

LOVE IS AN OPEN ROAD



Don't Read in the Closet 2015

THE GRAND PALACE

S. Allen

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Love is an Open Road

An M/M Romance series

THE GRAND PALACE

By S. Allen

Introduction

The story you are about to read celebrates love, sex and romance between men. It is a product of the *Love is an Open Road* promotion sponsored by the *Goodreads M/M Romance Group* and is published as a gift to you.

What Is Love is an Open Road?

The *Goodreads M/M Romance Group* invited members to choose a photo and pen a letter asking for a short M/M romance story inspired by the image; authors from the group were encouraged to select a letter and write an original tale. The result was an outpouring of creativity that shone a spotlight on the special bond between M/M romance writers and the people who love what these authors do.

A written description of the image that inspired this story is provided along with the original request letter. If you'd like to view the photo, please feel free to join the [Goodreads M/M Romance Group](#) and visit the discussion section: *Love is an Open Road*.

No matter if you are a long-time devotee to M/M Romance, just new to the genre or fall somewhere in between, you are in for a delicious treat.

Words of Caution

This story may contain sexually explicit content and is **intended for adult readers**. It may contain content that is disagreeable or distressing to some readers. The *M/M Romance Group* strongly recommends that each reader review the General Information section before each story for story tags as well as for content warnings.

Each year, a dedicated group of Volunteers from the M/M Romance Group work hard behind the scenes to bring these stories to you. Our Editors, Formatters, Proofreaders, and those working on Quality Assurance, spend many long hours over a course of several months so that each Event is a success. As

each and every author also gives freely of their time and talent, it was decided that all edits suggested may be accepted or rejected by the author at any given time. For this reason, some stories will appear to be more tightly edited than others, depending on the choice of the author.

This story is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places and incidents are the products of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously. Any resemblance to actual events, locales, or persons, living or dead, is entirely coincidental.

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Photo Description

The first picture is a headshot of a young man wearing eye makeup and a lip ring. His hair falls to his shoulders. His bangs are platinum blond and swoop to his cheekbones, and the rest of his hair is a dark brown. The second picture is a man from thighs up. He's wearing low-cut jeans and a shrug that exposes his extremely muscular chest and abs.

Story Letter

Dear Author,

MC 1 has just arrived at his second job as a waiter after a long day at his main job (your pick, maybe customer service, help desk). MC 2 is a customer entertaining a client, brother-in-law, someone he needs goodwill but no romantic interest.

Your task is to get them past passing waiter and anxious customer to lovers, HEA is great, HFN acceptable.

I like funny stories, sex is appreciated, NO tentacles or non-con!

Sincerely,

Averin

Story Info

Genre: contemporary

Tags: businessman, humorous, one night, piercings, reunited, server

Word Count: 8,468

THE GRAND PALACE

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Evan dreamt he was standing on a sandy beach, watching the sunset, while the waves lapped over his feet. He awoke to realize the warm tropical waters he'd been dreaming of was actually the stream of urine his roommate's cat was letting loose on his feet.

"Damn it, Sampson!" Evan yelled at the cat as it hissed back at him. Evan looked over at his alarm clock. Four a.m., that couldn't be right because the sun was already up. He checked his phone, and yup, it was almost eight. Evan jumped out of bed and ran into the bathroom he shared with three other housemates.

He knew there was no time for a shower, but he had to brush his teeth. He stepped over a girl passed out on the floor next to the toilet and figured he could pee once he got to the office. While Evan had slept the night away locked in his room, wearing earplugs, the rest of his housemates had thrown a party. They'd been out of college for almost a year, yet he was the only one who seemed to want to become a fully functioning member of society. The other three partied all night, slept the day away, and then called their parents for money.

Evan was going to be late to a job he hated but had taken because it was the only offer he got after graduation. His title was junior accountant or something close to that, but in reality, he was the office gofer.

Evan groaned, realizing there wasn't time to brush his teeth. He grabbed the mouthwash, rinsed his feet off in the sink, and rolled on fresh deodorant before throwing on clean clothes and running out the door to catch the bus. On his way out, he noticed Jeremy, roommate and owner of "peeing on everything" cat Sampson, was passed out on the couch, naked except for a soggy, used condom on his stomach.

Evan grabbed Jeremy's car keys, knowing that as the most responsible housemate he'd be doing the heavy-duty cleaning this weekend. The least Jeremy could do was lend Evan his car, right? Hopefully Jeremy's car wasn't a total mess.

Of course it was. Evan brushed potato chip crumbs off the driver's seat in an effort to arrive at work without oil stains across the back of his khakis.

Traffic wasn't bad, and Evan ran into the office only five minutes late and one minute before he heard his name being bellowed across the office. Evan straightened his tie, knowing it was a metaphoric leash, and walked into the executive's office.

"Yes, sir?" Evan asked instead of telling the man to go fuck himself.

"Ethan, my boy, come in." Mr. Stillson waved him in. It wasn't even nine a.m., and he already had sweat stains visible through his shirt. And really, "Ethan"? The man had remembered his name when beckoning him into his office but couldn't recall it once he made his appearance?

"Ernie, I have a very important job for you today." Mr. Stillson shoved an entire chocolate croissant into his mouth, not bothering to close it while he chewed. "After you proof Johnson's report, I need you to pick up some clients at the airport and take them to dinner before dropping them off at their hotel."

"Mr. Stillson, sir, I've got three reports due today. Isn't there anyone else that can pick them up?"

"Edgar, everyone else has much more important things to do. I've e-mailed you their flight itinerary and already made reservations for dinner. Don't be late." He picked up the phone and began listing off requests to his secretary, effectively dismissing Evan.

Evan turned and huffed out his frustration, knowing there was no way out of playing babysitter tonight. As he walked to his desk, he saw Mitch playing video games on his phone, Sylvia watching cat videos, and Jon actually sleeping under his desk. Yup, everyone was very busy doing jack shit, and he was responsible for getting those reports in today and chauffeuring clients.

Evan worked through lunch and hit a fast-food drive-through on his way to the airport. Traffic was a beast: start, stop, stop, start. They had finally made it up to twenty miles an hour when it came to a screeching halt. Evan slammed on the brakes, dropping his chili cheeseburger in his lap in order to grab the steering wheel with both hands. He drove onto the shoulder, preventing an automobile accident, but he couldn't stop the fast-food accident he was now wearing. A chili cheeseburger was apparently not the smartest menu item he could have ordered. He didn't bother with any attempts at rewrapping the burger and simply shoveled bites into his mouth directly from his lap.

Evan took the exit before the airport, hoping to find a strip mall where he could buy some clean clothes. He found nothing except for a gas station and a

pasture full of cows. Evan pulled into the gas station, his nose scrunching at the stench of cow shit. He eyed the gas station warily. He stared at the small building visible between the rusted fuel pumps, trying to decide whether it was a convenience store of sorts or a meth lab. The smell of cow dung would definitely mask the mixing of noxious chemicals. Deciding to believe that meth labs were most likely housed in dilapidated campers and not rundown gas station convenience stores, he gathered the courage to exit the car.

Evan braved the building. As he got closer, he was able to make out a sign that read “Grandma’s Cupboard” in unlit blue neon letters. Taped underneath was a handwritten cardboard sign saying to pay for gas inside. Next to the door stood a six-foot, faded cigar-store Indian. What exactly did “Grandma” sell out of her cupboard? A hundred years of antiquated ideals?

Evan sighed and walked up to the shop. He half expected to walk through a beaded curtain and be greeted by a gypsy. He wasn’t far off the mark. A bell chimed as he pushed open the door, startling an old woman who was flipping tarot cards at the counter.

“Looks like you had an accident.” She waved a card in Evan’s direction. “Good thing I’ve got a little bit of everything in here.” She walked over to the far corner. She mumbled to herself as she picked out a few items and brought them over to Evan.

“These should fit perfectly. Here, go try them on.” She pointed a gnarled finger to the “fitting room.” It looked like an old cardboard voting booth with a plastic shower curtain for a door.

“Thank you,” Evan began, “but do you have anything else I can try on too? You know, to see what fits best.” He didn’t want to seem ungrateful for her help or insult her fashion sense.

“Nope. This is it. Last stitch of clothing for sale.”

Evan glanced back to the corner where she had retrieved the polyester outfit currently in his hands and saw no other clothing there. Evan shook his head. Did he actually see her rummage through a rack of clothing and pick these out, or did she grab the only garments she had randomly hanging for sale? He conceded and walked into the voting booth, um, fitting room. The old woman was right. Each article of clothing fit like a glove. Too bad it was a hideous outfit.

“Thank you. What do I owe you?” Evan hadn’t thought to ask before trying on the fashion disaster. He inwardly winced, hoping she wouldn’t gouge him on the price since he didn’t have any other options.

“Twenty dollars and five more minutes of your time.” She pushed a key on the antique cash register, causing a bell to sound and the cash drawer to pop open. “Cash.”

Evan dug out a twenty-dollar bill from his wallet and handed it over. It was totally worth his time and money to be wearing chili-free clothes.

“Alright, split the deck.” The old woman had placed a stack of tarot cards in front of him. He did as he was told and watched her flip the cards over, laying them out in a T-shaped pattern.

“I had a feeling about you. Tonight you will meet a two-toned servant, and he will guide you to the dawn. Beware of fire raining down upon you. You will not like the consequences.” She quickly grabbed Evan’s hand and placed it on a taxidermy crocodile head. “Willy likes you. Wanna buy him, only forty dollars?”

“No thanks, ma’am. I have to get to the airport. Thanks again for the clothes and the, um, reading.” He dashed toward the door and out of the bizarre world of “Grandma’s Cupboard.”

Evan pulled into the short-term parking lot at the airport. He was feeling lucky, as he found a spot right next to the walkway and noticed that the fast-food smell had dissipated significantly from the car. He quickly shoved all of Jeremy’s mess into the trunk and declared it clean enough. His boss was lucky that Evan had driven today. Otherwise, he’d be taking the clients to dinner on the bus, cheap bastards.

The airport was crowded with hurried people, who thought they were more important than the man next to them. Evan checked the flight board and saw that the clients’ flight was half an hour delayed. He found a seat in baggage claim and pulled out his phone to play a game while he waited. As soon as he had the app open, the phone started to vibrate. Of course, it was his mom. She had a sixth sense about when Evan had any free time, and if he didn’t answer, she’d just keep calling.

“Hi, Mom.”

“Darling, how are you? Working hard? I know it’s not after five yet, but I just knew I’d catch you right now.”

“I’m at the airport, waiting to chauffeur some very important clients to dinner.”

“That’s nice. So, I was calling because I made dinner reservations for this Friday with the McNeils. Their daughter, Cecile, just graduated from college and is home visiting. You two would make such a perfect couple.”

“Mom, we’ve been over this before. I’m gay. When I bring someone home for you to meet, it will be a man, complete with a penis.” Evan had finally come out his junior year in college, even though he’d always known he was gay.

“Evan, you really need to move on from this phase. You’ve been out of college for a year and need to work on building a family. You need a well-educated woman with the right career path. Cecile wants to be a lawyer, so you two could have a December wedding, and she can carry my grandbabies while she finishes up school, and then they’ll be old enough for daycare once she’s ready to join the right law firm.”

Evan sighed and let his mother rattle on about his future needs. He had played the part of the picture-perfect son since high school. He played football, dated the cheerleader, and maintained good grades. He was accepted into the college of his parents’ choosing, joined his father’s old fraternity, and continued to date women. It wasn’t until he’d almost drunk himself into an early grave that he faced reality. No one looked past the pretty frat boy, who always wore a fake smile to match his fake girlfriend. No one saw that he was dying on the inside, slowly losing all hope for any happiness. So, he moved out of the fraternity house, cleaned up his act, and came out. His parents were disappointed but chalked the entire thing up to him simply rebelling. He’d been their walking, talking drone for the last twenty years of his life with the exception of a stolen summer no one knew about, so they allowed him the last two years of college to live off campus and stop dating women.

“Evan, darling? Are you still there?” His mother’s shrill voice brought him back to the conversation.

“Yes, mother. I’ll see you Friday night.” There was no point in fighting. He hung up without a good-bye and tried to shake off the self-disgust that talking to his mother always brought on.

Evan stood and held up a printed sign to signal Mr. Yasui and group to him as people began to swarm around the luggage carousel. Ten minutes later, three small men approached Evan and bowed in greeting. Evan bowed awkwardly in return.

“I’m Evan. I’ll be taking you to dinner downtown and then to your hotel.”

“No. We eat at hotel,” Mr. Yasui spoke. Oddly enough, he was wearing a nametag. Mr. Kita and Mr. Matsuo accompanied him.

Evan cocked his head slightly, unsure what to say. “Can I ask why are you wearing nametags?”

“Bob give,” Mr. Kita answered. “He leave.”

Evan was getting more confused by the minute. Finally, after several minutes of silence, Mr. Yasui handed Evan a folded piece of paper. It read:

My wife has gone into labor early, and I was unable to find another interpreter for tonight, but someone will be there tomorrow. Please take them to the Grand Palace Hotel and make sure they check in. Afterward, escort them to their room and they will be fine. —Bob

Evan dragged his hand down his face. Mr. Stillson had left the company credit card number at the restaurant he’d chosen, complete with a limited spending amount. How could he convey this to Mr. Yasui? Fuck it. Evan fanned his fingers out and ran his thumb across the digits several times while shaking his head. That had to be universal sign for money, right?

Mr. Yasui laughed and pulled out a shiny, black Amex card. He nodded his head and stretched his arm forward, signaling for them to get on with it. Evan turned and began leading the way to Jeremy’s car. He stacked their luggage in the front seat, since the trunk was full of Jeremy’s garbage, and held the backdoor open for them to scoot in. Evan turned the radio up as he drove back into the city.

Casey showed up to his dinner shift at the Great Hall fifteen minutes early. He shoved his bag into his locker and tied the long, starched apron around his thin waist. He touched up his eyeliner before leaving the employee lounge, and headed into the main dining room.

Casey half listened to the shift meeting, pocketing the card with the night’s specials before heading to the bar for a quick espresso. Dom, short for Dominique, was bartending and winked at Casey as he approached.

“New do?” She asked, as she slid the black, porcelain espresso cup toward him.

“Trying it out.” Casey had bleached out the front third of his already light-blond hair. The platinum bangs swooped across his forehead and fell artfully to his cheekbones. The rest of his hair was a rich, dark chocolate and hung just past his collar.

“You totally look like a bad-boy rock star.”

“What do you mean look like? I am absolutely a star.” Casey blew a kiss to Dom.

“Are you kidding... check out the blind hottie, who was just seated in your section.”

“What?” Casey turned to watch three Asian businessmen being seated at table thirty-four, which was in his section.

“There’s another guy with them, see.” Dom nodded her head as a young man wearing a most unfortunate suit sat at the table. “Any man wearing that suit must be blind.”

Casey gasped as the man turned his head. “He’s not blind.”

“But you think he’s cute too.” Dom had inaccurately interpreted his surprise. “Well, he’s got to be straight to be wearing that pink mess. I might have to follow him into the men’s room later on and help him out of it.”

“You are a dirty girl.” Casey chuckled.

“They don’t call me Dom for nothing. I bet I can get his number and cop a feel before he leaves the restaurant.”

“Are you talking about the guy in the polyester suit at table thirty-four?” Ashley joined their conversation. “He’s cute. And check out those muscles. Even his shirt knows it’s a crime to cover up all that yummy man meat.”

“Man meat? Are you talking about penises?” Charlotte asked as she loaded her tray with margaritas. She was in her fifties and everyone’s work mom, and to hear her say “penis” was disturbing.

“No. Look, table thirty-four,” Ashley answered. The subject of their conversation was wearing a cream-colored paisley shirt that only buttoned halfway up his breastbone. The exaggerated collar only drew more attention to the skin on display.

“My prom date wore almost the exact same suit. A real man knows how to wear salmon. Let me tell you, after the dance Burt and I sure rocked his dad’s Oldsmobile.”

“Really, Charlotte?” Dom wrinkled her nose.

“Bye, kids. I must go forth and do my job,” Casey spoke with false bravado. He walked to the server station to center himself before greeting table thirty-four. He knew Mister Fashion Disaster from ten years ago, but would he recognize Casey?

Evan was able to get them checked in and up to the Great Hall, only being asked “Where’s the disco?” once and getting pinched on the ass twice. At the airport, he’d gotten a few catcalls and whistles but no comments or unwanted touches. The suit really did fit amazingly. It showed off his muscled thighs, round butt, and wide chest. It rocked as a sexy Halloween costume but missed the mark for business apparel.

When they were greeted at the hostess stand, he tried to signal a table for three, but Mr. Yasui grabbed hold of his forearm and held up four fingers to the hostess. The young woman laughed and led them to a table set for four. Evan obediently followed, taking in the amazing view. The Great Hall restaurant dominated the top floor of the Grand Palace Hotel. The walls were mostly windows, showcasing the beautiful city below. The chairs were plush with high backs, providing false privacy. Evan shook out the linen fanned across his plate and draped it across his lap. He opened the leather-bound menu and waited for their server to get this party started.

“Hello, my name is Casey and I’ll be taking care of you this evening. May I start you gentlemen off with a bottle of wine or perhaps a martini?” Casey spoke on autopilot.

Evan’s head whipped up at the musical voice of “Casey.” It sounded so much like his Casey, but there was no way. His Casey had disappeared from his life ten years ago. Yet, looking at this beautiful man talking about drinks stole Evan’s breath away. Those blue eyes, outlined in black and highlighted with silver, he knew those eyes. He tried to subtly catch Casey’s attention to see if there was any recognition on his part. Evan vaguely heard Mr. Yasui ordering for everyone, pointing to what he wanted and affirming when Casey repeated his order. In the blink of an eye, a tumbler of scotch with two ice cubes was in his hand, and their first course of calamari and oysters was being delivered.

Evan threw back the scotch and coughed because of his foolish action. Mr. Kita thumped him roughly on the back and scolded him for wasting such a fine

scotch. He waved toward Casey and pointed to Evan's empty glass, signaling for another. "Try again, slow."

Evan smiled and nodded. Mr. Kita gave a cheesy thumbs-up and smiled back. Evan was oblivious to any conversation going on around him until he heard his boss's name. "Mr. Stillson? He's my boss and cheap." That second scotch had warmed Evan's veins and loosened his tongue.

"Yes. No business." Mr. Yasui nodded his head in agreement.

Evan laughed and slapped his hand down on top of the table, rattling their silverware. He could just picture Mr. Stillson all red in the face, huffing and puffing out his displeasure. "Then why come here?"

It was Mr. Yasui's turn to belly laugh. "To see red face in person and party!" He puffed his cheeks out and widened his eyes to make his point.

Evan laughed until he snorted. He'd walked by the conference room on occasion and noticed they often did video chats with clients instead of just phone calls. The big bosses said it was more personal; Evan thought it was a way to brag and intimidate. *Look at our nice conference room with our leather chairs and expensive art; see our imported water. Yeah, that's right, we know better, so just nod your head like a good little client.*

Wine was being poured and plates cleared as their entrees were being brought out. Evan watched Casey, hoping to see some hint that he recognized him. He seemed completely unaffected by Evan's presence, and it made Evan grind his molars together in frustration. Evan finally made his move when some artsy chocolate dessert was placed in front of him. He grabbed Casey's arm, pulling him close and said softly, "Casey, I still don't like chocolate."

Evan heard Casey's breath hitch. It was enough; enough to confirm his Casey remembered him too. He dropped his hold on Casey's arm and let him take the plate away. Evan pushed his chair back from the table, needing to find the bathroom. He looked around, not finding a sign, and decided to just ask the bartender. The bartender pointed him in the right direction and then winked at him. It was kind of creepy and gave Evan the chills. Her black hair fell to her chin, and she wore super short bangs. Her eyes were heavily lined in black makeup, which contrasted with her bright-red lips. She was big and intimidating like a warrior princess or professional wrestler.

Evan was washing his hands when Xena walked into the men's room. He watched her confidently walk up behind him and whisper in his ear, "I'm off in an hour."

Evan was paralyzed by shock. He felt dwarfed by her body crowding him, which was impressive because he stood at over six feet and worked hard to maintain his current muscle mass. Yet, there she was, looking like she was getting ready to devour his soul. When her hand snaked to the front of his pants and squeezed, he jumped away, squealing like a damsel in distress. He felt as though some stranger was trying to pick the lock to his chastity belt, which of course was ridiculous.

“Did I come on too strong?” She looked at him coyly. “You look like a big boy, big enough to handle me.” She snarled and snapped her teeth as she stalked toward him.

It was not sexy. It was terrifying, so Evan fled the men’s room like the scared little boy he was. Mr. Kita patted Evan’s arm when he got back to the table and then pointed to the bar. “You lucky?”

“Did I get lucky? You mean with her, no!” Evan shuddered.

“I like.” Mr. Kita raised his eyebrows several times to emphasize his interest.

“By all means, she’s all yours.” Evan could just picture Mr. Kita in tight-whities, jumping on her back and riding her around like a horse or something.

Evan was getting ready to ask Mr. Yasui if they could leave since dinner was finished. Evan was desperate for the day to be over. Casey walked up to the table with a black check presenter in hand. Evan’s relief was short lived when Mr. Yasui shook his head and pointed to something on the drink menu. A few minutes later, Casey was back with a chilled bottle of cinnamon-flavored whiskey and four shot glasses.

Suddenly the old woman’s words drifted into Evan’s head as he watched the Fireball being poured out. “*Beware of fire...*”

“No!” Evan shouted and stood up. It was then he realized they were the last patrons in the establishment.

Mr. Yasui, Mr. Kita, and Mr. Matsuo stood up with him, glasses in hand, and shouted, “Yes!”

Evan groaned in defeat and then picked up his glass and knocked the liquor back. The three men with him followed suit. Before he knew it, the remaining staff was seated around the table, finishing off the bottle. A few guys from the kitchen had joined the table, bringing out some leftover food to snack on. Mr.

Yasui had the hostess sitting in his lap, giggling, and she sure as shit did not look old enough to be shooting back whiskey.

Evan stood up to leave. He had to have fulfilled his job requirement of traveling and dining with the clients. As he turned to look for Casey, Mr. Matsuo jumped on top of the table. It was definitely his cue to leave. He could just picture some authoritative figure interrupting this impromptu party and him having to explain, or worse, having to tell to his boss why the clients got arrested.

“Casey!” Evan spotted him entering the employees only area. He managed to get to the door before it slammed shut. He slipped in, seeing Casey tucking his stuff into a locker. “Hey, you know who I am.”

“Evan.” Casey’s back was stiff as he answered, still facing away from him. “I didn’t think I’d ever see you again.”

Evan wanted answers but first he had to know. “Are you seeing anyone right now?”

Casey turned toward him and shook his head. Evan strode quickly to him and kissed him. He wrapped his arms around Casey’s shoulders possessively and devoured his mouth. He felt Casey’s fingers digging into his waist, not pushing him away but pulling him closer. Evan licked the round ring pierced though Casey’s lower lip before lightly tugging on it with his teeth.

“I like this.” Evan nipped at the ring one more time.

“You got big.” Casey’s hands roamed up Evan’s wide back, across his rounded shoulders, and down Evan’s expansive chest.

“A lot has changed in ten years.” Evan nipped at Casey’s earlobe, pulling it into his mouth as he ground his erection against Casey’s. If only they were naked. Evan was quick to remedy that problem and pulled Casey’s crisp, white shirt from his slacks.

“Not here.” Casey moaned. He grabbed Evan’s hands, preventing them from successfully unbuckling his belt, and leaned his head back against the lockers while trying to catch his breath.

“Only you could make me lose my mind enough to make out at work.” Casey chuckled. “What are you doing here?”

“Being miserable without you.” Evan had no idea how true that statement was until it left his lips unconsciously. He had followed everyone’s directions

on how to become an adult: finish high school, go to college, get a job. But was being unhappy a requirement for adulthood?

“Whatever.” Casey feigned indifference, but his eyes warmed at the comment. He had truly missed Evan as well. He took Evan’s hand and laced their fingers together. “Let’s get out of here.”

Casey was in shock as he directed Evan to his home. They left downtown and wove their way to a quaint neighborhood. Most of the houses lining the main street had been converted into small businesses. Casey lived above a coffee shop. He instructed Evan to park in the alley behind the building and led him up a flight of stairs.

Casey’s mind was a mess of questions, but his body couldn’t deny his attraction to Evan. His hand shook slightly as he unlocked the door. He couldn’t take his eyes off of Evan as he entered his home. Evan had grown from a gangly boy into an impressive man. Despite his emotions being in turmoil, his body burned to be touched. Evan read him perfectly as he shoved his body against the door, slamming it shut and claiming his mouth.

“Damn, this ring is hot. Do you have any other surprises for me?” Evan smiled mischievously as he pressed his body against Casey’s. Casey couldn’t remember Evan ever being this forward as a lover, but that was a long time ago. They’d had the summer before high school to explore their budding sexuality and the emotions that went with it.

“You’ll have to find out,” Casey said on a breathless moan. Evan was the only man ever to make Casey mindless with need. Evan had both their pants open in the blink of an eye, and his hand wrapped around both their hard pricks. Casey dropped his head to Evan’s shoulder as Evan slowly rubbed his thumb across their leaking slits, dragging the sticky precum down their shafts.

“Ruled out a Prince Albert,” Evan said before sucking on Casey’s earlobe. Everything about this man turned him on. As much as he wanted to talk to Casey, he had to take the edge off first.

Casey was on the same wavelength as he licked his palm and wound his fingers with Evan’s. Together they worked themselves to a quick climax.

Casey’s heart fluttered as Evan gently kissed him. Evan cupped his face with his clean hand and rubbed his thumb softly across Casey’s cheekbone. “You are gorgeous. I love the eyeliner. It makes your eyes look stormy.”

Casey blushed at the compliment. “Now that we got that out of the way, let’s clean up and talk.”

Casey tried to take a step toward the bathroom, but tripped over his pants still pooled around his ankles. Evan tried to grab him before he hit the floor, but he only managed to wipe his cum-covered hand on the sleeve of Casey’s shirt.

“Thanks for the effort, but gross.” Casey laughed. He sat his bare butt on the hardwood floor, so he could untie his shoes and get rid of his pants. His shirt was half-unbuttoned, and there were cum streaks everywhere, even on his tie. He looked over at Evan, expecting to see him as rumpled he was, but nope. Evan’s pants were only down to his thighs, exposing his spent cock. Otherwise, Evan was still completely dressed. “I can’t believe that one, you’re still completely dressed, and two, how are you clean? Is it the polyester or the pink that repels stains?”

“Don’t laugh at my suit.”

“Please tell me you normally have better fashion sense, and this is not a prime example of how you usually dress?”

“You have no idea. But I won’t voice any dislike of this outfit because the woman who sold it to me will probably hear it and curse me or something.” Evan laughed, remembering the old woman leaning on Willie’s scaled head.

“What?” Casey asked as he balled up his work pants and headed toward the bathroom.

“Trust me, you don’t want to know.” Evan’s voice trailed behind him. After they washed up, Casey grabbed some sweats and a striped tank top for himself.

“Do you want something else to wear? It’ll probably be too small on you, but at least it’s made out of cotton. Really, do you eat small children sprinkled with steroids for breakfast or what?”

“No. I prefer eating leprechauns. Much higher in protein,” Evan joked and took the offered sweats and T-shirt.

“You must have terrible luck. You’re supposed to catch them, and then they have to grant you a wish in exchange for their freedom, but instead you eat them.” Casey shook his head while smiling.

“Don’t you know they’re tricky little bastards? Leprechauns are a morality tale, warning of greed and the follies of get-rich schemes.”

“You don’t say? Well, I learn something new every day. Guess I’ll have to feed the one I caught yesterday to my cat in order to avoid any trickery. And to think, I was going to wish for a magic bean.” Casey rubbed his chin in exaggerated thought.

“Enough with the fairy tales.” Evan grabbed Casey’s hand and hauled his smaller frame into his lap. “Now, I want to learn about you.”

Casey couldn’t help the giggles that escaped as Evan nuzzled his neck. “Stop that. I’m still just as ticklish.”

“I have missed you so much,” Evan said seriously. “What happened to you?”

“After my parents died, I moved to the smallest shit town in Iowa to live with my grandmother. She wasn’t bad, but she lived like it was the early nineteen hundreds. It was awful. She hated technology, except for the toaster oven, of course.”

“Of course.”

“My high school graduation class was a total of fifty kids. I moved out as soon as I could. I went to San Francisco and started taking my music pretty seriously.”

“I remember you playing a lot for me that summer. You were really good.”

“Thanks. I got together with a couple of other guys, and we recorded a few albums and did some touring.”

“That’s great. I wonder if I’ve heard any of your music? What’s your band name?” Evan asked excitedly. “Are you still playing?”

“We were called the Dick Monkeys. They’re still playing, but I quit.”

“Dick Monkeys.” Evan chuckled to himself like a little kid saying “fart” at the dinner table. “Why’d you quit?”

“I love playing music, but I can’t stand the lifestyle. Don’t get me wrong, it was fun and exhilarating, but there wasn’t any room for stability or future plans. We played gig to gig, not making enough money to eat, and then the locals starting picking up on us, and then we spent a year touring. After two years, I realized this was not the life I wanted to live. I was ready to grow up. I was tired of feeling hungover all of the time and not knowing what was going to happen from day to day. I wanted a home.”

Evan rubbed his hand down Casey's arm to his fingers. "So rock-star life wasn't all it's cracked up to be?"

"Hardly. It's grungy and dirty. It chews people up and spits them out. I lost two band members to severe drug addictions, saw countless relationships end and obsessed groupies willing to do anything. I just wanted to play my music, but I got caught up in the whirlwind. I woke up one day and quit. I packed up and came home. I looked you up once I got settled."

Evan was startled and squeezed Casey's hand tightly. "Why didn't you come to me?"

"You looked happy. I saw you were in college and part of a fraternity. I almost approached you one afternoon, but you were with your girlfriend." Casey looked away, not wanting Evan to see the jealousy hot in his eyes.

"I was playing a part. I was so unhappy." Evan gently took hold of Casey's chin, tilting his head and kissing him. "I was missing you. After you left, I thought about coming out to my parents. But I had no reason to. It's not like I had my eyes on any other boy, only you. Time passed and I began to lose who I was. I did what was expected of me and what came easy. I spent a lot of time at the gym, working out my frustrations."

Casey laughed. "You must have been very frustrated."

"Yeah. It was like the one thing I had complete control over, my body. I watched what I ate and worked out and watched myself grow."

"Are you out now? Please tell me you don't have a girlfriend."

"No girlfriend or boyfriend for that matter. I came out to my parents a few years ago, much to their dismay. Just this afternoon, I got a call from my mother. She informed me of dinner plans where I'm supposed to meet yet another fertile young woman. I swear I feel like I'm sitting on an auctioneer's block while she parades women by, waiting for one of them to bid on me. Luckily, I can be a ripe asshole when I need to be."

"Fertile? She wants grandkids," Casey said thoughtfully. "Hasn't she ever heard of adoption?"

"She doesn't get it." Evan pinched his index finger and thumb together and extended his pinky.

"What are you doing?" Casey mimicked Evan's hand configuration.

"Pretending to hold a tiny teacup like my mother does."

“Why?”

“It helps me get into character, duh.” Evan cleared his throat and took a pretend sip from his imaginary tiny teacup before talking in a haughty, high-pitched voice. “Evan, darling. If a lady’s vagina is too loose, you can use her anus just like any man’s. I don’t understand what the fuss is. You only have to get her pregnant once and then use whatever orifice you want for your own pleasure.”

Casey slapped Evan’s chest, laughing hysterically. “Your mother did not say that.”

“She did. Thankfully, it was over the phone, but still.”

“You should call her and say you’ve taken her advice seriously. Tell her you bought several female hookers to try out the ‘other orifices’ she recommended, but unfortunately, you think one of the women had crabs.”

“I could shave my pubes and make them into ‘crab cakes’ as a thank you for a keeping-me-straight dinner.”

“That’s disgusting, but I like it. Does your mom like seafood?”

“She loves clams.”

“Does she like digging for clams?” Casey couldn’t hold back his snicker.

Evan dug his fingers into Casey’s sides, tickling him. Casey howled with laughter, trying to escape from Evan’s grip. Evan’s hand slid under Casey’s tank top and up his rib cage. His thumbs rubbed across Casey’s nipples, halting his laughter. Each one was pierced, and Evan’s eyes widened at the find

“What do we have here?” Evan raised one eyebrow as his thumbs worked Casey’s nipples into tight little peaks. “Do the barbells make them more sensitive?”

Casey released a small moan and nodded. Evan pulled Casey’s tank off, and Casey swung his leg over to straddle Evan’s lap. Their lips collided passionately. Evan wrapped his arms tightly around Casey and rocked his hips up, grinding his erection against Casey. Casey moaned into Evan’s mouth as Evan’s tongue invaded.

“Next your tongue. I want to play with a barbell right here.” Evan emphasized his point as his tongue twisted and licked across Casey’s. Evan scooted to the edge of the couch and stood up, easily carrying Casey’s weight.

Casey locked his ankles together behind Evan's back for the short trip to his bedroom. He continued to kiss and suck at Evan's neck until Evan unceremoniously dropped him onto the bed.

"Yeah!" Casey grunted as he hit the mattress.

"You know this whole thing," Evan said as he waved his finger between the two of them, "will be a whole lot more successful without any clothes."

Casey's mouth formed an O as Evan got naked in front of him. He was like a Greek statue, miles and miles of smooth muscle. Evan turned in a leisurely circle, showing off as Casey's eyes slowly traversed Evan's body.

"I can feel your eyes violating me." Evan laughed as he sidestepped Casey's reaching hand. "No touching until you are naked too."

Casey huffed and threw a pillow at Evan. Then he pulled his sweats and briefs down and sat at the edge of the bed with his legs crossed. He leaned back and raised one eyebrow before slowly lifting one knee and planting his foot on the mattress. He repeated the action with his other leg, leaving himself completely exposed.

Evan put his hands on Casey's bent knees. "You look delectable."

"Take your time." Casey smirked and dragged his fingers up and down his smooth chest. Evan followed the motion. His mouth went dry as he got a good look at the shiny barbell in each nipple. His eyes watched as Casey drew circles around the jewelry and then headed back down toward his hard arousal.

His cock was surrounded by neatly trimmed dark-blond hair. Casey stroked one finger down the dark-pink length before taking hold of his balls. He raised his knees toward his chest and waited for Evan's reaction.

Evan made a choking sound when he saw the small ring embedded between Casey's scrotum and anus. He got on his knees and stared at the treasure he'd uncovered. "Fuck, Casey. This is so fucking hot."

"Thought you'd like it." It was a pleasant surprise to learn how arousing Evan found his piercings. Getting his tongue pierced was definitely next on his list. Suddenly, he felt Evan lick the entire length of his perineum. Casey lost all brainpower as Evan devoured him.

Evan sucked at the ring, using his spittle to rub open Casey's ass. He loved hearing Casey moan and beg for more. Evan looked up and spotted a bottle of lube and a condom lying on the bed. He smiled and locked eyes with Casey. "You little slut. Think you're gonna get lucky tonight?"

“Stop being a tease and fuck me already,” Casey demanded with amusement heavy in his voice. “You want to as much as I do.”

“Maybe,” Evan joked as he rolled the condom on and lubed up. He knew he wouldn’t last long. He was so turned on by Casey. He lined up the head of his dick to Casey’s stretched opening and nudged in. He slowly inched forward, his eyes falling shut with the intensity of entering Casey’s tight body.

“Casey,” Evan whispered. He leaned down and captured Casey’s lips in a possessive kiss before pulling back and slamming into him. He built up a rhythm that had them close to climaxing. It was Casey who fell over the edge first, shouting out Evan’s name as he squirted his release between them. Evan’s body went rigid as he filled the condom and then collapsed on top of Casey with a grunt.

“Get off.” Casey pushed at Evan’s muscled body. “I can’t breathe.”

“No can do. You’re just going to have to suffer until my brain can come back online and tell my body to move.” Evan huffed. He rolled to his side and kissed Casey’s shoulder. “I’m so glad I found you tonight.”

“Me too.” Casey grabbed Evan’s discarded T-shirt and cleaned them up before snuggling up against Evan. He was exhausted, but the excitement of being with Evan kept him awake.

“So, what are you doing now that you’re not playing music anymore?” Evan felt a tad guilty for not putting more effort into their conversation before attacking him, but Casey was too tempting.

“I still play, just locally and on my own terms. I love music.”

“Why don’t you become a music teacher or something? I wanted to be a math teacher,” Evan confessed.

“What do you do now?”

“I’m a junior accountant or something. I really have no idea what my title actually is, but I do a little bit of everything at the office. I really hate it.”

“Then quit.”

“And do what?”

“Whatever for money and then go back to school for your teaching credentials or anything. Life is meant to be lived happy.”

“I haven’t been happy in a really long time. What are you doing to be happy? You can’t honestly tell me serving is your life’s passion.” Evan

fingering Casey's platinum bangs, brushing them forward and away from the darker strands.

Casey pushed all the hair now in his face back. Evan repeated the motion, gently stroking Casey's head. "That feels nice," Casey murmured. "I'm working on building my own Grand Palace. I work as a barista at the coffee shop on the lower level of this house, take classes online, and serve at night. I'm saving up to buy this place. I want to own the coffee shop and host music and poetry reading and all sorts of other artsy shit. I'm doing something I'm proud of."

"I don't have a purpose or direction. I work out, but I don't want to be a trainer or anything like that. I don't want social status like my mom. I don't need a fancy job title like my dad." Evan closed his eyes and breathed in Casey's scent. He could smell the restaurant and the sandalwood of Casey's hair products and underneath, he smelled like sunshine, just like he did ten years ago. "I want to be loved."

"Baby, you have to love yourself first." Casey drew figure eights on Evan's chest with his finger. "It sounds cheesy, but it's true."

"What's happening tonight? Are you eventually going to tell me to leave and then what?" Evan knew Casey was worth changing his life for. But if he wasn't going to be around, then Evan could take his time figuring out how to turn his future into a happy one. He already knew he needed a new place to live, by himself.

"What do you want, Evan?" Casey lifted his head and looked expectantly at him.

"I want you. I want to help you build your Grand Palace, and I want to be a teacher, damn it." Evan's smile matched Casey's. Casey nodded, leaned up, and rubbed his lip ring along the seam of Evan's lips. Evan quickly snatched the hoop into his mouth, sucking on Casey's bottom lip before releasing it and kissing Casey with a silent promise of the future.

They kissed and talked for hours. Evan had never been happier than he was with Casey wrapped in his arms. His eyes were heavy with sleep, but he didn't want to miss another moment with Casey. It was silly, but holding his lover was still new and too precious to take for granted.

"Fuck, Casey. The sun is rising. What time do you need to be downstairs?" Evan yawned.

“I’m off this morning. How about you?” Casey sat up facing the window.

“I’m calling in sick. After yesterday, I deserve the day off. Besides, I need to start making plans. Maybe I don’t quit my stupid job yet, but I look into what I need to do to get out of it and start something new.” Evan scooted up behind Casey and pulled the blanket around them to comfortably watch the dawn of a new day. He kissed Casey’s shoulder. “Good morning, Casey. You are my sunshine and my heart.”

The End

Author Bio

I want everyone to fall in love and have a happy ending. I've gone to school for many years and have the certificates/diplomas to prove it. Unfortunately, my editing still sucks. Oh well, there are lots of stories that need to be written, and I'm not afraid to do it. BTW, my cats say hello and thanks for reading.

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