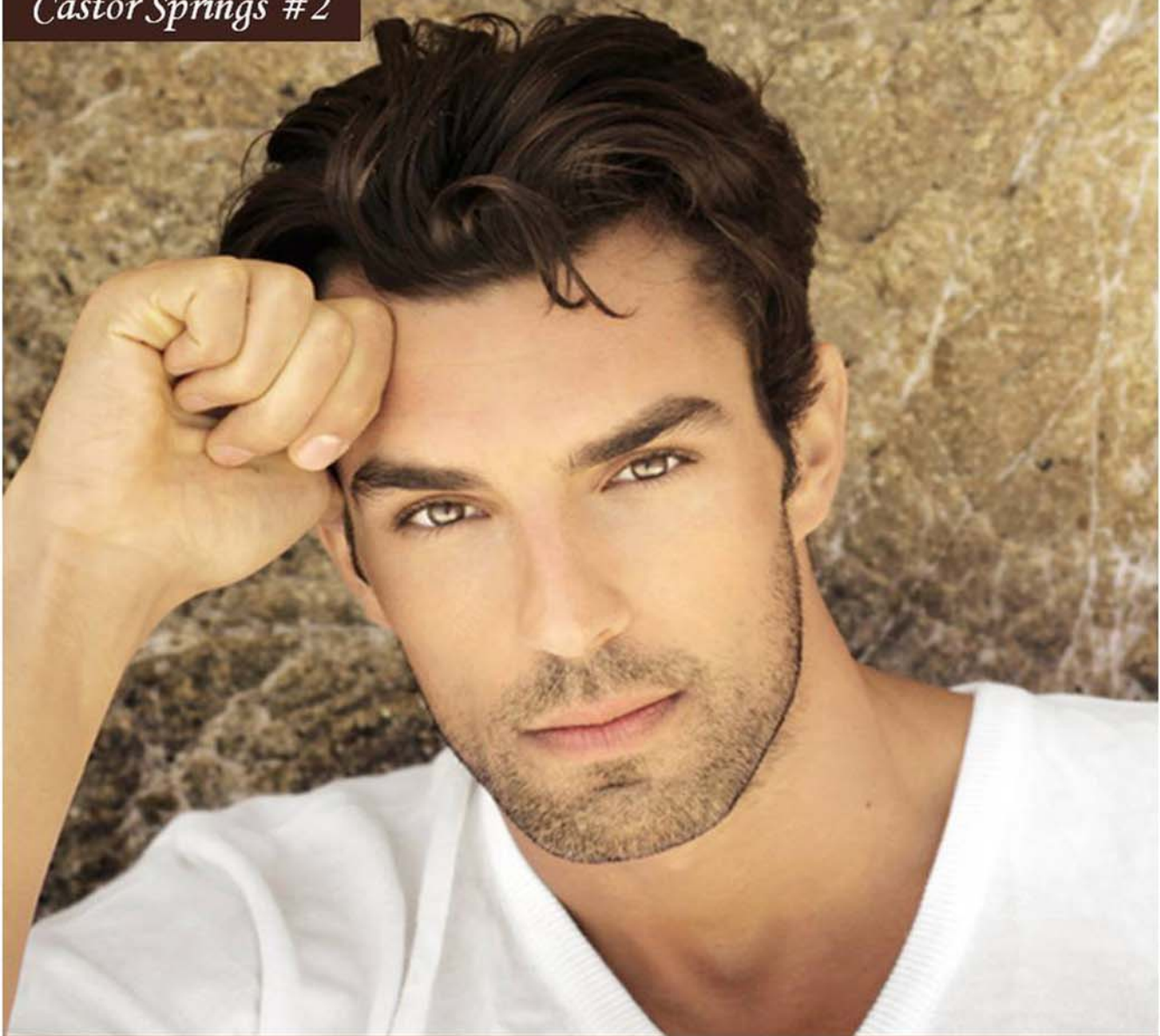


*Castor Springs #2*



# *Midnight Muffins*



*Erica Pike*

# **MIDNIGHT MUFFINS**

## **(Castor Springs #2)**

Texan carpenter and hobby farmer Liam is in a pickle. He wants his boyfriend of one month to stay in Castor Springs, but is afraid to suggest it due to Kevin's dislike of the tiny town. The culinary genius Kevin has been the prince of Liam's fantasies since childhood and Liam's not willing to see him go.

What makes things difficult is the massive lion in their path: The two couldn't be any more different. Kevin is a social butterfly while Liam is more like a common clothes moth whose idea of a perfect evening is to stay at home and eat Kevin's gourmet food.

When Kevin accuses Liam of being in the closet, even though everyone in town knows he's gay, Liam will have to face his anxieties in the hope that Kevin will want to grow old in Castor Springs.

# Love Has No Boundaries

*An M/M Romance series*

## MIDNIGHT MUFFINS (Caster Springs #2)

**By Erica Pike**

### Introduction

The story you are about to read celebrates love, sex and romance between men. It is a product of the *Love Has No Boundaries* promotion sponsored by the *Goodreads M/M Romance Group* and is published as a free gift to you.

### What Is Love Has No Boundaries?

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 they 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 Has No Boundaries*.

Whether you are an avid M/M romance reader or new to the genre, 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.

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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# MIDNIGHT MUFFINS

(Caster Springs #2)

By Erica Pike

## Photo Description

A close up of a deep-looking, handsome man lying on a white floorboard. The back of his wrist lies over his forehead and he's looking into the camera with beautiful brown eyes under thick black eyebrows. His lips are full and luscious and his stubble is black.

## Story Letter

*Dear Author,*

*I am kind of a quiet guy. I've never had any luck meeting people or anyone who could really pull me out of my shell. Please help me find someone strong enough and willing to take a chance on me.*

*Sincerely,*

*Justjen*

## Story Info

**Genre:** contemporary

**Tags:** culinary, blue collar, established couples, men with pets, reunited

**Word count:** 9,854

### *Acknowledgements*

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# MIDNIGHT MUFFINS

## (Caster Springs #2)

By Erica Pike

One more second, that's all he needed. One more second to finish the calculation for the cabinets and then head out for lunch. Figures that the idiot in the next room chose that crucial moment to hammer on the pipes. For four minutes there had been nothing but the constant banging. Not a soft *thump-thump* of hammer on wood, but a loud *clank-clank-clank* of steel against steel. How was a man supposed to concentrate in all that noise? Now he had to start all over again.

Liam was beginning to understand how his boyfriend, Kevin, had felt a month ago when Liam was drilling the pavement outside the house Kevin was renting. However, if Liam was to be honest with himself, his frustration really had nothing to do with Charlie's banging...

*What the hell am I doing?*

Building a bakery for Kevin, that's what he was doing. He was building it without Kevin's knowledge. Without even knowing if Kevin was staying in Castor Springs for good, or if he was going back to L.A. to his hot-shot taxman job. For now, Kevin was only staying on an extended leave from work and had only hinted a couple of times that he might want to stay permanently. It wasn't enough for Liam to get his hopes up, but at the same time Liam was getting his hopes up...

Liam didn't know if Kevin had fancy party friends back in L.A., or if he'd had rich boyfriends. Maybe Kevin was in the habit of having lunch in fancy restaurants with his posh colleagues every day. Liam knew hardly anything about Kevin's life. He was afraid to ask, in case Kevin would start to miss L.A., and Kevin wasn't offering any information. Why would Kevin want to stay with some hick of a Texan carpenter?



It was getting harder to ignore the topic of Kevin leaving. It hovered in the air like a swarm of flies. You could swat at it all you wanted, but the only way you could escape it was by running.

*One fucking second.*

“Hello?” a voice called from the doorway. Although Kevin was thirty now, his voice still sounded the same as it did at eighteen, back when he left Castor Springs in a cloud of dust. The very clear, medium high tone had the exact same effect on Liam as it did back then, getting him all hot and bothered and making his stomach flutter. “Anyone in here?”

If the sound of Kevin’s voice didn’t finish Liam off, the sight of him certainly did. The way the white light shone on Kevin’s black hair as he stepped through the door was enough to make Liam go all weak in the knees. Kevin’s blue eyes shone bright as beams in the sunlight against his white skin. Whether in L.A. or Texas, the guy just didn’t get any tan and it looked sexy as hell to Liam.

The banging in the back continued.

“Obviously,” Liam answered, smiling wider as Kevin looked at him. Kevin smiled back.

Okay, so maybe Liam still viewed Kevin as a god, and it was unfair to Kevin, but the guy just did things to him that no one else ever did. No guy ever held a candle to Kevin. The fact that the two of them couldn’t be any more different was a cause for worry though. Kevin always acted like his ass was on fire, constantly up to something without being able to stay still for very long. It was so unlike Liam who was not only quiet, but also very private. The social butterfly versus the common clothes moth.

Kevin scuffed his sneaker against the rubble of concrete and looked up with a shy smile. “What? I just thought I’d bring over a couple of sandwiches.”

Liam was well aware that the dreamy haze that sometimes overtook him around Kevin looked very dumb, but he couldn’t help it. It usually made Kevin fidget, like now, so Liam shook it off and strode over. He picked up the

five-foot-seven skinny frame of his boyfriend and mashed him against a wall. Kevin's feet circled Liam's waist and they met in a kiss so intense the world tilted on its axis.

Damn, he was never going to get used to kissing Kevin Lewis, always turning into teenage goo whenever their lips met.

"Mmmm..." Liam rumbled against Kevin's neck in their embrace. "You came to see me."

"Well, yeah." Kevin laughed and squirmed away when Liam nuzzled his ear. "I always want to see you. Besides, there's not much else to do. Your company's books are now in order, I've cleaned your house, cooked your lunch and fed your chickens. I swear, if I spend one more second in that cabin of yours without a project, I'll take up knitting."

"What's wrong with knittin'?" asked Liam, arching his back to look Kevin in the face. Fuck, did Kevin find the knitting needles? Did he find the half-finished gloves hidden under the bed? Or maybe he didn't find them, maybe he just saw all the knitted blankets, sweaters and hats and put two and two together. Liam didn't have a momma or a granny who could've knitted those.

"Don't worry, baby," Kevin said, his body shaking in quiet laughter as he smoothed Liam's brow with his thumbs. "I find knitting very manly."

"You've been snooping"

"No, I've been cleaning," Kevin corrected.

Liam raised his brow. "Under the bed?"

"Uh huh." Kevin leaned in for another kiss. "I spotted the mess under there after we fell from the bed last night."

Liam squared his shoulders to see if his back still ached from hitting the ground with his naked boyfriend on top. At least it wasn't Kevin who fell first or he would've been squished like a bug under Liam's larger bulk.

"Liam, do you think he'd like white on the walls?" asked Charlie, Liam's business partner, as the automated glass doors rolled open. His face flushed

purple at the sight of Kevin's feet wrapped around Liam's middle. "Oh, I'm interrupting again. Hi, Kevin."

"Hi, Charlie," said Kevin, slowly unwrapping himself. With a blush in his cheeks and a twinge in his stomach, Liam let him go. "Are you finishing up the kitchen?"

"Yup." Charlie strategically blocked the view to the back by planting his wide body in front of the glass doors. He'd developed a large debt of favors through the years, from Liam bailing him out of jail for drunken brawling to Liam driving all the way to El Paso to pick up his adult daughter after a nasty break-up. Liam had called in all favors to get this bakery built.

"Who'd you say the client was?" Kevin asked, eyes narrowing.

Damn, was he onto them? If there was one thing Liam was dreading more than Kevin's leaving, it was explaining to Kevin about the bakery. A bakery was a gigantic commitment to Castor Springs. It was also a gigantic commitment to Liam.

"Um..." Charlie scratched the back of his balding head. "This guy from San Antonio."

"You said a woman from Houston last time."

"Uh... they're siblings?" said Charlie.

Of course, Kevin was way too smart to buy that. How a busy bee like Kevin came to become an accountant was something Liam would never understand. Maybe it was because Kevin excelled at snooping.

"Why aren't there any invoices? I've been digging around your office, Charlie, but I can't find anything. You're not doing this under the table are you? 'Cause with my job, I can't be a part of that."

"No," Charlie exclaimed, baring his palms in front of him. "No, er..."

"It's nothin' like that," Liam said. As much as he enjoyed watching his old friend squirm, there was too much at stake. Charlie, being an honest man, was a terrible liar whereas Liam was more able to bend the truth. It had fished

Charlie out of the pickle jar more than once. “These people want to keep this under the radar for now. We have the invoices.”

Kevin furrowed his brow. “Yeah, but why? I mean, this is Castor Springs. Nothing exciting ever happens here, so why all the secrecy?”

Liam’s stomach dropped. Kevin was right: nothing exciting ever happened in this tiny little hole of a town. They even stopped printing the small gazette because the only news was the weather forecast, the occasional farmers market announcement, and a false report on a coyote attack on Mrs. Alpert’s goats. No, you got all the news you needed from Dinah’s Diner, or just by sitting out on the lawn and chatting with a neighbor. Not that Liam had any neighbors.

It was small town nosiness that drove Liam out of town. The common knowledge that Liam was gay made people eye him in a weird way whenever he so much as talked to a guy. It didn’t matter if the guy was straight; people always wondered. No, he chose to build his two story cabin at the very outskirts of town. It took three years to build it, and last month he finished putting in the railing for the front porch. Maybe it was the fact that he was officially out of projects at home that he’d started building this bakery.

Kevin changed his focus from Charlie to Liam. His puzzled face relaxed into a smile as he took Liam’s hand.

“Ready for lunch?” He picked up a small basket by the doorway. “I didn’t go all out for a picnic, just made a couple of sandwiches. Wanna eat at the park?”

“The park?” Liam heard the trepidation in his own voice. The park was a wide open space around a pond, with not many nooks for privacy. “Why don’t we just eat in here?”

Kevin’s smile flashed for a second before he pulled on Liam’s arm. “Come on, it’s not like we’re gonna be smooching under a tree or anything. We can come back here for *that*.”

It was with heavy steps that Liam exited the small bakery and walked hand-in-hand with Kevin to Lankford Park. Apart from a couple of not-so-discrete looks, they didn’t really generate much attention on their way. The

park wasn't as heavily occupied as Liam had thought, it being Thursday, and they managed to snag one of the few hedged-in spots. Kevin spread out the thin blanket that was attached under the basket and started setting out the food. His "couple of sandwiches" were packed with olives, Frisée lettuce, cherry tomatoes, thin slices of brie, and this gorgeous white vegetable dressing between pieces of freshly baked French whole-grains, still crispy on the outside and so soft on the inside. Liam groaned deeply at the first bite, leaned back against a tree, and chewed with his eyes closed. After a couple of more bites, he opened his eyes and saw Kevin just watching him with a small smile on his face, his sandwich untouched.

"What?" Liam asked around a bite, grabbing one of the freshly squeezed juice bottles to wash down the scrumptious food. Kevin had mixed oranges and lemons this time, with a hint of something else Liam couldn't put a finger on.

"Nothing." Kevin looked away and opened a bottle of his own. "I just like seeing you eat my food." He adjusted himself on the blanket, placing his plate over his crotch. The beginning of stiffness didn't escape Liam. It wasn't the first time he'd caught Kevin sprouting wood while they were eating.

"Your food is the best. Gonna make me fat," said Liam, pulling Kevin closer for a chaste kiss.

Kevin grazed his teeth over his lower lip and looked up at Liam, eyes half-hooded with long, black eyelashes. "We're just gonna have to increase our workout then."

Liam glanced around, but the hedges were too high for anyone to see, so he traced his fingers along Kevin's freshly-shaved jaw and gave him a deep kiss that seemed to drag on forever.

"Oh, sorry!" a woman said, making Liam jump, but Kevin refused to let him break the kiss. With a tiny pang in his gut, Liam tried to ignore whoever was there, but he couldn't help listening.

"Should they be doin' that when the kids could run in and see 'em?" a guy asked in a hushed voice from the other side of the hedge.

“They’re just kissin’,” said the woman. “We do it all the time.” She sounded like that blonde one from Dinah’s posse—a group that must have sparked the inspiration of the Gossip Girl.

The conversation faded away into the distant sounds of people talking.

Kevin broke the kiss and studied Liam’s face hard for a long time. Then he looked down at his food and started to eat. The shift of mood was almost palpable and Liam couldn’t help feeling he’d done something wrong.

“What?” Liam asked, taking another swig of juice.

Kevin chewed in silence.

“What?” he repeated. He put down the little bit of uneaten sandwich and pulled Kevin’s face toward him.

“Nothing.” Kevin freed himself to take a drink. “I just didn’t think you were in the closet. I mean, everybody already knows you’re gay and you did ask me out to a restaurant that first day I came here... But it kind of makes sense now. We always stay at your place and never go anywhere together. You’re in the closet.”

Liam furrowed his brow. They never went anywhere together? Now that he thought about it, Kevin was right, but it wasn’t because Liam didn’t want to be seen together. Kevin was being unfair. They’d been so wrapped up in each other this past month that they’d barely made it out of the house in their spare time.

“I’m not in the closet,” Liam said, waiting for Kevin to meet his eyes. “I’m not. I just don’t like everyone knowing my business. You know how it is around here.”

Kevin looked down at his lap. “It’s just that I’m not sure I’m okay with hiding. I mean, I *really* want to be with you, Liam, but I want to be able to go places with you without you tensing up every time.” He glanced up with a sad look in his beautiful eyes, and it just about tore Liam’s heart out.

Was Kevin breaking up with him?

Liam shifted away, disbelief shredding through his body. Where the hell did this come from all of a sudden? Things had been perfect so far. Kevin had flourished since he came to live with Liam. He'd looked exhausted a month ago, but now he was more vibrant than a bucket full of rainbows. He seemed to love life at the house: chatting with the chickens; patting Tabby the cat when all three of them were curled up on the sofa in front of the TV; watching Liam take care of Priest, the black stallion; starting that small patch of a vegetable garden behind the house; cooking and baking in the kitchen. Oh, how he loved to cook and bake. Kevin's folks ran a bakery in town before they moved away. Kevin had toyed with the idea of starting up a bakery of his own, which was why Liam had taken the initiative and started building it in the hope that Kevin would stay. Where was all this coming from?

"Are you breakin' up with me?" Liam asked with a hint of anger in his voice. Kevin was *not* just taking off like he did the last time. Not if Liam had a say.

Kevin shook his head. "No. I mean, I don't want to, but sometimes I wonder if you even want me to stay."

"You don't think I want you to *stay*?" Liam said loudly. He couldn't help it; this whole conversation had popped out of nowhere.

Kevin lifted his shoulder in a half-shrug. "I don't know. When we're together at the house, things are *great*, but you won't ever go with me to Dinah's Diner, or to that restaurant you *invited* me to go to that first time. We don't go to the bar, or the market, or the park."

"We're at the park now," Liam pointed out.

"Yeah, but this is the first time I've managed to drag you here and we're sitting behind some Goddamned bushes. You don't want to be seen with me. You even ask me to wait in the car when you go to the hardware store." Kevin shouted the last bit. His words echoed through Liam's ears, and then Liam noticed that the people in the park seemed to have gone quiet.

*Great, the gay couple is arguing in public. Let's all listen so we can spread the word.*

Kevin sprang up and paced the small clearing. He let out a cold laugh, but kept his voice quiet for his next words, “You don’t feel comfortable with me in public. You’re in the closet even though everyone knows you’re gay. How messed up is that?”

Liam stood up, but stayed by the tree. He’d worked hard to get Kevin out on a date and he would die before he let him slip away. He’d do the long distance relationship thing if that’s what it took. Hell, he’d even move to L.A. if Kevin wanted him to. What he absolutely would not do was to let Kevin continue to think Liam was ashamed of their relationship.

He walked over, took Kevin’s hands in his and waited for him to meet his gaze.

“I’m not in the closet; I just don’t feel comfortable around people. I never have. You know what I was like when I was a kid. I haven’t changed much.

“It’s not that I don’t want to be with you in public; people notice me more when you’re with me. I don’t like them staring.”

Kevin rolled his eyes. “News flash, hot stuff—they stare at you even if I’m not with you. You’re the hottest guy in town. Hell, you’re the hottest guy in the whole of Texas. Even Dinah and her friends drool all over you. She told me so herself.”

Liam let out an exasperated laugh. This again... “*You* are the hottest guy in town.”

“Well then they’re looking at us extra because apparently together we’re supernova. Big deal,” Kevin said, his face now relaxed in a smile. “They’re just wishing they were one of us.”

“Or they’re wondering about what we do when we’re alone.”

“Yeah,” said Kevin, with a shrug. “And they’re getting turned on by it.”

Liam let out another laugh. “Doubt that.”

Kevin’s smirk was contagious, and before Liam knew it, they were kissing again.



The workday felt like it would never end. He and Charlie had to abandon the bakery to do an emergency fencing job for old man Jacob, repair a section of a roof that caved in on one of Mr. Gilmore's stables, and then prevent further damage from a leaked pipe in Mrs. Martin's bathroom. Jobs were often like that around Castor Springs: short notice and diverse. By the time Liam made it back to the house it was dark and late.

Tabby sat on the porch as Liam stepped out of the car. The light from the overhead shone down on the cat's white and ginger fur. Tabby mewed a greeting as Liam dipped down to pat him. From the large window, Liam could see Kevin in a white apron moving about in the kitchen. He looked serene as he stirred a large bowl and added a handful of ingredients into the mix. His fingers ran nimbly over the dough as he tipped the bowl over and started kneading, putting his whole body into it.

They hadn't really finished their conversation at the park, but watching Kevin all warm and homey in Liam's house, Liam re-established his resolve: he would not let Kevin leave. Kevin seemed in no hurry to return to L.A. and Liam was in no hurry to see him leave. They needed to talk about it, but Liam wasn't so great at talking. He always ended up saying something juvenile when he was around Kevin. Maybe it was because he sometimes felt like that little kid with the big crush around him.

Tabby mewed again and snaked his body around Liam's feet. With a deep sigh, and one last look at Kevin's strong hands working the dough, Liam opened the door and was greeted by a low volume of rock music and the mouth watering scent of baking. His house had never smelled as good as it did after Kevin had decided to stay on vacation.

Liam removed his dirty shoes and stripped down to his boxer briefs. He never used to care if he brought the dirt into the house, but now that Kevin insisted on cleaning during his stay, Liam didn't want to make the job hard on him. He meant to sneak upstairs for a shower, but was caught with his foot on the bottom step when Kevin suddenly looked up from his baking.

“Hey there,” Kevin said with a small smile on his face. Not the beaming welcome with hugs and kisses Liam usually got. Things were still awkward and it made Liam’s stomach twist in all sorts of ways.

“Hey,” said Liam, going for a light tone that sounded as forced as it was. He abandoned his trip to the bathroom and walked to the open kitchen instead. “You makin’ midnight muffins again?”

“It wasn’t midnight,” said Kevin, turning his eyes up at the ceiling in mock exasperation. “It was ten o’clock.”

Liam skirted the wooden island and put his arms around his lover. Kevin relaxed against him with a satisfied sigh.

“I’m just making the dough for tomorrow. The same recipe I used last night and meant to bake this morning, only I found your damned cat curled up in the bowl and had to throw it out; the dough *and* the cat.”

Liam chuckled as he hugged Kevin closer.

“Are we okay?” he asked and placed a slow kiss on Kevin’s neck.

“Mmm, yeah,” Kevin whispered. “We still need to talk, but let’s try not to shout this time, okay?”

“Sorry,” said Liam. “I usually don’t get angry like that.”

“Just when you’re around me,” Kevin said.

He was right. The only times Liam was ever truly emotional were because of Kevin. He got hurt when Kevin made those off-hand promises back in the day; he got sad when Kevin left; he got angry when his dad wouldn’t allow Liam to go after Kevin; he got exasperated when he couldn’t locate Kevin; he got angry that Kevin didn’t remember him a few weeks ago when Kevin finally came back to town; he got furious that Kevin said he’d go out on a date but then didn’t; and now he felt like he wanted to cry when he thought about Kevin leaving again. At the same time, Kevin stirred the best kinds of feelings within Liam. If anyone could make him feel alive, it was Kevin.

“That’s because you’re annoying,” Liam said, digging his finger into Kevin’s side.

“Ouch!” Kevin laughed and twisted away. Then he picked up a handful of flour and tossed it at Liam’s chest.

“Hey,” Liam yelled as the soft ingredient landed on his chest and snowed down to the light brown tiles. He made a grab for Kevin, but Kevin was already running up the stairs, laughing.

Liam took two steps at a time and just managed to grab the tail of Kevin’s apron before Kevin could reach the bed.

“My boyfriend’s gonna be very upset if you get flour all over the sheets,” Liam murmured as he started to strip Kevin.

“Boyfriend?” asked Kevin, short of breath.

Hands on the bottom of Kevin’s shirt, Liam looked up. That’s right, they hadn’t really discussed that. Somewhere during the month of being together, Liam had starting to think of Kevin as his boyfriend. Was Liam less to Kevin?

Before Liam could panic, Kevin grabbed his head and mashed their mouths together in a mind-numbing kiss. Kevin’s shirt, pants, socks, and underwear flew off in a flurry of hands and feet before Liam’s knees hit the bed and he fell on it. Kevin worked Liam’s underwear off and then let himself fall on top, forcing an *oof* from Liam’s lungs.

“There’s a day’s worth of sweat on my body,” Liam warned as they rolled on the bed, trying to get under the sheets.

“It’s okay. I like it,” said Kevin, with a big smile on his face as he buried his nose in Liam’s neck and inhaled deeply. “Mmmm...”

The mere feel of Kevin’s warm skin made Liam shudder. Under the sheets, Kevin took Liam’s erection in hand and started stroking in a slow rhythm. Liam sucked in a breath and trembled from the small, wet kisses on his neck and chest. A nip on his pectoral had him moaning and the suction on his nipple made him cry out with his bottomless need for Kevin.

Spreading his legs, Liam laid back and let Kevin work him open. It was something Kevin excelled at and always made Liam a very eager bottom. Kevin had small fingers, and he was so very gentle, massaging his way in like

they had all the time in the world. It didn't even begin to compare to the hurried sex Liam had had in back alleys.

When Kevin carefully pushed his length inside, Liam let out a deep breath mingled with a rumbling groan. Kevin maneuvered himself closer and looked Liam deep in the eyes as he started rolling his hips. The moon shone through the window and cast rays of white on the bed, making Kevin look unearthly with the milky white skin and wild, black hair. His muscles bunched and relaxed as he moved inside Liam, his blue eyes intent. When Kevin increased the speed, he hit Liam's prostate and Liam threw his head back with a deep grunt.

For a moment, all Liam sensed was the slapping of skin, the firm grip of hands on his hips, Kevin's rough grunting and breathing, his own groaning and gasping. Then the intense need to come started to overwhelm him whenever Kevin moved an inch. When Kevin wrapped his fingers around Liam's erection and stroked, it felt like he was being molded into a ball of bright hot existence, hurtling fast toward the sky. As he floated back down, he found himself in the arms of his lover, exhausted, sated, and happy. No one made him feel more alive...

\*\*\*\*

The next morning, Liam woke up with a cat in his face. They were both lying on Kevin's pillow, but Kevin was nowhere in sight. It was... unusual. With this one exception, Liam was always the one to drag Kevin out of bed in the morning. This was different, unfamiliar, and Liam didn't like it.

The smell of freshly baked bread hit his nostrils when he walked down the stairs. Kevin was busying himself with a coffee pot, pouring the black liquid into two cups. The breakfast table was decked in muffins, bread rolls, and all sorts of spread, and on the plates were scrambled eggs with mushrooms and ground pine nuts, just how Liam liked them.

Kevin often made Liam lunch, and always dinner, but this was the first time he'd woken up early enough to make breakfast. It warmed Liam down to his toes.

“What’s all this?” Liam asked, and took a seat on his usual chair by the bay window.

“Just thought I’d make breakfast for my *boyfriend*,” Kevin said with a grin, his hair adorably ruffled.

Liam smiled back and dug in, shoveling fork after fork of eggs into his mouth. Hearing Kevin call him that was unreal, but Liam couldn’t shake the feeling that there was something more.

“So,” Kevin said as he sawed open a roll and buttered it up. “Max at the fertilizer factory called yesterday while you were out.”

“Yeah?” Liam asked through a mouthful of eggs. “What’d he want? The north side windows need repainting?”

Kevin focused very hard on putting a piece of ham inside his roll. “Actually, he wanted to talk to me.”

“You?” Liam asked, internally annoyed with himself for sounding so surprised. Why wouldn’t people want to talk to Kevin?

“He wanted to see if I’d take on the books for his company, you know, like I’ve done with yours.”

Kevin put cheese in his roll, a long slice of cucumber and red peppers. With careful precision, he placed it on his plate and stirred a spoon of sugar into his coffee. When there was nothing more to be prepared, he finally looked up.

Liam lifted his eyebrows in question.

Kevin concentrated back on his plate and continued stirring. “Would you be okay with that?”

Liam stared. Why wouldn’t he be okay with that? It’s not like Max was competition or anything.

Kevin dropped the spoon and looked back up at Liam. “Will you please say something? If you’re not okay with it, just say it.”

“Why wouldn’t I be okay with it?” asked Liam, putting down his cutlery.

“I don’t know, maybe because whenever I talk about staying in Castor Springs you never say anything?”

“You never talk about staying.”

“Yes I do,” Kevin said, looking at Liam with a hurtful expression. “Not often, because I don’t want you to think I’m pushing, but whenever I mention it you just go quiet.”

Mind still not working without that cup of coffee, Liam tried to think back to when Kevin might have talked about staying. The only two times he could remember had been said in a joke, once while gathering eggs from the chickens and once when Liam had finally managed to convince Kevin to go riding on Priest, even though it was more like Kevin gluing himself to Liam’s back to hang on for dear life. Had he talked about it more? Now that Liam thought about it, he had said small things. Once when they were curled up on the sofa watching TV, Kevin had said that he could just stay like this forever. When Liam was filling up the truck at the gas station Kevin commented on how if he lived in Castor Springs, he’d have to get a car of his own. Then there was that time when they took a bath together and Kevin said that if he was moving in permanently, they’d need a bigger tub... But that was just stuff you said, right? Not a sure thing, like if Kevin had said “I’m going to move to Castor Springs.” Or maybe Kevin had been hinting that he wanted to move to Castor Springs, but Liam was too afraid to hope because of similar comments in the past...

Liam didn’t notice that time had passed until Kevin scraped his chair back. He stood up with an irritated huff and walked to the island. There, he started scrubbing the counter with a damp rag and continued talking.

“I extended my leave because I wanted to see if you wanted me to move in with you. I make you lunches and dinners. I clean the house and milk your goddamn goat to see if it’ll make any difference, but you never say a goddamn thing. Whenever I talk about leaving my job in L.A. or staying in Castor Springs, you just lock up. Now my boss is hounding me to come back, but I don’t know what to tell him, so I’m just going to come out and ask you: do you want me to stay?”

“Yes,” Liam said, still catching up to Kevin’s speech. All that really mattered though were those last few words. “Of course I do. You’ve already moved in, haven’t you?”

Kevin stopped in mid scrub. His shoulders slumped and he sighed.

“Most of my stuff is still back in L.A., so no, I haven’t moved in.”

Liam didn’t know if Kevin was excited by the idea of staying in Castor Springs. It was no secret that he didn’t like the place and city life seemed to suit him so much better, so it seemed that Kevin wanted to stay because of Liam. That, in itself, was enough to make Liam’s heart swell. Kevin, however, didn’t look happy at all as he turned on his heel and started doing the dishes.

Not sure what to do with himself, Liam got up and walked over. He placed a hand on Kevin’s to stop him from cleaning. Kevin released another sigh and closed his eyes.

“Baby,” Liam said quietly, “I really do want you to stay; I *need* you to stay. There’s no way I’m lettin’ you leave again. Haven’t I ever told you that? I must have, because I’m always thinking it.”

“Really?” Kevin turned his head to nuzzle Liam’s chest. Liam put his arms around him and squeezed tightly.

“Yeah, I probably never say anything when you talk about stayin’ because I’m afraid to hope...”

Kevin let out a quick snuffle. Liam tilted his head up and met rapidly blinking eyes. “That’s my fault, isn’t it? I’m sorry.”

“It’s not your fault that I’m too much of a chicken to ask,” Liam said and kissed Kevin’s forehead. “Didn’t wanna bring up the issue in case you’d start to talk about leavin’.”

“We’re both chickens then,” Kevin said with a small smile. “I was afraid you’d feel we were going too fast if I asked to move in with you. I mean, you’ve never been in a relationship before.”

“That’s because none of those other guys were you.”

Kevin stared at him for a while, deep blue eyes shining with unshed tears. Then he smiled and reached up for a kiss. Liam groaned against the soft lips.

“I’ll go reserve us a spot in the chicken coop,” Kevin said with a laugh as they embraced. Liam laughed into Kevin’s hair and squeezed him harder. They stayed locked to each other until Kevin’s stomach started growling. With a laugh, Liam led them back to the breakfast table and they continued eating.

“This mean you’re gonna stop cooking me good food?” Liam teased between bites.

“No. I like the cooking,” Kevin said around a mouthful of blueberry muffin.

“And the cleaning?”

“And the cleaning,” Kevin said with half a smile.

“I’ll milk the goat then.” Liam gave Kevin a wink.

“No,” Kevin said with a laugh, “I like that too. I like all of it, even when Billy kicks over the bucket or when the cat steals an egg and rolls it off the counter. I *love* being here, but I’ll need a new job to help keep us going.”

“I do okay with money. You don’t really have to work.”

“Oh, no,” Kevin said, putting up a finger. “I’m not some frilly little housewife waiting for you to come home. I’m getting a job. I can advertise as an accountant. I just...”

“What?” Liam prompted when Kevin stared at his coffee cup.

“I just wish you’d have told me about the bakery.”

Liam looked up from his second bread roll. “The bakery?”

It had occurred to him that now might be the best time to bring up the bakery, but he’d hoped it would be ready before telling Kevin. It was only a couple of more weeks if there weren’t many other jobs.

“Yeah, I know you’re building a bakery,” Kevin said. “I know one when I see one. It looks very nice.”



“Oh,” Liam said. It was a bit of a relief that he didn’t have to tell Kevin in words. Giving him a bakery was practically giving him a wedding ring and he didn’t know if Kevin was ready for that. After this morning, though, it didn’t seem like Kevin minded at all. “I’m glad you like it.”

Kevin wiped his fingers and dropped the napkin on his empty plate. “Yeah, but there’s no room for a second bakery in a town this small. Maybe they’ll let me work there. Hey, have you been hiding the inventories from me so I won’t get disappointed?”

Liam took Kevin’s hand in his. Oh the choices: To wait a couple of more weeks and see the look on Kevin’s face when Liam gave him the keys, or to see that look right now. It would be much more practical to do it now; Liam didn’t want Kevin to take on too many accounting jobs. Besides, Kevin might need to prepare and buy whatever one needs to run a bakery. Liam really only knew how to build one, but he assumed there’d be sacks of flour, some milk and sugar, and maybe a couple of bowls.

Kevin shrugged and smiled. “Well, I’m happy as long as I can move in with you. Hell, maybe we’ll add more livestock and grow an orchard and I can start up a small shop with preserved goods. That sounds like fun, yeah?”

“Baby, the bakery’s for you.”

“Hm?” Kevin’s whole demeanor was still focused on his new train of thought.

“I’m building it for you. The bakery.”

Kevin turned his gaze on Liam. “Did you just say you’re building the bakery for *me*?”

Liam rubbed the back of his neck. “Figured I could sell it if you didn’t want it.”

Kevin stared for a few more seconds and then launched himself from his seat and landed in Liam’s lap. He smothered Liam’s face in kisses. “You really *do* want me here!” he said with a cheerful laugh.

“Yeah,” Liam replied with a content sigh as Kevin’s hands stroked him all over. It was making Liam hard. “I really, *really* want you here.”

Suddenly Kevin jumped off. “Okay, let’s go!”

“Go?” Liam asked, his boxers now straining with a hard-on.

“Well yeah.” Kevin’s face was exuberant. “I’ve got a million and two things to do: gotta have things packed up back in L.A., moved over here, and make room for my stuff. Then I’m going to shop for the bakery. Oh, this is so exciting. Thank you so much, Liam.” Kevin jumped back into Liam’s lap and gave him a long, heartfelt kiss. “Keep all the invoices safe. I’ll need them for the books and to know how much to pay you back. How’d you get the money anyway?”

“Told you, I do okay with money,” Liam said, his cock pushing against Kevin’s jeaned butt. “And I dipped a little into the money Dad left me.”

“Oh baby,” Kevin said and gave Liam another long kiss. “I’m sorry. I’ll pay you back every cent. For the work, too.”

Liam stroked Kevin’s back as they looked at each other.

He swallowed hard before he voiced aloud what he’d been almost too afraid to even consider. “How about you don’t pay me back and we become partners instead?”

Kevin’s eyebrows shot up. “You want to be a partner in a bakery?”

This was the part that really made it look more like a ring instead of a business. It would be theirs and it would be a long term commitment. Encouraged by Kevin’s earlier enthusiasm about their relationship, Liam continued.

“It’s just an idea,” said Liam, suddenly feeling insecure all over again. Maybe Kevin wanted the bakery for himself. It was *his* dream, after all. “My part would be building and maintenance, and yours would be baking and running things?”

Kevin's eyes on Liam's face seemed miles away as he thought about it. Then he broke out in a smile. "Like a silent partner?" he asked, kissing Liam yet again.

"Mmm," Liam hummed through the kiss. "With benefits."

"I love it," Kevin said against Liam's lips, his body wound like a bow with the need to get going. Liam held onto him, not ready to leave just yet. "Will people know that we're partners?"

"Yes." Liam stroked his thumb on Kevin's lower back. "I thought about what you said yesterday. I'm gonna try to be more open in public; I'm not gonna hide us. Didn't realize I was doing it until you said it."

That earned him another kiss, deeper, with added tongue. They kissed for a while, touched each other, and before Liam knew it, he was pulling off Kevin's T-shirt.

"And we'll go out sometimes?" Kevin asked on a short breath. He fished Liam's cock from his boxers and gave it a few strokes.

"Yeah," Liam promised, really ready to accept just about anything at the moment, and pushed his hands under Kevin's jeans to cup his cheeks. "But we'll stay at home as well, right?"

"Yeah," Kevin agreed as he lowered himself from Liam's lap to the floor. "Just a night out now and then. Maybe up in Floresville or San Antonio. Not much happens around here."

"Okay," Liam said, spreading his knees to make room.

Kevin slid Liam's erection between his lips and sucked hard. Liam threw his head back on a whimper as Kevin groaned.

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As it turned out, it was a good idea to tell Kevin about the bakery sooner rather than later. Since that morning in the kitchen, Kevin had bought a couple of freezers, three huge ovens, a long worktop, a stove, display cases, tons of raw material and just about everything a bakery needs. It must have cost him a fortune, but Kevin said he had money saved up and now that he was no longer

paying rent, he could afford it. Plus, he sold most of his fancy furniture to a friend back in L.A.

On top of that, Kevin had spent days and nights busying himself with baking things to put in the freezers, testing out recipes (from which Liam benefitted), learning the heat levels of the ovens, testing and deciding on what kinds of non-baked foods to sell (from which Liam also benefitted), and haggling with sellers. He even hired and trained a kid to work the register and clear the tables for the first couple of weeks, thinking he'd maybe hire the boy permanently if things stayed busy.

Kevin had been so busy that Liam hardly saw him at home anymore, but instead of fretting, Liam spent the time building tables and chairs; varnishing the mahogany walls outside; painting the inside walls antique white; bolting down the big, swirly *Midnight Muffins* sign atop the door; doing a lot of heavy lifting; plugging equipment; and basically doing whatever manual work needed to be done. For a while, Liam regretted building the bakery so small. Kevin was made for bigger things, but then this was tiny little Castor Springs. It was nice to have a bakery again, and if the buzz around town was anything to go by, people agreed.

“Baby, could you put those cloths on the tables?” Kevin asked, shoving a small stack of blue and white checkered linens in Liam’s arms. It was still dark outside and everything was peaceful. Even the low volume of rock music added to the peace.

Liam stood still and watched Kevin skirt the worktop and start drizzling dressing on the rows of roll-halves, readying them for the lettuce, bologna, fried bacon, and cheese. He looked paler than usual with deep half-moons under his eyes, but even though he hadn’t slept all night and it was six o’clock in the morning, he still looked energetic.

A knock sounded on the back door. Tucking the cloths under his arm, Liam went to open the door for Beck, the seventeen year old kid who had to drop out of school at sixteen to take care of his momma. Liam knew him to be a hard worker, so Kevin got a great find there.

“Oh, hi,” said Beck, not looking Liam in the eye as he stalked past and put away his jacket.

Liam blushed as well. He hadn't known the kid was helping out a couple of days ago when Liam's sexual frustration won out. From outside, he'd looked through the small paned windows in the back and seen his boyfriend bustling about. Kevin had looked too scrumptious in his apron and the tall, white toque on his head. Liam barged in, pushed Kevin into a corner and went down on his knees. He thought Kevin's protests were a game as he yanked down his pants and was about to put his dick in his mouth when the automatic doors slid open and a flushed face Beck dropped a tray of cutlery with a loud clang. Kevin had pulled his pants up, stifling his laughter, and shot Liam a sultry I'll-deal-with-you-later look, but all Liam could focus on was the fierce pang in his gut for having been caught in the act. Kevin firmly established a never-in-the-bakery rule after that, for hygiene he said, but things had been awkward between Liam and Beck ever since.

Liam hurried to the front and spread out the cloths over the circular tables. In the middle, he placed the small blue mats he'd secretly crocheted and given to Kevin the night before. In the very center, he placed bowls of sugar and other niceties Kevin wanted on every table.

There were only five tables, but there was plenty of space next to the shop to expand, if Kevin needed to later. That's how things were in Castor Springs: cheap land and building permits (the Mayor was just happy that someone was building) and lots of available space, even on the “high street”. Liam had reserved the land next to the bakery, just in case.

Beck came through and started stacking the shelves with freshly baked loaves of bread while Kevin carefully cut some of his pies and cakes into pieces, placing each one on a small paper tray to put in the display case. Mornings started late in Castor Springs, so it wasn't until seven thirty when Kevin finally unlocked the front doors and greeted his first customers. Among them was Dinah.

“You little rascal,” she drawled. “I'm right across the street and you're already takin' away some of my business.”

“You’ll just have to stay competitive,” said Kevin with a cheeky grin.

Dinah laughed and nudged him in the shoulder.

“You sellin’ those cherry pies your mamma used to make?”

“Of course.” Kevin hurried behind the counter and pointed out the selection of baked goods with a flourish. Dinah’s eyes bugged out at the delicious looking pies and cakes. “I’m also selling a variety of sandwiches and might offer jams and other preserves in the future. I do love to cook and I find that having diversity is fiscally sound.”

“Well, I’ll be damned,” she said and eyed the cherry pies for a long time. She ended up buying two, along with three loaves of bread and a couple of sandwiches. Kevin rang her order up and threw in a couple of chocolate chip muffins for good measure.

At the second register, Beck somewhat clumsily rang in the totals for a couple while trying to bag up the goods at the same time. His eyes widened when another burst of people walked through the door. The muffins were running out fast. Dinah didn’t seem in any hurry to leave Kevin, so Liam went into the back to get more. When he returned with a tray of blueberry and apple muffins, Dinah shot him a curious look.

“You guys are comin’ over tomorrow night, ain’t ya?” she asked when Kevin handed over her bag.

“Ah, darn,” said Kevin, casting Liam a quick look. “I’m sorry, Dinah, I forgot all about it. Things have been so busy.”

“Don’t mean y’all can’t come over. Come on, Liam, it’s time to show off your boyfriend. You can’t keep him to yourself all the time. My girlfriends are all curious about you two.”

*To gossip, no doubt.*

“Uh, can we have some time to talk about it?” Kevin asked, well aware what a blabbermouth Dinah was. Just then, a couple of more people walked in and things got really busy. Dinah stood to the side, but didn’t look like she was leaving without an answer.

She was half a generation older, and although Liam couldn't exactly call her a friend, she'd never been anything but friendly toward him. She even used to babysit him when he was in diapers. She'd developed some kind of no-bullshit big-sister syndrome and he knew she gave people hell if they ever said anything negative about him being gay. In fact, he was pretty sure that Dinah's common sense and her ready comebacks were partly why people didn't give Liam as much trouble about his sexuality as they would have. Dinah was in the very center of the gossiping circle and her opinions held much weight in town. People knew that what you saw was what you got.

If Liam and Kevin were going to be socializing around town, Dinah would be their best ally as her no-bullshit policy applied to all other people as well.

"We'll come." The words came out of Liam's mouth before he knew he was going to say them. It surprised him as much as it did the other two. Then there was no more time because the place filled with curious people who ended up almost cleaning out the shop. It was a good thing Liam had taken a week off to help until Kevin and Beck got the hang of things.

They arrived at the cabin in darkness. Liam went to check on the animals while Kevin carried in covered trays and other items he'd loaded in the back of the pickup. Billy the Goat and Priest were fed fresh hay; the chickens happily squabbled when he poured fresh feed into their coop; and the rabbits rolled over one another in their excitement to get the leftover vegetables from the bakery.

When Liam came back to the house, Kevin sat on the porch on a red blanket, food strewn about among a number of candles. Tabby was noisily wolfing down food on the other side of the porch.

"Hi," Kevin said with a sweet smile.

"Hi," Liam said with a laugh. "We havin' a picnic?"

"Yeah, I thought it'd be a good way to wind down."

Liam walked up the couple of steps and made himself comfortable next to his lover. Kevin had flour on his chin and a streak of pink icing on his neck,

but otherwise he looked clean and happy and sated despite the exhaustion he no doubt felt.

Liam picked up a piece of cherry pie to feed Kevin. “Thought you’d head straight to bed after today.”

“Too amped up,” said Kevin as he took a bite. “Mmmm,” he groaned just like Liam did when he too took a bite. “Don’t think I’ve eaten since noon.”

“I know.” Apart from a hurried lunch, Liam had forgotten to eat as well. “You’re gonna have to eat more though. No one’s gonna trust a skinny baker.” He pinched Kevin’s side and received a squeal in turn as Kevin wriggled out of it.

They fed each other and ate in silence, exchanging small kisses in between. Then they cleaned up and Liam practically had to carry Kevin up the stairs as the fatigue finally overwhelmed him.

“You sure you want to go to Dinah’s tomorrow?” Kevin asked as Liam sat him down on the bed and started removing his clothes.

“Not if you’re gonna be this tired.” Liam reached up for a slow kiss. Kevin’s forehead rested against his for a moment and Liam thought he’d nodded off until Kevin raised himself up.

“I’ll be fine, but we really don’t have to go if you’re not okay with it. We’re basically walking into the belly of the beast here. You know who her friends are.”

“Yeah.” Liam smiled, ran his fingers through Kevin’s hair, and cupped his face. Kevin leaned into the touch with eyes closed. “But they’re on our side, so it’s okay. You just stay your chatty self and I won’t have to do a lot of talkin’.”

“What are you saying?” Kevin asked with a laugh as Liam pulled his T-shirt over Kevin’s head and pushed his pants down the rest of the way.

“Just sayin’ that you’re a social butterfly. That works great for me because you’ll be the center of attention and no one will even know I’m there. Dinah said the girls are bringin’ their husbands, so I’ll just watch TV with them or something.”



“Fat chance,” Kevin said as he laid back and pulled Liam to lie on top. “I’m gonna make you wear a pink tiara and you’re going to join our tea party like all the other good little boys and girls.”

Liam snorted into the kiss and Kevin laughed back, rolling them over to undress Liam. He got halfway done with the pants when he simply fell asleep, his head on Liam’s stomach and hands down along Liam’s thighs. Liam pulled him up and put him under the covers.

Tabby darted into the room and jumped up on the bed to snuggle against Kevin. As much as the two might bicker—Kevin vocally and Tabby with mewls and resentful glares—they really did make a great match. Sort of like Liam and Kevin, who were opposites in so many ways, but at the end of the day they made up for each other’s shortcomings in a way that made them a perfect whole.

**THE END**

## Author Bio

*Erica lives in Iceland with her adorable little twin boys. She often says that her real name sounds like Klingon to foreigners. Seriously, if “Eyjafjallajökull” (you know, the volcano that stopped international air travel in 2010) looks like someone fell asleep at the keyboard, Erica’s real name could leave a non-Icelander in a zombie-like stupor for days.*

*She’s been writing for several years, or ever since reading became an obsession. Aside from a business degree, Erica has taken English courses at the University of Iceland and gulped down anything that might help her in her career as an author. She takes great interest in English, but will break every single grammar rule for the sake of *The Voice*.*

*Erica loves hearing from her readers. She’s a friendly, easy-going (if a bit silly) person who doesn’t mind talking about herself in third person.*

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## Published Work by Erica Pike

### Castor Springs Series:

Half-Baked Promises

Midnight Muffins

### Boston Boys Series:

A Life Without You

Absolutely Eric

### College Fun and Gays Series:

Hot Hands

Grade-A-Sex Deal

The Walls Have Ears

Little Stalker

Welcome, Brother

Cold Hands

**Other:**

In His Pocket