looked down. I watched his deft motions with soap, his incredible tenderness as he washed my cock, my balls. His hands turned me and I went with it, leaning against the wall so he could wash my cleft. He pressed a soap-slick finger inside me and I breathed, wishing he'd take it further and knowing he wouldn't. The same finger pressed in twice more, rinsing, and he soaped my legs from behind before turning me again.

I looked at him, the plane of his back, the way the water sluiced through his hair, as he bent to clean my feet.

When he stood and reached for the shampoo I kissed him. And took the shampoo.

Years of the two of us touching one another, years of passion and intensity and love and laughter, but whatever was building between us in the shower felt both familiar and fresh, as if he'd invented it for this occasion specifically.

I washed his hair and shielded his face. I let my hands roam his body (which was clean already, not tarnished by travel), I knelt in front of him and carefully, so carefully, washed him as he had me. Will was hard, of course. Hard in my presence naked, whatever the context.

I pressed my cheek against his thigh and closed my eyes again, needing the contact, needing his presence. Needing, maybe more than both, the perfect understanding of an old lover, of one who never judges.

His hands held me against him with no demand.

When he was as clean, if not more, than I was, I stood up. We embraced, and this time I couldn't meet his eyes. I couldn't look at him with my tears. I couldn't answer any of the questions I'd be able to see on his face.

He dried me first, shivering, water drops splattering on my skin. I dried him (starting with his hair, which I fancied had grown longer over the course of the last week; he'd trimmed it right before I left). Then Will led me to bed, my own bed, with clean sheets, fluffed pillows. He pulled me to him and I went, grateful that he held me, grateful that I was old enough and wise enough to let him.

\* \* \*

I woke to their voices. I should have sprung from the bed to kiss my husband, but I listened without moving, needing to make sure everything was all right before rushing in.

"It's no problem. We can do it a little differently."

"I couldn't kick him out, Tru. He just, like, lay there with me."

"Should I be jealous?" Truman asked, and I could hear his smile, I could hear how much he loved Will in the tease.

"Fuck yeah, you should be jealous. He let me *hold him*, Tru. Like I can die happy now."

“Don’t. But go downstairs for a few minutes and order dinner.”

“Should I, like, do something for him?”

“I’ll do that.”

“Aw, you want to make dinner for your man. That’s so cute!”

“I want to spank my boyfriend if he doesn’t order dinner like I told him to.”

“Hey, not for nothing, but you wanting to spank me is not really a disincentive.”

“Go.”

“Yeah. Just. You know. Make everything good, okay?”

“I love you, William. Go downstairs.”

“Love you, too.”

I couldn’t hear them kiss, but I assumed they did. Then: Will’s steps on the stairs.

I reached out a hand when Truman approached the bed. He took it and sat beside me.

“Hello, my love.”

I kissed his fingers and held them to my lips.

“Did you like my messages?”

“I lived for them,” I said.

His eyes darkened. “Next time I’m coming with you. Even if Ally’s planning a wedding.”

“Is that why you stayed?”

“I—not exactly.” He looked so good in his suit, in his slacks and shirt and tie. Truman could pull off a casual suit every day without making it too formal, without using his suit to put space between himself and other people.

I wanted him in the bed with me. When I tugged, he came. Suit and all.

He rested a hand on my face. “This was important. And it was good. I’m not complaining.”

“Neither is he.”

“Well, no. But the moments we most enjoyed would have been better if you were present.

We hold ourselves back a little for you, my husband.”

I wasn’t sure how to take that. “In what sense?”

“There are things we did that we wouldn’t have done with you here. I am determined to quit—editing.”

“Do I—do I make you do that?”

“Hugh. Of course you don’t. But both of us do anyway.”

Except that if both of them did it, I couldn’t really be blameless. “I don’t want you to edit yourself.”

“What’s wrong? Hugh, what is it?”

How could I possibly explain? I’d missed him, I’d missed home, I’d been splintered into two people, and one of them had rather melodramatically missed my life while the other had smiled and chatted and—

“I’m a fraud,” I said, offering the only smile I could offer, which was weak and needy.

Truman’s eyes narrowed. “You are my husband and his boyfriend and Cordelia’s son. You are not a fraud. Those three points do not intersect at ‘fraud’, Hugh Reynolds.”

I’d lost myself in Will earlier at least in part because he only needed to see that I needed him. When I pulled myself against Truman, when his arms wrapped around me, he kept talking.

“You are yourself, even when we’re not there to remind you, even when you aren’t here to remind yourself. I left you messages to make sure you remembered that. You are good, and you are loved, and you deserve all of it.”

I breathed harshly against his chest.

“You’re home now, love,” he said, stroking my hair.

“I feel like I barely held myself together and now I’m falling apart.”

“Then fall apart, Hugh.” His arms tightened.

“I can’t.”

He kissed my forehead and didn’t say anything else.

\* \* \*

I managed to go downstairs and watch them eat, watch Truman make my dinner. We almost never prepare for one another like this. He does his ironing, I do mine. We take different lunches, and use different toothpastes.

I couldn’t tear my eyes away from him as he made dinner for me, he and Will holding up a conversation they were clearly continuing about Will’s cousins and their adoption.

“It’s just so terrifying that someone could take Miles away, even though obviously it’s legal and they already knew that.” Will shook his head. “I don’t know. The whole thing freaks me out.”

“I could have gone into family law. I thought about it.”

“Nah. Then you wouldn’t have met your husband.”

“Oh, I would have. Just in a different context.”

My throat closed, even considering the idea that in some alternate universe Truman didn’t steal my binder at a conference so he’d have an excuse to sit next to me.

“Oh man, Tru. Your husband’s *wrecked*.”

“Hush.”

“I’m just saying I’m glad you aren’t going to work tomorrow.”

I frowned. “You’re not going to work tomorrow?”

“It’s Friday. I rescheduled my clients for earlier this week, or next week.”

“Gobsmacked,” Will said, drawing my attention, fingers drawing an invisible scribble in the air. “That thing happening on your face right now? Gobsmacked.”

“Perhaps instead of needling Hugh, you could help.” Truman waved the spatula he was using on the red potatoes.

“Mm, help how?”

“Sit in his lap. Remind him what you smell like.” Tru smirked in that wholly handsome and not-smirky way of his. “Remind him what you taste like.”

“Oh fuck yeah.”

In seconds I had a lapful of Will.

“Hey,” he said. When I didn’t reply he pulled my arms around him, making it easier for me to tighten them. “This will pass. I know you hate feeling like this, but it’ll pass. Me and Tru will help.”

“Selflessly, I’m sure,” I murmured.

“Yeah, it’s not exactly the worst thing, you being all messed up and letting me help for once.”

“You were nervous at the airport.”

“Ha. Yeah. But then you needed me, so I worked it out.”

“You worked out your nerves?”

“Yeah. See, ’cause me having nerves when we’re planning something is expected. But then you needed me, so I stopped having nerves. Which I think means they’re just some kind of self-indulgent thing I do because we expect it, but whatever.”

“Deep thoughts.”

“Can it, Mr Reynolds.”

I ran my hands up and down his back, remembering the time he took a beating and knelt right here the next day, sucking Truman’s cock while I occasionally flicked bacon fat on his skin. Not enough to burn. Just enough to feel it.

“I do hate feeling like this,” I said, tugging his shirt off. “I’ve been waiting since I left to get back to you two, and now that I’m here, I’m useless.”

“You aren’t useless!”

“Don’t indulge him, William.”

Will squirmed until our bodies aligned better. He was already hard. “I like indulging him!”

My husband appeared with a plate of food. He’d cut the steak up into thin slices. The cauliflower was roasted perfectly: a little browned and crispy on the outside, promising that it would be perfect on the inside, neither mushy nor hard.

“Don’t indulge him, Will. Feed him.” The plate slid onto the table and Truman picked up a piece of steak and held it to my lips.

I pushed back all of the voices lamenting the loss of my dignity and met his eyes before taking it, swiping my tongue across his fingertips.

Cooked perfectly.

“Thank you.”

Truman smiled and kissed me. “You’re welcome. Now distract Will long enough so he doesn’t notice me eating the rest of the potstickers.”

“You fucking cheater.” Will had to shift on my lap again to grab the food, and he was bashful about it, about taking this measure of control from me. His shyness lit the fuse of my desire and I forced his face toward mine.

“Feed me, Will.”

“Oh, fuck yes.”

Alternating bites: steak, potato, cauliflower; steak, cauliflower, potato. He fed me with his fingers, not a fork, and he couldn’t hold eye contact while doing it. His gaze kept skidding away as if it was too dangerous to watch me eat from his hand.

I shivered, thinking, *I am eating from Will’s hand.*

Truman returned after a few minutes, in more comfortable clothes, and sat in the chair beside us. The mismatched chair. The one I’d bought years after Mom purchased the bistro set, when it became clear that we hoped to have three people in this kitchen as often as humanly possible.

He gave Will bites of the potstickers. We were a ridiculous picture of grown men feeding one another, playing on some larger symbolism, some metaphor of needs being met, protection and caretaking freely offered.

I used to care a lot more about the picture I made. I used to see myself from the outside far more clearly than I could feel myself from the inside. Both of them changed me in that respect, making me a man who understands that the picture only has what power we give it.

We eventually finished eating. Will and Truman did the dishes together. I could live the rest of my life in my kitchen, watching them at the sink, listening to their voices. Something about me makes it hard for people to relax, even the people I love. But the two of them talked and laughed and washed dishes without analyzing everything, without settling awareness over every word like a too-heavy blanket, obscuring meaning in the name of examination.

And just like that, I was back into the funk I’d felt descending the second I left Paris. I’d held it off the entire trip, but I was wearing it now, when I least wanted it.

“We’ll do whatever we want tomorrow,” Truman said to Will, glancing over his shoulder (and catching my attention). “Tonight we’ll sleep.”

“Yeah. ’S good. Sleep will be awesome.”

“Actual sleep, Will.”

Will laughed.

They led me upstairs and I expected them to sandwich me in the middle, but they didn’t.

“You’re crashing, love,” Truman said, after I’d crawled into my side. He fussed with the blankets for a minute like a little old lady. Then, not looking at me, he added, “We’re probably

going to have sex in the bed next to you. Join in if you like, but you still can't come until tomorrow."

This time Will's laughter echoed off the tiles in the bathroom. A second later he called, "I just spit toothpaste all over your mirror and it's totally not my fault!"

Truman and I smiled at each other.

"I love you," I said. "I think I'll just watch."

"I think you're going to fall asleep."

"Not with the two of you fucking in the same bed."

He kissed me. "You're home. I love you, too."

I fell asleep. To be fair, they took an awfully long time to brush their teeth and walk to the bed. I didn't even hear Will rinse.

\* \* \*

I woke up far too early and watched them sleep. Will had curled against Truman, but at some point, during some shift, he'd slid down, his face now nestled in Truman's armpit. Truman's hand rested against his hip possessively and I examined their faces, their bodies, for any hints I could find of what I'd missed.

Of course I expected them to be closer when I returned, after seven days with one another. I needed to understand the new cords stretching between them, the beautiful sense of togetherness, which had been a seed before but now bloomed, vibrant, breathtaking, so bright I couldn't look away.

It was creepy, really, the way I watched them, the way I tried to capture them when they weren't awake to stop me. But they like this about me (most of the time). They like that I dig in and wallow and try to understand.

I dozed, on my side, facing them. The next time I woke up, Truman was turning, his other arm reaching to rest on Will's side, still asleep. Will's breathing changed and he snuggled in deeper, which made Truman's hand curl over him, as if in comfort, protection, companionship. Love, of course, above all else.

Eventually I fell back to sleep.

\* \* \*

I don't underestimate my husband's ability to surprise me, but surprise me he did.

Candles. Candles on every stable surface in our bedroom. I blinked, rubbing my eyes after the blindfold, and the first thing I saw was Will, naked, looking at me.

"C'mere," Will said, pulling me to the center of the room. "This is what we did, the first

night you were gone. Because I felt so shitty, and Tru missed you but decided to focus on me instead, so he staged this whole romantic seduction thing.”

I swallowed, allowing him to tilt my chin up, allowing him to kiss me.

“We missed you so fucking much. I’m so glad you’re home it’s kind of sick.”

“So am I,” I said.

“Good. Kiss me, Mr Reynolds.”

I obeyed, sliding my hands into his hair, taking just a little more than he offered. Will, as ever, leaned into me, his entire body demanding more.

“What did we do on the second night, Will?” Truman asked from somewhere in the shifting candlelight behind me. (A window must have been open, or else I’d have to see where that draft was coming from. I told myself to stop thinking about home maintenance and focus on the feel of Will’s lips beneath mine.)

I permitted him to pull away enough to speak.

“You spanked me. Was hot.”

“Yes, it was.”

I knew that voice. That was Truman observing. I wanted to turn toward him, but didn’t quite have the courage. Sometimes he sees deeper into me than I realize, and the warm reflective pool of his gaze leaves me naked. I focused on Will and waited.

“Uh, so, the third night was after you head-fucked us over that ‘don’t touch each other’ thing and Tru needed a little TLC, so I, uh, you know, gave it to him.”

I tilted his chin up. “How did you tenderly love my husband, Will? Tell me in detail.”

“Shut up. Jerk.”

“I begged him all night to fuck me without a condom, but he still refused.”

Will avoided my eyes. “That’s our agreement.”

“Truman fucked you without a condom.”

“That was different.”

“Because he did it in the heat of the moment? Or because you believe you’re dirty?”

“I didn’t say *dirty*, but one of us is still having sex outside, uh, outside this, and just—obviously—oh, fuck you.”

“You and I both had sex with Red, Will. And Red is certainly not monogamous.”

“Oh hell no. Listen, just shut up.”

I grabbed his face and pressed it to my lips, nipping at his ear. “What did you mean when you said ‘not yet’, Will?”

“Nothing. Not talking about this now.”

I wanted to growl and force the issue, but Truman cleared his throat.

“On the fourth night I enticed Will to flog me, though he claimed he was uncomfortable with the arrangement.”

“I can use a flogger! But just, I don’t know, it felt weird. Like my brain expected you to be here, and when you weren’t, I couldn’t quite keep my balance. I couldn’t keep my throws even. It was weird.”

“I promised him we’ll try it again soon,” Truman said.

“Excellent.” Because that was my line. They expected it.

Will smiled and ran his hands up my back, on either side of my spine. “It’s not that we don’t get you’re all fucked in the head, you know. If you’re pretending for us, you can quit it. But if you’re pretending for yourself, it’s cool. I’ll let Tru knock that shit out of your system.”

“The fifth night, Will.”

“Um, okay, so I flogged Tru and then...oh, the fifth night, uh, we used the buckling restraints because I wanted my hands immobilized, and he fucked me hard, and held out until way after I came against the bed, like an asshole.”

Truman laughed. “It was difficult, but I persevered.”

“He told me he was tenderizing my ass,” Will said, kissing my jaw. “Told me that next time he’d do that when you were here, too, so you could pick up when he was done and keep going.”

My cock strained against my clothes. “Yes. Now works for me.”

“Naughty, naughty. On the last night we mostly just fooled around, waiting for you to get home. You married a really good kisser, Hugh.”

“I know.”

Will smiled, his cheeky smile, and kissed me. “You gotta let go of me now. We have a whole thing worked out.”

“Wait,” I said, before he could pull away. I held him in place by the shoulders and looked up and down his body, taking in the known planes of him, even in dim lighting. I ached to kneel, to press my face to his cock, to smell him now, not directly after a shower, when he’d smell like himself.

He brushed my hands off and stepped in closer again, arms taking me in a hard embrace. “Quit being such a baby,” Will whispered. He shifted only enough to undress me, pulling my T-shirt over my head, pushing my pants to my ankles. “I gotta go. There’s a plan.” With one last kiss to my cheek, he stepped back.

I didn’t turn to follow his progress. He went to the bed; I could feel him move through space as if the candles had added viscosity to the room and Will’s steps rippled back against my skin.

Then I felt Truman, behind me, pressing against me. Naked. Completely naked, head to toe. My Truman, who pretended he hated his body less than he did because it bothered Will, who put up with nudity when he felt it would cause too much trouble to not be nude, but who felt every second of it as if it exposed more than just his skin.

I closed my eyes and tried to memorize him against me, standing, erection hard at my ass.

“I love you,” I said, because this moment deserved something, and it was the best I could do.

“I want to flog you. May I?”

“Of course.”

Truman enjoys flogging more than being flogged, and blowing more than being blown. He likes penetrative anal sex in both directions. He appreciates Will in bondage, but isn't particularly interested in being tied up or tying me up. He enjoys spanking both of us, more than he'll readily admit, and even more when we add an element of ageplay to it. He can take or leave most impact toys, with the exception of Will's favorite flogger and, secretly, the paddle he has only used on me once. (It's only a matter of time. He was high, paddling my ass. I can't wait until he asks me again.)

“Standing or lying down?” I asked.

“Lying down. Next to Will.”

This had excellent potential. I took my position, exposing my back and ass and thighs to Truman, wishing I could watch. A second passed. Will grabbed my hand and squeezed.

“Is he standing naked behind us with a flogger right now?” I murmured.

“Isn't that, like, the hottest thing you've ever heard of in your life?”

“Yes.”

Will smirked. I wasn't looking at him, but I knew. “Yeah. Fuck yeah.”

“I'm jealous you get to watch.”

“You fucking well should be.”

“Quiet in the peanut gallery, please.”

Truman still concentrates when he picks up a flogger. He still practices, feeling out his balance, swinging it as if he's surprised to find it in his hand. I breathed, riding the anticipation.

He began slowly, warming himself up far more than he warmed me up. I imagined the weight of each throw, the way he'd feel it in his wrist and forearm, light flicks of the falls on my skin. I opened to it and I wanted to sigh, I wanted to groan with the pleasure of sensation, the absorption, the way my thoughts slowly dimmed until they were no more than candlelit notions passing through my mind.

Will shifted, curling around me, and when I lifted my head he moved until I could suck him. The flogging intensified slowly, and I mirrored it on Will's cock, teasing him with light licks, using my lips on his skin, very occasionally—in time with Truman's build-up—my teeth.

“Ohhh fuck me, you guys—stop—do something—damn you both—”

Truman laughed breathlessly. “Is that the best you can do, Will?”

The best he could do was to thrust into my mouth, but I used my arm to pin him across the stomach. His legs drummed in protest and Truman's strikes on my back got faster as he, I presumed, watched us.

“Harder, harder, Truman, *fuck*, don’t go easy on him—”

“I’m not—”

He wasn’t, at least not intentionally. Truman, forever believing he couldn’t understand what Will and I got out of this side of the flogger, hardly ever applied himself to the level of sensation I enjoy. Require. Need.

Tonight I needed it.

I let Will’s cock slip from my lips and he groaned. “Truman,” I said.

The flogger did not come down again.

“Yes, love?”

“I need you to take me to the edge. Can you do it?”

“With this? I’m not sure.”

“Use the mop flogger,” Will said. “That’s what you want, isn’t it? Not the pain, the everything.”

“The overstimulation, yes. The mop flogger. Please.”

Truman’s hand ghosted up my back. “I have so little practice with it.”

“Time to get more.”

“I’ll be right back. Don’t go back to what you were doing.”

“Sadist!” Will called. He smiled down at me, reaching out to gently press my head to his thigh so I could rest it there. “What else do you want tonight?”

“This. After this, I want him to fuck me while I suck you. Don’t come until he tells you to, Will.”

“Yeah, okay.” His fingers brushed over my temple, down the side of my face, my neck.

“Anything you want, we’ll do.”

I considered it, the offer there, the space to expand my desires into larger parameters.

“I’d like you bound. At my mercy.”

“Oh man. Yeah, okay. Hot.”

“We should tell Truman—”

“Uh, no, it’s cool.” Will squirmed until he could reach Truman’s bedside table. “Your restraints, sir.”

I stared at them. Then at him.

“So Truman and I? Not as OCD as you are about erasing all traces of sex.”

“I don’t erase all traces of sex.”

“You do. But you erase all traces of everything. When you leave the house, all your breakfast dishes are put away, Hugh.”

“Is that bad?”

“No, it’s great. It’s you. But he and I, apparently, do things differently. Um. Shit.”

We were still locked in each other’s gazes when Truman came up the stairs.

“What is it?” he asked, pausing beside the bed, mop flogger in hand.

“Hugh wants me restrained.”

“Oh. Okay.”

“Also, I just broke the news to him that we don’t put everything away when we’re done with it.”

“Is that how it feels?” I asked. “Like I erase things? I don’t mean to erase things. I just—like knowing exactly where everything will be when I next need it.”

“Not like it’s a bad thing.” Will dangled the leather cuffs by their buckles, drawing my attention to his own cuffs, the understated ones he wore always. The ones we’d bought for him to remind him of his place with us.

“You want Will’s arms back?”

“Please.”

We reconfigured with Will on his knees and me on all fours. And Truman, one hand on my chin, one hand on Will’s cock, murmured, “Open, love. Show him everything. Show me everything.”

Then he picked up the mop flogger and started to play.

Certain toys remind me of certain moments. We didn’t play with the mop flogger enough to write over the memories with a pleasing blur; I remembered the first time Truman had picked one up, of a significantly lower quality, and the first time he’d used it on my skin. I had used this one on Will, though he found it crossed over to *too much* faster than he liked (I wanted to warm him up more so he welcomed it, but it just wasn’t in circulation that much). I had once used it on our friend Red, who went deep into himself with a mop flogger. The only other person I knew who loved mop floggers that much was Nick.

And myself. I love almost anything that can eliminate my thoughts. It’s why I don’t drink very much. Oblivion is such a sweet temptation.

I gave over to the burning, trying to feel every lash, sucking Will without mercy or finesse. I wanted more. I wanted him inside me, I wanted Truman inside me, I wanted to feel my back peel open until it was raw nerves.

Will cried out, bucking, unable to stop me by any means other than pulling away, but I still had my arms and held him still.

“Fuck you, you’ll make me come—dammit—stop—”

I didn’t stop, but he also didn’t come, even though everything in him wanted to.

Finally, desperately, Will begged Truman, not me.

“You have to fuck him now, Tru, I can only come when you’re inside him and you have to fuck him right now or I’ll lose it—”

I could have gone longer with that bright smoldering flame on my back, but I didn’t complain when Truman pushed inside without stretching, without hesitating, using his body to

part mine.

I relaxed my throat to take Will in deeper, wanting it on both sides.

“Ohhh, you fucker, you fucking fucker, let me come, damn you—Tru—Tru, can I come yet? Please?”

“Not yet.”

Will’s groan vibrated his body and I swallowed a few times just to torture him, just to see how much lower his voice could go, how much longer he could make those sounds.

“You must have really missed Will,” Truman said, dragging his fingernails down my back.

I tensed my ass around his cock in answer and he leaned forward, giving me more pressure, more sensation, forcing me to brace harder or be pushed into Will.

“Be strong for me, love.”

A command I couldn’t ignore. I tightened my entire body and pulled off until I was only sucking the head of Will’s cock, much too hard.

“Oh you fucking—you fucking—”

Truman came down on my back and pounded me, moaning when I milked him, not holding back.

“Yes, oh fuck yeah, come on, fuck him, Truman! Oh shit, that’s so fucking hot, fuck him harder, do it harder!”

Truman’s breath hitched and he wrapped his arm around my neck, squeezing lightly.

“Jesus—Jesus—antimony, arsenic, aluminum, selenium—oh fuck—I’m gonna come—”

“Me too,” Truman murmured into my ear, just before he bit down.

I love this. I love this moment of suspension, this in-held breath between saying it and doing it, between acknowledging the orgasm and experiencing it. I love this moment of feeling each of them give way. Truman inevitably leads from the hips, his orgasm overtaking him as if he only just barely allows it to do so; Will comes from the center of his body, like invisible fingers of orgasm reach out from his spine, making him momentarily lose control of more than just cock or balls, but self.

I sucked each of them down, needing this connection, needing to know that they were within me, that I absorbed them, that my bodily appetite for them was sated, physically, literally. Permanently.

I kept Will in my mouth, not moving, and he trembled even after the waves of orgasm passed, but he didn’t pull away. Truman’s breaths steamed my skin until he kissed me. And laughed lightly into my ear.

“Was that what you wanted, love?”

Gently, so gently, I released Will, who sighed. “Yes. Thank you.”

“You’re welcome.”

I waited for him to ask. I waited for him to offer. Truman had held my orgasm in check for a

week; it is in his nature to raise the question of how I want to come, and where, and with whom. He said nothing.

Truman pulled out, ran a cloth over my ass, kissed me, kissed Will, and withdrew to take a shower.

Damn everything, this was not what I expected. I needed him to do what I expected. I needed everything to fit into my finely honed expectations, a week in the making, and the thing Truman should have done was this: torture me, make me wait, then focus on me until I could finally give way.

“You aren’t ready yet,” Will said. He reached out and drag his fingertips lightly over my back.

I closed my eyes.

“Trust him.”

“I do.”

Soft laughter. “You think you do. Come here.”

I wanted to defend myself, but instead I obeyed, letting Will hold me again. “We never do this.”

“You never let me.”

Was that true? Surely it wasn’t just me. “We have a dynamic. I assumed it satisfied you. That you didn’t need...variation.”

“Who’re you talking to? I’ve got nothing but variation.” He kissed my hair. “The shower was a nice touch, right? I wouldn’t have thought to do that, but it’s genius.”

“A nice touch in the sense that I find it unusually unsettling?”

“Yeah. That’s your domain, but don’t fucking mess with Tru, right?”

“Yes, Will. Do not mess with Truman.” I couldn’t make my mouth use the nickname.

Another kiss. “Accept, Hugh. Can you do that?”

“Of course.”

The shower shut off and I tensed.

“Oh man, you’re so used to knowing everyone’s move you can’t deal right now. That’s awesome.”

“I’m glad you’re enjoying it,” I said dryly.

“I am, yeah. Because I used to get off more on surprising you than on anything else. Every now and then I’d say something and you’d be surprised for half a second before you reacted.”

I lifted my head. “You don’t get off on that now?”

“Don’t need to. Tru surprises you way more than I do.”

“You do all right, Will.” His smile, Will’s smile as he leaned down to kiss me. I sometimes allow myself to forget that this boy single-handedly dismantled me once, with downcast eyes and an unending battle to find himself.

Will had always been brave. I am many things, but innate courage is not a quality burned

into my bones the way it is Will's.

The door to the bathroom opened. Truman stepped out, in a spill of steam and light. The candles flickered.

I wanted to speak. Ask a question. Anything. But I stilled myself and tried to accept.

"My men," he said, smiling. He'd dressed, of course. Gray pants, dark blue T-shirt.

"Get your ass over here, Tru. Man. Can you flog Hugh naked everyday? Because seriously."

"I'll keep your request on file."

We were on his side of the bed, so he moved to mine, neatly bookending me in between them.

"On your back, love," my husband said.

I have virtually no sense of physical modesty. Lucy has always teased me that I overcompensate with higher mental barriers, but the truth is that I consider this body itself a barrier. I built it out of a sense of overwhelming despair; now it is my shield.

Truman touched my shoulder, no pressure, and I followed directions, breathing slowly until the marks on my back quieted down. He leaned down to press his lips to mine. "Can you hold very still?" he whispered.

"Yes, yes, of course I can—"

"Shh." He kissed me again, my lips, my cheeks, my forehead. He kissed my eyelids and I left them closed.

Years of kissing him have taught me how his lips feel on my skin, how he moves, the paths he enjoys taking on my body. Truman can spend hours on my chest, kissing up to my shoulders, along my biceps. He maps me infrequently as if reassessing for changes in the landscape, but this was different. He covered me with touch as if he was my shield. And I let him.

"William."

The command was low and I didn't open my eyes.

Will moved in space, on the bed, and when I felt him, it was unexpected.

My toes. I shifted, but a hand grabbed my foot and held it still. Will, making a meal out of my arch, making a meal out of my discomfort. The words tripped over each other in my head and I couldn't help trying to pull away again.

"Be still," Truman said, pausing in his detailed examination of the crook of my elbow by lips and tongue.

"I—"

"Shh."

I swallowed.

Will kissed my ankle. "Accept, Mr Reynolds. Let us help."

*I don't need help, dammit.* But that would have been a hard argument to make; I was nearly undone by their touch, by their mastery over my responses. By their willingness to take me

where I did not want to go, perhaps more than anything else.

I wanted to hide my face in the sheets, or in their skin. I wanted a distraction.

Will nibbled each of my toes, making me twitch, struggling to stay still. He used his tongue between them, and the power play that might have turned me on—*worship my feet, embrace your degradation*—didn't exist. Accept, accept, accept the tongue nudging apart small toes that much preferred the presence of socks and shoes. Accept the equally unsettling sensation of Truman's lips closing over one thumb for all the world as if he was felling it.

"Please," I whispered.

Truman continued to my index finger; Will chewed his way from my arch to my heel, lifting my foot off the bed for access.

I had wanted to find this place through sensation on my terms: heat and fire and pain translating into the familiar hurricane-twist of intensity, strong enough to take me over. They'd given me a little taste of that, but now they were giving me this, sensation on their terms: heat and wet and the occasional brush of Truman's beard, the occasional nip of Will's teeth.

It overwhelmed me, drawing me into the places I wanted to transcend.

"Please," I tried again, keeping my eyes shut as if they were blindfolded, unable to see them, unable to add sight to touch. "It hurts, please don't, please stop..."

Truman moved, lifting his lips from my palm, and my heart jumped. *Yes, please, release me from this, please make it stop.*

"No," Will said. "He's still not there yet."

*Traitor. Traitor!* I started to shake my head, but Truman kissed me and I stilled.

"He's right. You taught him so well, love. I know it hurts, and I know you will survive it. You are not a fraud, Hugh."

I couldn't help tensing. "I can't—I don't want—"

"I know." He kissed me again. "I love you. Now be quiet. Will and I planned this all week."

They planned this all week? How could they possibly? I wanted to argue, I wanted them to argue. I wanted their voices, instead of this torturous tease of their skin on mine. I wanted to start a fight.

I wanted to hurt them both for daring to presume they could read me this well, that they could address the dark places I tried so hard not to show them. The two of them together probably couldn't hold me down if I wanted to get up. I was shorter, but stronger, and more accustomed to using my strength.

I breathed into the bed and didn't move. They resumed their separate activities.

The itchy feeling of needing to move should have eased off, but it built as they drew together at the center of my body, inevitably joining one another over my thighs, Will sneaking up to play with my naval.

I squirmed and he huffed a breath against damp skin, probably a withheld laugh.

“Turn over,” Truman said.

*No, no, no, you can't—I can't—I can't do it again—*

I turned over, finally able to bury my eyes.

This time their progress was unhindered by my interruptions. I caught flashes of acute sensation—Will's stubble in the hollow behind my knee, Truman's tongue tracing my vertebrae—but the buzz of presence grew, an invisible force field of energy encompassing all three of us.

My cock, unconvinced by vulnerability, decided that perhaps tonight would end in sex after all. By the time they descended on my ass with teeth and lips, it took everything in my power not to hump the sheets.

I couldn't tell who was rimming me and who was gently touching my balls, they'd changed sides so many times. But it had to be Will at my ass. He dove deeper, and I know the feel of Truman's beard on my skin.

Will at my ass, Truman's fingers tracing symbols of devotion into my thighs, sliding up against my stomach, avoiding my aching cock.

I shifted my legs wider, in invitation, and Will laughed against me.

“And he's back. Love you.”

They didn't need me to speak, so I remained silent. They moved me onto my side and since I didn't know what they intended, I tried to be malleable.

“Open your eyes,” Truman said, touching my jaw.

I opened my eyes and stared into his, into the warm hazel eyes I'd missed so desperately I'd pictured them as I lay in my tasteful hotel room, wishing I could conjure him to my bed.

Will pressed against my back, at least half-hard against me, rubbing himself into my crack.

“Your boy is incorrigible, Mr Reynolds.”

“Our boy,” I corrected.

“Yes. He is.” He kissed me. Will kissed the back of my neck. “You may come if you can let us welcome you home, Hugh. If you aren't ready to do that, you will wait until you are.”

“Fucking Truman, right?” Will nuzzled against me. “Always with the evil choices.”

It was a cruel trick, luring me into submission only to make me choose. But I understood why he did it. I didn't have a choice about how much they loved me; I only had a choice about how much I could accept.

And I wanted it all. Even though it hurt.

“Touch me,” I said.

“Is that what you want?”

He would want to suck me, Will would want to detach so he could watch us.

“I want this. I want to feel Will and you at the same time. I want to kiss you, Truman.”

The lines at his temple smoothed out and he leaned his forehead against mine. “Always. Forever. Let's not do seven days apart again, Hugh.”

“Agreed.”

“You guys are adorbs,” Will said, thrusting against me.

Truman hooked Will in one hand until he was reluctantly inside our moment. “We will make plans for Will later,” Truman said to me, looking at our boyfriend.

“Aw, c’mon, this is supposed to be psychoanalyze Hugh time!”

I turned my face toward Will’s. “I love you, too.”

“Shut up.”

Truman released him and reached for my cock.

“Oh fuck yeah. Yeah, yeah, yeah.” Will gnawed on my shoulder, but I couldn’t look down.

I kissed Truman, closing my eyes again, pressing my cheek into his, kissing whatever part of his skin my lips touched while he took me in hand and gave me exactly what I wanted, hard, fast, more his style than mine, but perfect for this moment. This was what I’d imagined, what I’d missed.

I came apart between them, unable to hold back, Will’s arm crossed over my chest, holding me so he could rut against my ass, Truman’s leg over both mine and Will’s, holding us together. It didn’t matter that I moaned into Truman’s mouth, or that I thrashed as his hand sped up; they kept me exactly where I needed to be.

\* \* \*

Hours later, candles mostly sputtered out, sheets changed, showers taken, I still lay between them.

Will drifted in and out of sleep, but Truman stayed awake with me, a silent vigil neither of us had acknowledged.

“Thank you,” I said, eventually, into the near-dark.

“There will never come a day when you can’t ask me for that, Hugh.”

I hate the tendency toward *always* and *never* and *forever*. Promises remind me that we never really know what’s around the next corner, no matter how clearly we think we see. We might break up. We might cheat on one another. We might fall out of love, or worse, one of us might fall out of love while the other does not.

One of us might die. There is no such thing as forever.

“There will never come a day as long as I live, Hugh, when you can’t ask me for that. No matter what else happens.”

I contemplated his words, his clarification. Still a promise, but also a nod to the things we couldn’t predict. I couldn’t say I believed it. I couldn’t thank him again.

I lifted his hand to my lips and held it there.

“Thank god Will was here. If I’d had to sleep alone for the last week, I would have lost my

mind. I don't know how you did it."

*I lost my mind. I lost myself.* "I love you," I mumbled against the back of his hand.

"I love you, too."

"Me too," Will said sleepily. "Love you both."

I reached for his hand as well. Low light, yes, but it was inescapable that I wanted to hold their hands. I turned my head, searching for Truman's eyes.

He kissed me and settled against my chest. "Goodnight, my loves."

"Night." Will's voice faded as he slipped back into sleep.

"Goodnight, my loves," I echoed, kissing Will's hand, then Truman's.

I try not to think about how much I can't live without them. It's terrifying and fills me with dread, a weight against all of my internal organs, an impossible pressure on my lungs. I can't live without the two of them, and I could lose them at any moment, through some fluke, through an accident, through the wrong cells doing the wrong things, taking love away from me again.

"Stop thinkin' so loud," Will complained, curling against my other side. "Tired. Sleep now."

I focused on them, on their scents, their familiar forms, the tickle of Truman's hair on my chest, the way Will inevitably threw his leg over one of mine, an inveterate cuddler.

Truman squeezed my hand. I knew he'd finally fallen asleep when his grip relaxed. I watched the last of the candles flicker out on my dresser and closed my eyes. They were safe. I was safe. We were home.

**Also by Kris Ripper**

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*Queers of La Vista*

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The Butch and the Beautiful  
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The Ghost in the Penthouse

Hold Fast

## **About the Author**

Kris Ripper lives in the great state of California and zir pronouns are ze/zir. Kris shares a converted garage with a kid, can do two pull-ups in a row, and can write backwards. (No, really.) Ze has been writing fiction since ze learned how to write, and boring zir stuffed animals with stories long before that.

Absence and Presence

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