

# Brewing Up Trouble



Jessie G

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# Love is an Open Road

*An M/M Romance series*

## BREWING UP TROUBLE

**By Jessie G**

### 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

My photo inspiration was a man in a black tux jacket, a dress shirt completely unbuttoned, and a pink bow tie. His pants are opened, revealing boxer shorts which are being tugged down slightly. His chest and abdomen are covered in dark hair, one nipple is pierced, and he's wearing a wristwatch.

## Story Letter

*Dear Author,*

*He comes every day to my coffee shop with his partner. They are cops. I know that because his partner told me. But that's the problem you know? While his brother in arms is open and friendly (and straight), I never heard the song of his voice... But the look I receive every time I look in his direction... Geez... It sets me on fire!*

*Maybe today is the day he will speak to me...*

Author, I LOVE dirty talk... Would you please me with this? Otherwise, carte blanche, but please at least a HFN...

*Sincerely,*

*Jenn*

## Story Info

**Genre:** contemporary

**Tags:** law enforcement, baristas, bakers, bears, slow burn/UST, humorous, dirty talk

**Word Count:** 16,228

# **BREWING UP TROUBLE**

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## Chapter One

As one in a long line of O’Leary men in blue, Quin always knew he would be a cop. It’s what O’Leary men did. They were manly men—strong and stubborn, loud and boisterous—who were devoted to the shield first and family second. It took a strong-willed woman to put up with an O’Leary man, and those who had, claimed to one and all that the sex was worth all the bullshit. Since they tended to breed like rabbits, Quin assumed that was true.

In many ways, Quin was a true O’Leary and did the name proud. If he had a few quirky traits that didn’t quite fit the mold, his father would swear on a stack of Bibles that he inherited them from his mother’s family. God love them. It was that “understanding” on the part of the senior O’Leary that allowed him to accept that Quin would never be loud, never be boisterous, never like women, and would probably never produce a grandchild. Not that he needed any more of those.

All in all, Quin was proud of the way he lived his life. Being a police officer had been a family calling, while working his way up the ranks to Detective Sergeant in the Homicide Division had been something he did for himself. It was an accomplishment that utilized his tendency to blend and observe, while giving him a leadership role. Strong and stubborn O’Leary men weren’t followers after all.

With his career firmly established, and thus his legacy on the family tree, Quin felt no guilt about not hiding his sexuality. Not that he flaunted it, flaunting wasn’t his style, but he definitely wasn’t in the closet. He’d taken his share of shit growing up, in the academy and even on the force, but he stood his ground and few people were stupid enough to openly challenge him. If they chose to talk behind his back, that only reflected on their character, not his.

If he had one regret, it was his seemingly permanent single status. As more than one nameless fuck told him, who would want to put up with the crap? Long hours, middle of the night phone calls, dates abruptly cut short or cancelled with little notice—and that was just the crap from his job. He wasn’t much of a talker, didn’t really feel comfortable sharing his feelings, and had zero dance skills. A catch he was not.

“You’re brooding.” Quin looked up from the piles of paperwork covering his desk and smiled. Before he got promoted, Detective Anthony Capisi had



been his partner. Their track record together had been above reproach, and when he got promoted, Anthony was the first person he wanted on his team. Another son of a cop, Anthony understood the family legacy. He had a beautiful wife, two adorable kids, and a devil-may-care attitude to be envied. He was also a top-notch detective who had no ambition to lead and cared very little that his friend outranked him. All of which made him Quin's most trusted friend. "Don't you know that brooding gives you wrinkles?"

Quin leaned back in his chair and eyed his friend in amusement. "Have you been reading *Cosmo* again?"

"Maria keeps leaving the damn thing in the bathroom, what else am I supposed to do?" Tony pushed off the doorframe and looked at his watch. "I have just the cure for brooding and *Cosmo* approves."

Quin didn't need to look at his watch to know what Tony was referring to and felt a little hitch of anticipation. Feeling it annoyed him because he knew better. "I have a pile of paperwork—"

"Stop right there," Tony cut him off sharply and treated him to his perp stare. "Those scones are coming outta the oven in five minutes and I intend to get mine while it's still piping hot. You know you wanna."

Did he want a piping hot scone from the piping hot coffee shop owner around the corner? Sometimes he thought he might want it just a little too much. "*Cosmo* wouldn't approve of scones, they're not good for your girlish figure."

"Hey, what's wrong with my figure?" Tony looked down at himself and scowled. The man was a gym rat with zero body fat, but he always fell for the jab. "Asshole. That shit ain't gonna distract me from my mission."

Quin knew he would regret asking, but the script had been set in stone and he'd be less than a friend if he didn't play his part. "Which is?"

"To get you laid, my man, to get you laid." Tony grinned smugly. "And *Cosmo* most definitely approves of that. Come on, let's make a move, you know you're just dying to hear that sexy drawl again."

Getting laid wasn't his problem. He could do that any day of the week with any number of willing participants. And it wasn't like they hadn't heard that sexy drawl yesterday or the day before that. In fact, he was hard-pressed to remember one day in the last month that they hadn't heard it.

It all started two months earlier, when local street thugs started robbing businesses close to the precinct to earn their gang colors. Joe Gibson, owner of the local coffeehouse, stood his ground when they hit his shop during the lull between breakfast and lunch. There was a little relief in knowing that Joe would survive his injuries and even more in knowing his team had brought the bastards to justice.

Then, a month ago, Tony heard through the grapevine that Joe's nephew had come from Texas to take over the business until his uncle got back on his feet. Going down that afternoon had been a courtesy, but Quin had taken one look at Heath Gibson—cowboy, baker, and the hottest barista on either side of the Hudson—and fell hard. That was before Heath smiled, before those green eyes lit with mischief, and before he greeted them with the sexiest, drawled out, “Howdy, what can I get you fellas?”

Tony, who'd never met a stranger in his life, became even more animated, and before Quin knew which end was up, they were seated with a couple of cappuccinos and the best scones he'd ever tasted. The little shop was busy with the locals coming to welcome Heath to the neighborhood and declaring their undying love to him for reopening their favorite spot, but he found the time to check in on them before they left.

When Tony continued to carry the conversation, Heath treated him to a teasing grin and asked if he ever talked. Quin, being Quin, kept his mouth shut. That only encouraged the sexy man, who leaned in and whispered, *“Oh, Detective, I do love a man who plays hard to get.”* Just remembering the way Heath's breath caressed his ear nearly made him moan out loud. *“I'll let you in on a little secret. Nothing makes my dough rise faster than a big, strong bear with a deep, throaty roar. Let me hear it, just once. Please.”*

Quin had held out, even when that full lower lip jutted out in a sexy, flirty pout. It had become a challenge for them both ever since. Heath was always flirty, always inappropriate, and always adorable as hell in his attempts to get him to talk, and Quin had to fight every day not to give in. As it was, he jerked off more times to the idea of Heath's dough rising than he would ever admit.

“Hello, anyone home?” Tony gave him a knowing grin. “Let's go get us some scones.” Quin knew it was pointless to fight. Not only because Tony could be relentless, but because he really wanted to see what Heath would try next.

## Chapter Two

Heath looked at the clock again and wondered where his detectives were. It hadn't taken long to realize they were timing their entrance with his afternoon batch of scones and that if they were late or didn't show at all, it was because they had caught a bad case. That got him thinking about all the horrible things they must see on the street, and his soft heart couldn't help but worry.

He genuinely liked the talkative Detective Capisi. With his friendly smile, quick wit and exaggerated antics, they were immediate friends. Didn't hurt that he was easy on the eyes either, but Heath pegged him as straight, married with kids, and rocking a picket fence right off the bat. That easy friendship aside, it was the tall, dark, and silent one that really made his toes curl. Built like a brick shithouse, with midnight hair and deep blue bedroom eyes, he had Heath's radar pinging like mad. Then those eyes raked him from head to toe in the hottest fucking leer he'd ever been treated to. It felt like a full-body lick—his toes curled, his cock stiffened, and his heart wept. Then the bastard refused to speak, and Heath just knew his voice was going to drip sex. It just had to.

He had never thought of himself as a game player, but the challenge of getting the impenetrable Detective O'Leary to speak to him had become the highlight of his day. He flirted shamelessly, teased, even dared to touch, but the man held out. The only thing that kept him in the game was seeing how turned on the sexy detective was by his antics. But enough was enough. They'd been playing for a month! He needed to hear that voice and, well, he needed other things from Quin, but he'd darn well earned the voice.

"Here they come!" Tina, his afternoon cashier hissed and then laughed when he jerked around to look. His uncle's staff had been grateful that he'd reopened the shop and were eager to get back to work. They were a good crew and he liked working with them, but they'd seen his obsession right quick and took evil delight in teasing him about it.

His cheeks heated when the bell chimed over the door and Tina made kissy faces at him. A couple of his regulars grinned knowingly, and he felt the flush spread to his neck. Did everyone know how bad he had it? "Look what you started."

"Me?" Tina shook her head, the big gold hoops swinging wildly from her ears. "Darlin', you started it. We're all just here to enjoy the show."

He rolled his eyes when she tried to add a twang to the endearment, making it sound ridiculous with her rougher New York accent. “Why haven’t I fired you yet?”

“Do I smell blueberry scones?” Tony sidled up to the counter and winked at him, another knowing gesture that told him everyone was just here for the entertainment. Was he making a fool of himself? He let his gaze slide to the right, taking in the object of his obsession, and decided he didn’t care.

Heath folded his arms and gave them both his best stern look. “Have you been good boys? Did you earn a scone?”

“If by good you mean that I’m so bad that I’m damn good, then yep, I’ve totally earned one.” Tony flexed, causing more than one woman in the shop to strain around for a better look.

Before Quin could answer, if he was going to answer, the bell over the door chimed again and Heath’s Uncle Joe hobbled in with his cane. Joe was immediately swamped by both employees and customers, but Heath’s two detectives continued to stand at the counter. Tony looked back at him thoughtfully. “Joe looks good.”

“Yep, he’ll be back behind the counter in no time.” Heath wasn’t sure if that was true or not. When he first came to New York to run the shop, it had been a temporary solution for them both. He needed a change of scenery, and Joe needed help. But lately Joe had been making noise about expanding and needing a partner. Heath wasn’t quite ready to leave and might be persuaded to stay, but not by his uncle.

“And then you’ll go back to Texas?” Tony asked slowly, glancing quickly at Quin.

“Texas is home.” Heath just shrugged and turned to make their cappuccinos. “Why don’t you boys grab a seat and I’ll bring these over?”

Tina came rushing back behind the counter, and Joe wandered the shop, talking to everyone including Tony and Quin. Heath hated to think that his decision to stay or go would be based on a man who refused to utter a single word to him, but it was true. If Quin so much as said “Hello” or gave him just the slightest bit of encouragement, he would stay. For that reason alone, he should cut and run. It wasn’t healthy to have a man affect him so deeply when there was no basis for that feeling. He didn’t even know how he liked his coffee, since Tony did all the ordering, and he had a feeling Quin would be

stubborn enough to drink it instead of ending his self-imposed silence to correct it.

“What’s wrong?” Tina nudged his shoulder, and he realized he was glaring at the cappuccino machine.

Heath just smiled and shook his head. He was raised in a shop like this, learning the business end from his father and the baking from his mother. Both would remind him that the family business was no place for his personal life. He not only agreed, he knew his Uncle Joe believed just as they did. So, while he liked Tina and could use a friendly ear, he wouldn’t share his worries. Back home, he had friends outside the business to confide his troubles to. Here in New York, he’d been working day and night, and had no time to make friends beyond his uncle’s employees.

“Don’t get discouraged,” Tina whispered, despite his silence. She was an intuitive one, and though he wouldn’t confide in her, he was grateful for the little boost of support. “That man’s hungry and it’s not for your scones, trust me. Now, go turn on that cowboy charm, and get out from behind my counter.”

Heath didn’t bother to correct her as he grabbed a tray and loaded it with the coffee, scones, and the surprise he’d made to give to Quin. Earlier in the week, Tony confided that Quin was being honored with a commendation, and Heath had spent the last few nights designing a cookie to look exactly like the medal he knew Quin would receive that night. It was probably foolish, but he was proud of that cookie and he was damn well going to deliver it.

“Here ya go, fellas. Two cappuccinos and blueberry scones, still smokin’.” Heath expertly laid the mugs and plates on the table. When he saw Quin’s gaze narrow on the cookie, Heath smiled politely and offered a subdued, “Congratulations, Detective O’Leary.”

Was that charming? No, but a commendation deserved a level of respect from him. Just because he turned the medal into a cookie didn’t mean he didn’t respect it. He hoped Quin recognized that he was honoring him in a way that he was most familiar with. Satisfied with his offering and his ability to contain his normal flirtation, Heath turned and headed toward the kitchen. He might need to hear that voice, felt he worked hard to earn it, but he wasn’t sure he wanted Quin’s gratitude to be the first words they shared.

“Heath.” The deep timbre vibrated through the shop, stopping him just as he swung the kitchen door in. It was sinful, decadent, and better than he’d imagined. It called to every cell in his body, making him turn before he even

thought to send the command to his feet. Heath could only watch in anticipation as the sinfully decadent Detective O’Leary crossed the shop toward him. When Quin’s arm came around him, pulling him close to all those mouthwatering muscles, Heath forgot to breathe. “Watch out.”

Heath didn’t know or care what he was watching out for. He leaned in and breathed deeply, taking in the clean scent of his detective. Earthy, a little spicy, and very addictive. He wanted to rub up against Quin, roll around with him, until he was permanently covered in that scent.

Just the idea had him moaning in need. “Quin, please.”

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## Chapter Three

Quin looked down in shock at the little cookie. It didn't take a genius to know that Tony had clued Heath in. Nor did he need to ask himself why. The whole shop—from the employees to the customers, to his own damn partner—was watching their little dance play out every day, and he knew they were all waiting for him to give in. When he saw Joe walk in and heard Heath suggest that he'd be returning to Texas soon, Quin felt both disappointed and smug.

Quin felt smug that he had proven to everyone and his partner that he had made the right choice by holding out. He wasn't interested in another mindless fuck, even with a man as gorgeous as Heath, and clearly that was all Heath was offering. Heath came to run the shop *temporarily* and, while he respected a man who helped family, he didn't need to be another *temporary* amusement in someone's life. And yeah, it was disappointing to know he was right in thinking that was all Heath wanted from him.

Then he delivered their order and that cookie. It was just a cookie. It couldn't be pinned to his chest, couldn't be framed. Two bites and it would disappear forever. Just like Heath, disappearing from his life forever. Temporary. The attraction between them was huge, but he knew nothing about the man except that he made an exceptional cappuccino and could bake like a dream. Quin didn't know why that lack of knowledge bothered him so much when he rarely cared to get to know his other bed partners, but it did.

"They say the way to a man's heart is through his stomach." Joe Gibson stopped beside their table and looked down at the cookie thoughtfully. "'Course, if you don't want that cookie, I'm sure someone else will be happy to snatch it up."

Quin didn't doubt Joe's wisdom. Nor was he ignorant to the true message Heath's uncle was trying to convey. If Quin didn't act soon, both the cookie and Heath could be snatched away from him. It was that thought that propelled him up out of the seat, cookie in hand, to stalk the always inappropriate baker. No one was snatching his cookie or Heath before he had a chance to make them permanent in his life.

He called out before Heath could disappear into the kitchen and smirked when everyone turned in shock, including his cowboy. Shock that made Heath oblivious to the kitchen door swinging back on him. It was instinct that had

Quin reaching an arm around him to protect him from the blow. Then Heath buried his face in Quin's neck, breathed deeply, and moaned his name.

"Fuck," Quin bit out, that moan making his balls draw up tight.

"Yes, please." Heath moaned again and rubbed against his chest like a cat. "Do you smell this good everywhere, Quin?"

God help him, but he could not resist this man, couldn't even remember why he was trying. In a lust-induced moment of clarity, Quin knew exactly why he'd only ever played a temporary part in anyone's life. Because he hadn't been interested in someone so deeply on every level that he was willing to fight for more. He wanted to know every part of Heath—his body, his mind, and his heart—not just once and not just until he went back to Texas.

With a handful of golden curls, he tipped Heath's head back and grinned at the look of naked desire on his handsome face. "It would serve you right if I teased you right here in front of everyone."

Despite the hand in his hair, Heath nodded. "I've been so bad. Very bad. Teach me a lesson, Quin."

"So very bad," Quin agreed. His grip tightened a little, and he watched those eyes glaze over. "Do you know how many nights I jerked off thinking about you just like this—your eyes glazed with lust, your curls in my fist? You, on your knees, those plump pink lips parted and slick, just waiting for my cock to slide between them. Do you?"

"As many nights as I've jerked off thinking about being under you. Your big, muscled body pinning me down and big, strong hands holding me tight. Your cock filling me up." Heath pressed closer and whimpered. "You're proportionate, right? Tell me you're proportionate."

"Who knew cowboys had such filthy mouths?" Quin grinned. Did he think he'd have the upper hand just because he could physically overpower Heath? That perfectly dirty mouth was going to have him on his knees if he didn't keep his wits about him. "You want it a little rough, cowboy? Want to feel me pressing you into the mattress? Want to see my fingerprints on your golden skin? I promise I'll more than fill you up, Heath, you'll be feeling me for days."

"When?" Heath swayed and curled strong hands around Quin's upper arms to steady himself. His cowboy was six feet of lean, corded muscle, but his hands didn't quite span the circumference of Quin's biceps. A man tall enough and strong enough that Quin didn't have to fear hurting him, but still small



enough to feed that dominant part of him, was a gift. Those throaty moans and that sexy drawl were a gift. And then there was that cookie.

“You in a rush, Heath? If I dragged you into the kitchen and bent you over the worktable, you’d let me have you, wouldn’t you?” That came out harsher than he intended, but he needed Heath to think about a slow burn, not a flash fire. Those big green eyes blinked up at him, some of the glaze wearing off, and it pissed him off to know he’d shown even a little bit of his insecurity. Preferring the lustful leers over the thoughtful stare, Quin leaned in and pressed his lips to Heath’s ear. “Because I’m not in a rush, Heath. I want to know who you are—the cowboy, the baker, the nephew who came running to his uncle’s aid. If we rush, if we jump into bed, I’ll miss out on knowing who Heath Gibson is and that would be a damn shame. If we rush, skip all the foreplay, I won’t have time to touch and taste, or to learn what you like and what you love. I’ll miss every whimper and moan. I’ll be denied your scream as you come all over us both. I’ll never get to hold you in my arms while you tell me about your hopes and dreams. Wouldn’t you prefer that I take my time with you, Heath?”

“Yes,” Heath croaked and swallowed hard. “I want that so much. Will you give me time with you, Quin? No more games, I suck at them.”

“No more games,” Quin promised before taking a nip of his ear. “Tomorrow, seven sharp, I’ll pick you up. Dress casual, but no shorts.” When Heath nodded, Quin released him slowly, taking care that he was sure on his feet before letting go completely. Then he stepped back, putting some much-needed space between them. Another second of having that body pressed up against his and they were going to test the veracity of the worktable, rushed or not.

“Tomorrow?” Heath chewed on his lower lip and watched every step he took. “Really?”

Seeing that little hint of insecurity in Heath eased Quin’s fears. He nodded and paused midstep. “Yes, unless...”

“I’m good with your job, Detective.” Somehow Heath understood exactly what Quin didn’t want to say—that his job could force him to break his promise. “A quick text is all I ask for, otherwise I’ll worry about you.”

Quin nodded in agreement. If he had to cancel, he would find the time to call Heath. Potential one-night stands got a text if he couldn’t show. Heath Gibson deserved more than that. “I won’t make you worry about me.”

Heath's soft gaze said he already worried, but he didn't say it out loud. "Did you like the cookie?"

It was still carefully cradled in his hand. "If I eat it, will you make me another one?"

"Every day." Heath nodded solemnly. Quin was counting on it.

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## Chapter Four

Heath checked his reflection in the mirror one last time and figured he'd done his best with what he brought with him. The shop kept him busy from the commuter rush in the morning until four in the afternoon. Most nights, while his last crew cleaned the shop, he prepared for the next morning, and they usually didn't officially shut the lights off until after six. After that, he would trudge up the stairs to the little apartment above the shop and settle in for a quiet night. Luckily for him, the previous tenant had packed up and moved out after the shop was robbed, so he wasn't forced to use a room in his uncle's house. He loved the man, but had been on his own too long to want to live with anyone who still thought of him as little Heath.

Maybe it was boring, but after more than a twelve-hour day on his feet, he wasn't looking to go out drinking or dancing. He preferred the quiet of his home, taking the time to prepare a home-cooked meal, and settling in with a good book or a Netflix marathon. Here he was, smack dab in the middle of New York City, and he still hadn't ventured out at all. Truth was, he'd be inclined to venture out on occasion if he had someone to enjoy his time with. The ultimate hope was that he'd find the right person to venture out with, someone who would be just as content with quiet nights at home.

Back home in Texas, few men understood the rigors of his job. How hard could it be to run a coffee shop? Or bake? It wasn't like he was saving lives, wrangling cattle, or protecting the city, after all. They could never understand how he could be tired after being on the run from dawn until dusk, or how a catering job could take over his nights and weekends, or how running a chain of shops could be stressful at all. He was proud of his career, feeding people was fundamentally pleasing, and he couldn't take having that reduced to nothing because a potential boyfriend found him boring.

Until now. If Quin found him boring, he just knew he'd be crushed, but he didn't think that was going to happen. Quin was actually out there protecting the city and he knew all about long hours, canceling plans, and the bliss of a quiet night cuddling on the couch. Heath also didn't think Quin would reduce his career to something less important than being a cop. It was for those reasons that he totally understood Quin's hesitation yesterday.

Who could have guessed a single cookie would produce such an intense reaction in the man? Had he known, he'd have baked one weeks ago. They'd

taken a huge leap together, and he was ready to spend that time Quin promised him. So ready. But if duty called, he could and would definitely be understanding. Being a detective was a part of who Quin was, it wasn't just a job, and he was so proud of him. Was that weird considering they didn't really know each other? Maybe, but it was the truth.

Proud, but willing to be flexible, Heath was definitely pleased that at five minutes to seven Quin still hadn't called to cancel. Heath grabbed his wallet and keys and headed downstairs with more than a little excitement, and was just locking up when he heard the motorcycle come roaring around the corner. Heath felt a lick of anticipation as he turned to watch the bike prowl toward him and ease to a stop at the curb. Even at idle, the throaty purr was sexy as hell. The rider cut the engine and reached up to remove his helmet. He didn't know Quin rode, but he looked damned right straddling that beast.

Heath approached slowly, taking in the vision before him. "You sure know how to make an entrance."

Quin smirked and offered his hand. "Think you can handle it?"

Oh, he was going to handle it just fine. "I'll hang on tight."

"That's the idea." Quin wrapped a hand around his and reeled him in. "First things first."

Quin leaned close, hovered teasingly, before covering Heath's mouth in a leisurely kiss that curled his toes. Heath melted into the kiss, loving the soft feel of Quin's lips against his own, the teasing stroke of a tongue, the unhurried exploration. When Quin eased back and kissed the tip of his nose, Heath thought he might swoon right there on the street. "I thought that happened at the end of the date."

"Couldn't wait that long to taste you." Quin pressed another quick kiss to his lips before releasing him and reaching back into a saddlebag for a second helmet. "It's a shame to cover those curls."

"Does New York have a helmet law?" Heath asked. The helmet was a little big, and with Quin's help, he adjusted the helmet straps until it fit right.

"It does, but more importantly, I don't want anything to happen to you. Feel snug?" When he nodded, too pleased with Quin's desire for him to be safe to respond, Quin patted the second seat. "Throw a leg over."

Heath did as instructed, careful not to kick the saddlebag as he settled on behind Quin. He shifted to make sure he was centered and wrapped his arms around that strong body. "Ready."

The bike came alive beneath him, and he felt another lick of anticipation when Quin reached back, put a big hand on his ass and pulled him in tight. He didn't know where they were going and didn't care. As far as he was concerned, he could ride around all night wrapped around Quin and be content. For the first time, he found something better than a quiet night at home.

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Heath had no clue where they were and still couldn't find it in himself to care. Quin rode north out of the city, and Heath felt himself being able to breathe easier. He'd been so busy that he hadn't really given much thought to the differences between Texas and New York and figured if he thought about it too long, he'd get claustrophobic. Then they crossed a bridge, leaving the hustle of the city behind, and he immediately felt his body relax. If it were possible, he'd hug Quin tighter for thinking of it.

They'd been on the road for about an hour when Quin pulled into a small town and eased the bike down winding roads until they were parked at a waterside restaurant. "I should have asked this first, but do you like seafood? There's another place about fifteen minutes out, one of those farm-to-table types, if you prefer."

"Does it have the same view?" Heath took off his helmet before shaking out his hair.

Quin shook his head. "Nope."

"Then it's a good thing I love seafood." Heath rested his cheek on Quin's back and sighed. He knew he should stand and let Quin get off the bike, but he didn't want to let go. Riding with him had been the best date he'd ever had in his life. "I'm having trouble letting go."

Quin wrapped a hand around his calf and squeezed gently. "If we both didn't have early mornings, I'd be happy to sit here all night."

Heath considered that and knew Quin was right. At least there was still the ride home to look forward to. It was that thought that had Heath standing and looking around as Quin stored the helmets. "Where are we?"

Quin bent over to lock the saddlebags, giving him a great view of his muscled ass encased in tight black denim. The same ass that had been snug between his thighs for the best hour of his life. "Tarrytown, Sleepy Hollow area."

That had him looking up from the gorgeous view. “Like, the *Headless Horseman’s* Sleepy Hollow?”

“Yep. They do the whole thing for Halloween.”

“Will you bring me to see it?” Heath couldn’t hide the excitement if he tried. Halloween was by far his favorite holiday. “I love Halloween.”

“Me too.” Quin brushed a curl from Heath’s eyes and considered him. “Will you still be here for Halloween?”

Heath knew he should play his cards closer to the vest, but he was tired of playing it safe. He was also tired of playing games. Relationships took work, and he was willing to put the effort in for someone who was willing to do the same. “If we’re making a date, then I’ll be here.”

Quin’s grin grew and he teased, “What if we make a date for Halloween twenty years from now?”

“Then I’ll still be here. Are we making that date too?” Heath pulled out his cell phone and scrolled through his calendar. “How about we just make it a standing date, every Halloween for the next twenty or so years?”

“How about we see how this one goes first?” Heath wanted to be disappointed, but Quin was looking at him with affectionate amusement and what looked like hope. His suggestion was logical and right. They needed to know more about each other before they started planning their lives together, didn’t they? “What’s that smile for?”

“Just wondering how soon I can start planning the wedding.” Heath tried to sound like he was teasing, but probably failed miserably. Thankfully, Quin didn’t look terrified by the idea.

Instead Quin laughed and took his hand, tugging him toward the restaurant. “Do you know my parents? They wonder the same thing constantly.”

“Do they know that you’re gay?” He was out and proud, and had never really dated anyone who was in the closet. Hopefully Quin wasn’t going to be his first. That would really put a damper on the wedding plans.

“Sure. Life’s fucked up enough without pretending to be something I’m not.” Quin reached for the door and urged him to go ahead. “How about yours?”

“Yep. They were cool about it until I told them that, even if I found the right guy, I still wasn’t giving them grandbabies. That’s when Mom cried.” Heath grinned at the memory. “I’m one of six, so she’s not suffering from the lack.”

“I think our parents would get along.” Quin winked down at him, and Heath felt his heart beat a little faster. What started out as a joke was taking root faster than he could think. “I’m one of seven kids and there are plenty of grandchildren to start our own little league. Like you, I told them I wasn’t interested in kids of my own. You’d have thought I’d told them Guinness was shutting its brewery, the way they carried on.”

Their combined laughter drew several curious glances as the waitress led them to a table by the windows, but they ignored them. He was on a date with Quin, and before they were even seated, Heath knew that they both had the same outlook on family, marriage, and children. Huge topics that were usually taboo on first dates. Hell, on fifth dates. In fact, Heath couldn’t remember ever having the discussion with any of his previous supposed boyfriends.

He didn’t believe in love at first sight, but technically they’d been doing this dance for a month. With Quin smiling at him across the table, his eyes dark with fondness and desire, Heath decided that was just long enough to start falling.

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## Chapter Five

Quin sipped his coffee and covertly watched Heath walk toward the restroom. Dinner had started off so well that he freaked himself out—even more than during the conversation about marriage and kids. Every topic was seamless, flowing one into the other with an ease he had never experienced before. They didn't always agree, but the heated debates were fun and agreeing to disagree kept them from becoming awkward. The nagging suspicion that it was all too good to be real had him tempering his reactions so as not to appear too eager.

At first Heath didn't seem to notice. Then he looked confused, a little hurt, and eventually eased back a few inches to create a physical distance that matched the one Quin's attitude had caused. By the time the food was put on the table, Quin knew he'd totally blown it. Heath nudged his food around the plate and seemed more interested in the view than anything else. When the waitress came over to ask them if they wanted anything else, Heath jumped at the chance to ask for the check and looked surprised when Quin asked for coffee. That look demanded to know why he was prolonging their nightmare. Quin just didn't know how to explain that he was still trying to figure out how to salvage the mess he'd made.

"You almost ready?" Heath came back and sat on the edge of his seat, his entire posture conveying his desire to run.

"No." Quin was definitely not ready to leave.

Heath looked at him expectantly, and when Quin didn't elaborate, he huffed in annoyance. "I'm not one of those passive-aggressive types, Quin. I'm not going to ask what I did wrong, because I know I didn't do anything. We were having a good time and you freaked. I guess I get it, but you promised me no more games and this is one I'm definitely not interested in playing."

"It's not a game—"

"Bullshit!" Heath hissed. "One second you're talking, laughing, and cracking jokes, and then *bam!* Cold, silent, and indifferent. I may not be some slick, sophisticated city boy, but I'm not some country hick you can toy with."

"I never thought you were," Quin promised. He set his cup down and pushed it aside so he could grab one of Heath's hands. "Listen to me a sec,



okay? You're right, I totally freaked. The whole thing has been so effortless, so easy, like we've known each other forever. I've never had that connection with anyone."

"And your reaction is to cut me off? If that's your reaction to easy conversation, how are you going to react when it's something more?" Heath shook his head in disappointment. "You said you weren't in a rush, that you wanted to take the time to get to know me. That was a lie. You should have rushed, taken me in the back and fucked me over the worktable, instead of getting my hopes up like this."

Quin flinched at having his words tossed back at him like that, but Heath was right to be angry. "Maybe you and every one-night stand I've had are right. Maybe I'm not relationship material."

Heath just rolled his eyes. "Are you expecting me to feel sorry for you, Detective? Because that little pity party you're throwing for yourself is obscene."

When Heath jerked his hand away, Quin let him go. He watched helplessly as Heath grabbed the check and reached for his wallet. Was he throwing himself a pity party? Playing games? Everything about Heath said they had the potential to be more than just fuck buddies, so why was he screwing this up?

Quin grabbed the check out of Heath's hands and tucked it beneath his cup, ignoring the fuming look Heath shot him. "What's waiting for you in Texas?"

Heath folded his arms mutinously and demanded, "What the hell does that mean?"

"A lover, a boyfriend, a job... what's going to take you away from New York?" Quin knew how pathetic that sounded, how it made him look, but the need to know overrode the need to protect his ego. "You said Joe would be back behind the counter soon enough and that Texas was home."

Heath looked at him for a long, silent moment. With his chin high and his shoulders squared off, he looked like a fighter ready for the next round. "Exactly how insecure are you?"

"Because I want to know your plans? Because I want to know if any potential relationship we start already has an expiration date? That's insecure?" It totally was. Quin knew it. Heath knew it. The defensive response was to save face, nothing more.

“Could be the most insecure thing anyone’s ever said in the history of the universe!” Heath flopped back against the seat and eyed him thoughtfully. “You ever been in a relationship, Quin?”

“No. Didn’t I just tell you that?”

“No, you said the guys you fuck told you that you weren’t relationship material.” Heath scrubbed a hand through his curls and looked up at the ceiling as if praying for patience. “And you believed them? Big, strong detective with the NYPD lets some nameless fucks convince him he isn’t a good catch? Doesn’t sound all that secure to me.”

“And you’re so secure?” Quin couldn’t stop the retort if he wanted to. Yeah, he screwed up, but Heath didn’t have to take such delight in pointing it out.

“You know, I never really gave it any thought, but I know who I am and I know what I want.” Heath nodded, grinned, and patted himself on the back. “By comparison, yeah, I’m way more secure than you.”

This was getting them nowhere fast. “I know who I am and what I want.”

Heath leaned forward, got right in his face, and whispered, “I dare you to say it. Admit it out loud. Demand something for yourself. Come on, Quin, who are you? What do you want?”

“I want you.” Quin could have said he was a damned good detective, that he was comfortable in his own skin and with the choices he made in life, and that the only thing missing was a partner to share it with. In the end, all of that boiled down to wanting Heath, so that’s what he said.

Heath waved that off too easily. “You had your chance—”

“You’re still sitting here, aren’t you? I freaked. I panicked and screwed up. Are you going to cut me off for one mistake? How are you going to react when it’s something more?” There was zero satisfaction in throwing Heath’s words back at him. Ultimately, Quin didn’t want to fight with him. He wanted the easy conversation, the agreeing to disagree, and an end to the awkwardness he’d fabricated between them.

Heath sat up slowly and pulled his chair closer to the table. “You know what I was thinking on the ride up here?”

“No.” Quin wasn’t sure he could handle knowing either.

“That this was the best date I’d ever been on.” Heath paused and made sure he was really thinking about that. “One kiss. One hour on your bike. Just being

together. It felt so right, so comfortable. How stupid can I be? Despite all my best efforts, you held on to that silence for a month, so I don't know anything about you. Then you gave me just a little bit of attention and I'm tripping all over myself. I knew it was stupid and dangerous to feel that way about someone who couldn't bother to give me the time of day." Again Heath paused, and Quin could see the regret, that self-recrimination in his eyes. "We were right there, the potential I saw was right there! I could forgive a mistake, Quin, if that's what this was."

"I'm not following." What else was it if not a mistake?

"I don't think you see the potential in me." Heath patted his hand and gave him a sad smile. "And that's okay. See, I want the whole fairy tale. A partnership with the right man. One who sees in me what I see in him. I won't settle for less and neither should you." Heath nodded to himself, as if it was all done and decided.

"You couldn't be more wrong." Quin grabbed both of Heath's hands and squeezed them a little. "You didn't answer my question. What's waiting for you back in Texas?"

Again Heath appraised him, his posture remaining stiff and defensive, but he finally gave in. "No boyfriend, no lover. The family business will always be there if I want to be a part of it. What does that give you, Quin? Relationships are risks, people get together and break up, get married and get divorced. There's no preconceived expiration date. It just happens when couples stop trying."

"You're right. You're absolutely right." The real question wasn't what was waiting for Heath in Texas, it was what would keep him in New York. If Quin wanted to be the reason Heath stayed, he had to start trying, he had to take the risk. "Will you give me a chance to prove that I see the same potential in you that you saw in me?"

"Why should I?" Heath looked away, but Quin was positive he saw a spark of hope in that green gaze.

"Because you're the only man who's ever freaked me out." Quin had no trouble admitting that. The potential with Heath was so huge that he knew it would be devastating if it all went to hell. But was he going to man up and take a risk, or wuss out and run this guy right back to Texas? He was an O'Leary, wasn't he?

## Chapter Six

Heath was just bagging up the last of the bread for City Harvest when he saw the truck pull up to the curb. With Easter and Passover falling on the same weekend, they were swamped with orders, and he feared not having enough left over to give to the local food bank. Thankfully, they had great employees who volunteered to do some extra baking after hours so the shop could give more.

His uncle was thrilled with the increased business and redirected his efforts from getting him to stay so they could open another shop, to getting him to stay so they could expand the bakery business. Wasn't it an amazing coincidence that the storefront next door was available? The problem, if one could call it that, was that Heath could really see the potential. The shop already had a great reputation, and the items he'd introduced since he'd come in always received rave reviews.

If he went back to Texas and got swept back up in the business there, it would mean juggling seven coffeehouses and two dedicated bakeries. Instead of indulging in his passion for baking, he'd have to focus on managing time, employees, vendors, and cash flow. Just because he knew the business inside and out didn't mean he loved it. All that proved was that he'd been doing it so long—practically straight from the damn crib—that it was second nature. No, he wasn't itching to go back to Texas.

A single shop with an adjoining bakery was doable. More than doable once Joe was back on his feet. Double the work, sure, but they could share the load, and he already knew which employees he'd move up the ranks. Joe was old school when it came to sharing the responsibility, but Heath could see who would make good shift managers and, more importantly, who deserved to be. Joe had worked himself into the ground for decades, but Heath knew there was a way to have both a successful business and a happy life.

The only upside about being annoyed with Quin was that he could make his decision without Quin being a factor. It was a little flattering to know he freaked the man out, but it was better to make a business decision without personal feelings muddying the waters. He'd come here for a change of scenery and he could acclimate if he tried. It had great potential, and if he longed for some wide-open spaces, he knew he only had to drive an hour north to find them.

The bell over the door chimed, and he looked up from the last bag he'd filled, a ready smile on his face. Right up until he saw Quin following the regular driver from City Harvest into the shop. Damn but the man was persistent. It was close, but Heath was starting to think Quin was more persistent than him. Deep down, Heath was pleased that Quin hadn't given up. Heath certainly wasn't making it easy.

"Evening, Heath." The driver gave him a friendly smile and took out his form.

"Hey, man, how's it going? I've got ten bags for you tonight." Heath knew the driver's name, but the sight of Quin was messing with the last few remaining brain cells he usually had by the end of the day.

"Ten?" The driver looked up and then around the counter.

"We felt bad for having so little during the week, so we baked up a few batches just for you guys." Heath signed the paperwork and hefted a couple of bags. "Quin, can you give us a hand?"

It might not have been the arms-wide-open greeting Quin was hoping for, but he rushed up to grab some bags. The driver looked between them and shrugged before grabbing a few bags. It was all very efficient, as always, and Heath knew the guy had plenty more stops to make, so it wasn't but a few minutes before he and Quin were standing alone in the shop.

"Can you throw the lock?" Heath called over his shoulder and kept walking toward the counter. He still had a few loose ends to tie up before he could call it quits, and he was tired. Physically tired from the grueling week. Emotionally tired from trying to stand strong against Quin's charms. Mentally tired from being pressured into making a life-changing business decision. There just wasn't a spot on his body, inside or out, that wasn't exhausted.

Quin leaned against the counter and watched him count out the drawer. It was unnerving, and he had to start over twice before Quin's big hand covered his. "Heath, just look at me for a second."

"No, no. I just want to be done with this day... this week! Just look somewhere else and stop trying to make me nervous." It was a mistake to admit that, but Quin had him tied up in knots. Quin wandered around the shop, giving him some much needed space to finish for the night. By the time he'd made two passes, Heath was slipping on his jacket. "Gotta get this to the night drop."

Quin swept his hand toward the door and said, "I'll walk with you."

“Yeah, okay.” The bank was on the corner, less than half a block, and Heath never really worried about walking there alone. Having Quin’s bulk beside him was really doing a number on his head. Quin wasn’t doing anything more than walking, but it felt protective, like he was keeping himself between Heath and anyone else on the street. It was sweet and a little overbearing, but sweet was definitely winning.

By the time he dropped the day’s earnings and they headed back toward the shop, Heath could feel the last bits of his resolve melting away. Quin had pulled out all the stops. There had been candy, flowers, sweet little text messages, and eager requests for a do-over. Quin never seemed to care that they always had an enraptured audience as he bumbled through his attempts at romance. It was adorable, and Heath was totally weakening.

“Chinese?” Quin’s voice broke through his thoughts, and he looked over questioning. “For dinner. You look wiped and I suck in the kitchen.”

“Yeah, Chinese sounds good.” It actually sounded better than good. One of the best things about the city was the ability to have any kind of food you wanted delivered right to your door. He loved to cook and wasn’t surprised that Quin didn’t, but he knew he wasn’t capable of it tonight. “Are you inviting yourself up?”

Quin gave him a piercing look rife with desire and nodded firmly. “Yeah.”

Well, okay then. Heath unlocked the door leading up to his apartment and gestured for Quin to go ahead of him. “Just don’t take advantage of me in my weakened state.”

“There are a lot of ways I want to take advantage of you, but only when you’re in full form,” Quin promised. Heath groaned and then groaned again as he watched Quin’s fine ass move. Walking up the stairs should not be sexy. It was not sexy. How the hell did Quin make it sexy? “Are you staring at my ass, Cowboy?”

“Yeah, it’s a nice ass.” It was the hottest ass he’d ever seen. He just wanted to sink his teeth in and leave a mark. A possessive mark so the next one-night stand to come along would know who Quin belonged to. Then he wanted to sink...

“Just nice?” Quin tried to sound insulted, but Heath could hear the laughter.

He was so not in the right headspace for this. “I thought we agreed there would be no advantage-taking tonight?”

Quin laughed outright. "I'm not the one staring at your ass, baby."

The *baby* did it. Heath wasn't sure where the surge of energy came from, but when they reached the top of the stairs, he pushed Quin up against the wall and grabbed two handfuls of ink-black hair. "You're driving me out of my mind, Detective."

"We can go to the asylum together." Quin leaned down and kissed the corner of his mouth. "You, me, and a padded room so no one can hear you scream when I make you come."

How could anyone make the asylum sound sexy? How? It just wasn't fair. "Shut up, Detective."

"Make me, Cowboy," Quin taunted.

Full form or not, that was a challenge he could not pass up. He jerked Quin down and took that sinful mouth with his own. There was no finesse to it, no gentle coaxing. The need was too great for that. Quin groaned when their tongues clashed and teeth scraped across lips. Strong arms wrapped around his waist, lifting him a few inches off the floor, and then Quin was taking over. Instead of taking the kiss to the next level, Quin eased them down to a gentle caress.

"You're tired and I don't want you to do something you'll regret in the morning," Quin whispered when Heath frowned in confusion. With their foreheads pressed together, he could see the desire in Quin's blue eyes. It would be so easy to get swept away, and he wasn't sure if he was grateful or angry that Quin had the presence of mind to pull back. Heath wanted his man just as turned on, just as out of control, as he felt. If Quin could think logically then they still weren't on the same page. "We were right there together. I promise. Pulling back is killing me, but having you be angry with me again would be worse."

That might have been better than flowers, candy, and all the romantic gestures. "You're buying the Chinese."

Quin laughed and eased him back to his feet. "Deal."

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## Chapter Seven

Quin dug through the cabinets, locating the paper plates and napkins, while Heath went into the bedroom to change. Chinese takeout hadn't been in his plans for the night, but one look at Heath's exhausted face had him rethinking the new steak place the guys at the station had been raving about. He wasn't usually one for fancy restaurants, but he was running out of romantic ideas and had resorted to taking advice from his partner. He should have known better. Anthony got his advice from his wife's *Cosmo* subscription and *Cosmo* was all about setting the stage—wine and dine and all that shit. He wasn't that guy, and he didn't think Heath was either.

With his shoes by the front door, his sleeves rolled up, and the finest paper products laid out on the coffee table in the living room, Quin set a stage he was much more comfortable with. One a tired man who worked crazy hours could appreciate. He went back into the kitchen and found some beer in the fridge—it wasn't Guinness, but Heath could be forgiven for that this time—and set that on the table. Feeling like something was missing, he looked around until he found the TV remote, scrolled to the sports channels and put on the basketball game. Who needed wine and candles when you had beer and the Knicks?

Heath finally came out of the bedroom, and Quin turned to find he'd changed into loose sweatpants and a wife-beater that only accented his muscled body. Quin had more bulk, but the strength and power in those muscles couldn't be denied. Had they been in some fancy restaurant, Quin would have been deprived of seeing them.

"Oh," Heath whispered, looking around the living room, his tired gaze softening some more. "Perfect."

Quin barely resisted the urge to pat himself on the back and was glad when the buzzer rang. "Sit, relax, I'll get the food." He was down and back quickly, and he could feel Heath watching him from where he'd sunk into the couch cushions. "Want a plate or should we just pass the cartons?"

Heath patted the couch and smiled seductively. "You ever get tested?"

Quin frowned thoughtfully. "Regularly, doesn't everyone?"

"Since your last one-night stand?"

Quin still didn't understand the line of questioning. "Yeah, what's that got to do with passing the cartons?"



“Well—” Heath leaned close and licked his ear. “I figure when you stick that big monster cock up my ass, I’d really like it to be bare. Sharing the cartons seems so tame in comparison, doesn’t it?”

He pinned Heath to the couch, diving for his neck until Heath raised his hands in surrender. Quin licked a path to his ear and whispered, “How do you know it’s a big monster cock?”

“Proportionate, remember?” Heath grinned at him when he thrust the carton of General Tso’s chicken into his hands and jammed a set of chopsticks into it. “You trying to tell me to shut up?”

“Yeah.” Quin grabbed a carton of Mongolian beef and settled back on the couch. Keeping his hands off Heath was hard enough without the guy taunting him.

They both focused on the game for a while, and the silence felt comfortable. Companionable. Quin could get used to this at the end of a long day. How many nights did he sit alone in his apartment, watching the game, eating takeout, and wishing someone was sitting beside him? Someone who got his long hours, his need to decompress, and his desire for comfort over contrived. Was that Heath?

“The guys at the station have been raving about this new steak place in Hell’s Kitchen.” Quin kept it casual, just two guys talking, but he really needed confirmation that Heath felt the same way as he did. A nice meal out once in a while was, well, nice, but this right here was so much better. That was just his opinion, but he hoped Heath felt the same way.

“Yeah? Where’s that?” Heath shifted closer. “The shop keeps me pretty busy, so I haven’t really gotten to explore. It’s a little intimidating out there.”

“It can be.” Once again, Quin had to wonder if Heath could be happy in the city. “You just need the right tour guide.”

“Are you signing up for that?” Heath shot him a knowing grin. “So, tell me about this steak place. Is it one of those fancy, dress-up kinda joints? Wait...” Heath sat up and really looked at him. “Is that why you’re all dressed up, Detective? Were you gonna wine and dine me in some fancy steakhouse?”

“It was a thought.” Not a good one, if the look on Heath’s face was any indication.

“Fancy’s for special occasions. Take me for my birthday or something. This right here is more my style.” Heath wrinkled his nose, and Quin couldn’t help but lean in to kiss it. “Is that okay?”

“Better than okay,” Quin promised. Heath looked at him for another second, as if checking to make sure he meant it, before he settled back against the couch. “So, do you have a list of things you want to see?”

“The usual, I guess. That pretty lady in the harbor’s probably at the top. Time Square, Rockefeller, Top of the Rock... all the touristy stuff. Oh, and I heard I have to eat rat on a stick.” Heath glanced over and offered his carton. “It’s not real rat, right?”

Quin swapped out his beef for Heath’s chicken and laughed. “Some of the vendors might be iffy, but I know just the guy.”

“Awesome.” Heath wiggled again and Quin nearly sighed at the feel of that long body pressed against his. “Touring the city and eating from carts sounds like fun. But, uh, we shouldn’t call it a date. Maybe an un-date or something.”

Quin hated to hear that hesitant, almost fearful tone in Heath’s voice. He knew Heath wasn’t afraid of him, just afraid that he’d freak out again. “An un-date sounds perfect.”

They settled into that comfortable silence, and while Quin tried to focus on the game, he really wondered what Heath was thinking. He wasn’t all that good at small talk or getting someone to open up to him. If Heath were a suspect, he’d just use his cop voice on him, maybe back it up with some intimidating hovering or something. But Heath wasn’t a perp, he was the guy Quin wanted in every way. He wanted to hear about his day, his dreams, his goals... he just didn’t know how to start those conversations without sounding like he was reading from some script.

Just when he thought he might have come up with an opening, he felt Heath slump beside him, the nearly empty carton tilting awkwardly from slack hands. Quin eased the carton away, setting it on the table, and encouraged Heath closer.

“Heath? Come on, let’s get you to bed.” As much as he didn’t want this night to end, Heath was exhausted.

Instead of opening his eyes or standing up, Heath wrapped an arm around Quin’s waist and shifted to snuggle against his chest. “M good here.”

“You sure?” Heath nodded, and Quin hoped he was coherent enough to know what he was doing.

Quin settled back into the corner of the couch, and Heath instinctively followed till they were sprawled out together, and Heath’s even breathing

indicated he was asleep. Quin reached up and flicked off the lamp, then lowered the volume on the TV before dragging the throw down from the back of the couch. Heath snuggled in, breathed deep and whispered his name. If there was a more perfect sound, Quin had yet to hear it.

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## Chapter Eight

Heath's decision to stay in New York had been made easier when Joe's oldest son expressed an interest in learning the business. He was only seventeen and hadn't grown up in the shop, but he claimed to be eager to learn. Heath figured if they moved forward and he ultimately couldn't make a home in the Big Apple, at least he would know Joe wouldn't be alone if he left. It took some ruthless self-flagellation, but he managed to keep the Quin-factor to a minimum as he weighed his options and agreed to stay.

In fact, Quin still didn't know he planned to not only stay, but to put down roots by way of becoming an equal partner in the new arrangement. At twenty-seven, with too many years under his belt, the nest egg was just sitting there waiting for the right investment. With the decision made and Joe spearheading the arrangements, Heath was eager to talk to Quin. Truth was, once he forgave Quin for the ruined date, Heath had to face the fact that he'd totally discounted Quin's insecurity about moving forward in a relationship. Practically ridiculed him for it. He'd been unfair, struck out because of hurt feelings, and while he wasn't staying for Quin, he was hopeful Quin would be more secure because he was staying. That tangled web really only made sense in his head, but he was comfortable with it.

That conversation was unfortunately on hold. After their comfortable night in and an equally comfortable morning after, Quin's phone had rung just as Heath was setting a cup of coffee down in front of him. At least he finally knew how his man really liked his coffee—black, sweet, none of that fancy shit—and Heath had to laugh at all the weird flavors Tony had been ordering for his friend. Anyway, the call had come in, and before Quin even answered it, Heath knew it was a case. There was just something in the way his shoulders set and his jaw tensed—it was like watching a teddy bear go feral.

Quin had been pretty scarce ever since, only popping in for a quick hello or shooting off a quick text, and neither of his detectives had been in for afternoon scones all week. Just that morning, Quin practically did a drive-by while he was in the process of opening—grabbing a quick kiss and a cup to go—and Heath barely resisted the urge to tell him to come by that night. Quin looked so exhausted, and he just wanted to wrap him up and give him a place to rest. But he wasn't sure if they were there yet, even if Quin had done just that very thing for him.

“You keep glaring at those papers and they’re going to self-combust in your hands.” Quin’s voice washed over him, and Heath looked up quickly, fearing he’d imagined it. Quin eased into the chair across from him, still looking the worse for wear. “Then my favorite coffee shop would burn down and my favorite barista would be forced to take his scones to New Jersey.”

“I’d never make you chase me to Jersey.” Heath eased the papers aside and reached for Quin’s hands. “You look beat.”

“More than, but we got our guy, so it’s all worth it.” Quin lifted their intertwined hands and kissed Heath’s knuckles, turning his insides to mush. “I’m sorry I haven’t had time to—”

“Stop right there,” Heath ordered. “You never have to apologize to me about your job. Never. In fact, I think I’ll be insulted if you do. Got it?”

Quin shivered visibly and admitted, “Bossy Heath turns me on.”

“Yeah? Then brace yourself.” Good friggin lord, they were seriously gonna burn the place down if they kept up that line of thought. “I’m gonna feed you ’cause you obviously haven’t been eating well. Then you’re gonna go up to my apartment and take a nice hot shower. After that, you’re gonna slip that fine body between my sheets and sleep. I’d prefer you do that naked, but right now I’m more interested in seeing you sleep than I am in seeing your bare ass.”

The look Quin gave him made him wonder if they were going to test the sturdiness of the table between them. “Do I get another scone if I’m a good boy?”

Heath leaned in and shook his head. “I’ll go one better. If you’re a good boy, I’ll give you a glimpse of my bare ass. And, Detective, I have a great ass, so you’re gonna wanna be very good.”

Quin squeezed his hands almost to the point of pain and shook his head as if to clear it. “Damn, Cowboy, you keep talking like that and I’ll forget I’m too tired to get it up.”

Heath just laughed and tugged his hands away. “You’ll get your chance. For now, sit and let me take care of you.”

Heath hurried into the back to make Quin a sandwich, included a cookie, and was back in time to see Quin glancing through his paperwork. It wasn’t exactly the way he envisioned Quin finding out about the partnership, but he couldn’t be angry at Quin for looking. He tried to gauge his reaction as he eased the papers away and put the plate down on the table.

“Sit with me.” Quin nodded toward the chair he’d vacated.

“Only if you promise to eat everything,” Heath countered as he pulled the chair closer.

“I can eat and listen.” As if to illustrate his ability to multitask, Quin picked up his sandwich with one hand and gestured to the agreement with the other.

“Joe made me an offer I can’t refuse.” Quin rolled his eyes when Heath tried for his best New York mobster voice. “Actually, it really is a great offer. Full fifty-fifty partnership. We’re going to expand the shop, open a dedicated bakery next door, increase the breakfast and lunch selections... it’s got a lot of potential.”

Quin nodded slowly, thoughtfully, and pointed out, “You said something about the family business back in Texas.”

“It’s just a grander version of what Joe’s got here. Seven coffee shops that cater to the commuter, breakfast and lunch crowds, as well as two dedicated bakeries. I grew up working every angle from the kitchen to the counter to the business end.” Heath shrugged. It’s what he knew, what he was good at. “It’s a good fit for me, you know? I like feeding people. But all those balls to juggle is a lot. Doing this, a bakery side by side with a shop, lets me dedicate most of my focus on what I love. Being in the kitchen, baking. The business end will still be there, but it won’t be as overwhelming as nine locations.”

“And your family back home is good with you walking away permanently?” Quin tried to sound casual, but Heath could see how pleased he was.

“Remember all those siblings? We were all groomed from the cradle. They grumbled a bit, but in the end there are plenty of them there.” Again Heath shrugged. They were a pretty close-knit family and he loved them, but he was ready to spread his wings and knew they would never try to hold him back. If he got a yearning for home, he knew he could always visit. “Anyway, Joe’s kids are younger and they didn’t grow up in the business like we did. If they decide to learn it someday, we’ll be happy to have them join us. Then we can start looking at secondary locations.”

“You always impress me, Heath.” Quin pushed aside his empty plate. “Always.”

That warmed him more than he could express. “I do try, Detective. Now, impress me and show me you can follow orders instead of just giving them.”

Quin let him lead the way up to the apartment and stood silently as he unlocked it. Only when the door swung in did he ask, “Do I get a good-night kiss? I ate all my lunch.”

Heath sighed dramatically and nodded. “Just one, but no tongue. One of us needs to keep their brains intact.”

Quin leaned in and pressed a chaste kiss to his lips, then ruined it by nipping his bottom lip just enough to make him groan. “Don’t work too hard, Cowboy.”

Heath nudged him inside and started to pull the door closed. “Sweet dreams, Detective.”

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## Chapter Nine

Quin stretched and sighed when he felt the warm body nestled in his arms. He wasn't sure how long he had slept, but he was happy to know he hadn't dreamt being in Heath's bed. No one had taken such good care of him since he'd moved out of his parents' house, and he liked it, wanted more of it, but that wasn't surprising. When it came to Heath, wanting more was the norm.

He blinked a few times and glanced around until he found the clock on the cable box. Sunlight was peeking through the blinds, and the clock said it was after seven. At least two hours after Heath was normally opening the shop below. As wonderful as Heath felt in his arms, he hated the idea that he'd made him late.

"Heath." Quin nudged him, then groaned when Heath shifted to press closer, forcing him to notice that they were both naked beneath the sheets. He had been dead to the world when Heath came to bed, and missed the show. "Heath? Baby? You're late for work."

Heath buried his face in Quin's neck and shook his head, that wild tangle of curls tickling his chin. "Am not."

Quin laughed and swept those curls back, urging Heath to look at him. "What's that mean?"

Heath grumbled and opened one eye. "It means I got the weekend off."

Since Quin knew Heath had been working seven days a week since he arrived, he had to ask, "Who's watching the shop?"

Heath climbed on top of him and stretched out, obviously intent on using him as a pillow. "Uncle Joe was milking his injury so I'd agree to the partnership. The old bastard tossed away his cane and did a little two-step when I signed on the dotted line."

"Sneaky. I like it." Speaking of sneaky, Quin skated his palms down Heath's back and got two handfuls of firm, round ass. "I was a good boy."

Heath lifted his head again and propped his chin on Quin's chest. Quin bit back a groan when Heath's curious fingers began toying with his nipple piercing. "Yeah, you were, and you slept like fifteen or sixteen hours. Guess that means you're raring to go."



Quin squeezed that perfect ass and pressed their groins together. “There’s only one place I want to go. Need to go. You did promise I’d get to see your ass if I was good.”

One side of Heath’s lips tipped up in a sexy smirk. “Is that all you want to see, Quin?”

Quin rolled them over, and Heath spread his legs, giving him the perfect place to settle. It didn’t escape his notice how well they fit together. “I want to see everything.” Quin leaned down and took Heath’s full lower lip between his own, savored it, before moving away to lick a path across his stubble-roughened jaw. “Taste everything.” Heath shivered and moaned beneath him when he teased his ear. Quin wanted to discover every spot that would get that reaction. “Learn every inch of you.”

“Okay,” Heath whispered. “You convinced me.”

Quin laughed, something he couldn’t ever remember doing in bed with another man. “What did it for you?”

Heath lifted his hips to rub their cocks together. “It was your massive, uh, charms.”

Quin laughed again and lifted his head. “Have I ever told you how much I like you?”

The surprise that filled Heath’s face matched his own. He wanted Heath, could see the potential future they could have together and might even be falling in love with him. But at the core of it, he really liked everything about Heath. How many couples did he know who were explosive together, passionate for each other, *in love*, that didn’t seem to really like one another?

“I really like you too, Quin.” Strong hands cupped his face and brought him down for a gentle kiss. It was a really tender moment, probably the first he’d ever experienced with a lover, and he was glad it was with Heath. If it felt a little strange, he could chalk that up to relationship inexperience. Unfortunately, as they gazed adoringly at each other, Heath saw his growing discomfort clearly. And had no trouble calling him on it. “Too sweet for you, huh?”

“Yeah, uh, no, I mean...” Quin shook his head when Heath laughed at him. Was it any wonder no one else would put up with him? “Baby steps.”

“It was actually a pretty big leap for both of us, Detective.” Heath shifted, wrapped him up in long limbs, and sighed. “Now, let’s take another leap together.”

The fact that Heath saw through all his bullshit and refused to let it pile up between them was yet another thing to like about the man. In fact, Quin thought it deserved a reward. An oral reward. “You took care of me last night, now lay back and let me return the favor.”

“Oooo, Bossy Quin turns me on.” Heath shivered and sprawled out beneath him, arms and legs spread.

Quin wrapped a sure hand around Heath’s cock, squeezed, and was pleased to see desire overtake the amusement. That was more like it. He continued to stroke and squeeze, his pace slow and torturous as he set about learning all of Heath’s secrets. The spot just below Heath’s left ear was more responsive than the same spot below his right. His neck was more ticklish than erogenous, and his nipples were the most sensitive Quin had ever encountered on a man. He paused there, licking and sucking, then raking his teeth over the hardened peaks until Heath was trembling and begging beneath him. Finally he relented, mapping the defined core muscles and finding more ticklish spots. As often as Heath had him off-kilter, knowing them was going to be a handy tool in his arsenal.

“Quin, you’re killing me,” Heath whispered, trembling.

“You’re always in a rush.” Quin licked up a drop of precum and moaned as the taste exploded on his tongue. “Delicacies are to be savored, don’t you know that?”

“Am I...” Heath stuttered as he took another taste. “Am I a delicacy?”

“You’re fucking delicious,” Quin promised before he swallowed Heath whole. He’d teased, tickled, and tormented; now he just wanted to devour. Heath jerked beneath him, finishing the ride down his throat with a satisfying scream.

“Fuck... fuck... don’t you have a gag reflex?” Heath writhed and bucked instinctively. Quin didn’t, and he was too busy driving Heath out of his mind to answer. Heath grabbed Quin’s hair with both hands, tugged, and then screamed again when Quin swallowed around the head of his cock. “Holy... you motherfucker... you made me wait for... no, no, don’t make me come yet... please, want to... with you... QUIN!”

Quin eased back and grinned up at Heath’s dazed expression. “I love how responsive you are.” He nuzzled Heath’s balls and waited for some sign that he was coherent again before he ordered, “Roll over. I need to see that ass.”

He rose up on his knees and watched Heath flip over for him. His cowboy was stunning from any side, his cock delicious, but that aforementioned *great ass* was a work of art. Firm, round, squeezable, fuckable, bitable... perfect. Heath knew it and wiggled it in invitation before throwing a smug look over his shoulder. "You gonna stare at it all day, Detective? 'Cause it ain't gonna fuck itself."

"That dirty mouth ever get you in trouble, Cowboy?" Quin shook his head. Every time he thought he'd gained control of this seduction, Heath ripped it right out from under him.

"Only the very best kind." Heath rested his head on his folded hands and sighed. "Rock your world, Quin."

Was that a challenge? It sounded like a challenge. He filled his palms with those firm globes, squeezed, parted and leaned over for another taste. There, that was better. Moaning and gasping was so much better than smug and taunting. As he licked and sucked his way inside, Heath rocked beneath him, begging for more. "Lube?"

Heath flung out an arm and pointed to the end table. When Quin pulled out a bottle of lube and a box of condoms, those blond curls popped up again. That's when he remembered what Heath said about going bare. He didn't want to ruin the mood, but he had to point out, "Sharing a carton of Chinese food is not exactly like having unprotected sex and you didn't ask me what the results were."

"Fair enough, but you didn't ask me if I got tested regularly," Heath countered.

"I'm clean, do you need to see the results?"

Heath reached over and grabbed the condoms, tossing them back in the drawer. "I'm clean and I haven't had sex in a year. If you don't put that monster cock in my ass soon, I'm gonna tackle you to the bed and take it. Willing or not."

Quin did some tackling of his own, pinning Heath down with one hand and slicking him up with the other. "You just love to push me, don't you?"

Heath pushed back against his fingers, his body relaxed and open for him. "It's my new favorite pastime."

Quin smacked that perfect butt, got into position and thrust just enough for the head of his cock to breach Heath's body. "You're my new favorite pastime."

Heath looked over his shoulder, surprise and pleasure on his handsome face, and Quin thrust deep. It was absolute fucking perfection. The heat, the grip, and that gorgeous face tilted toward him while he filled Heath up. He slid his arms beneath Heath to grip his shoulders and dragged him up until they were both on their knees.

“Quin...”

Whatever Heath was going to say died suddenly when Quin wrapped one hand around his cock and grabbed a fistful of golden curls with the other. He tugged until he was a breath from Heath’s mouth and whispered, “Ready?”

Heath nodded and strong hands reached back to grab his hips. Quin couldn’t wait another second. He slammed his mouth over Heath’s, driving deep to match the hard driving thrust of his cock and the brutal stroke of his hand. Heath accepted all of it in that deliciously responsive way. Rocking and whimpering and moaning and just feeding every one of Quin’s needs until it all coalesced into a feeling so complete it stole his breath.

He pushed Heath down, blanketed his body, pinning him just as he promised he would. “We’re right there, Heath.”

“Yes.” Heath nodded, and a tear slipped from the corner of his eye. “Are you with me?”

“Yes, and I’m not going anywhere.” It was a promise, another first for him, but he knew when it came to Heath, he’d be experiencing them for a long time. Heath nodded again, and Quin picked up the pace, galloping them toward the finish line. No, the start line. They’d been inching toward it for weeks, both testing the other’s readiness, both seeing the potential.

The feelings raced up his spine, so many he couldn’t name them, and Quin felt an answering shiver from Heath. “Fly with me, Quin.”

And he did. No hesitation, no fear. He just flew, and he knew Heath would be there to catch him. That they would be there to catch each other.

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## Epilogue

### *One Year Later*

“Heath, there’s an irate customer out here demanding to talk to you!” Tina yelled from the kitchen doorway, and Heath glanced up in surprise. An irate customer? As he removed his apron and dusted off his clothes, he tried to remember if there had been a problem with any of their recent orders. No one was perfect, but the business had hit its stride and he had a solid team working for him. After a few bumps in the road, he could honestly say that all the feedback had been positive.

Heath followed her through the bakery and toward the adjoining shop. “Do you know who he is?”

“Yeah, I’ve seen him a few times. One of them big, intimidating types who think they can just throw their bulk around and lil ol’ Tina here’s gonna cower in the corner.” She tossed her head and rolled her eyes. “Tina don’t cower.”

No, Heath couldn’t even imagine her pretending to try. Irate or not, Heath wouldn’t stand for a customer trying to intimidate one of his employees. That shit just wouldn’t fly with him. They crossed through the new archway between the shop and the bakery, and he squared his shoulders in preparation for battle. “Where is he?”

“That’s the bastard, right there!” Tina pointed, and Heath followed the direction of her hand.

If asked later, Heath would swear that time stood still so he could capture every nuance of the vision before him. Quin was standing in the center of the newly renovated coffee shop, in nearly the exact spot where he’d stood in the old coffee shop when Quin said his name for the first time. Quin had been wearing dark jeans and a button-down with the sleeves rolled up then. But now all those beautiful muscles were draped in a tailored tux—if he had to be specific, he’d call it charcoal—a light gray dress shirt and, of all things, a pink bow tie. *Pink*.

Subconsciously, he knew that they had an audience. The employees and customers had had a ringside seat to the evolution of their love story, and on some level had become invested in their happily ever after. Quin knew it too. Why else would Quin decide to do this here?

They also both knew he was totally swooning on the inside, but it wouldn't be the Heath and Quin show if he didn't play his part. "Detective, did I forget the officer's ball?"

"As much fun as that sounds, this'll be better. I have a proposal for you, Cowboy." Quin crooked a finger, motioning him forward, and Heath's feet responded instantly. His heart fluttered, and a murmur went through the crowd when Quin got down on bended knee and opened his hand. There, resting in the palm was a pair of rings. Intertwined cookie rings, of course, and one Heath had thought he was making for a customer. Apparently it was for his most favorite customer of all. "Will you, Heath Gibson, do me the honor of entering into a co-op agreement with me in Lenox Hill?"

Oh, how well his detective knew him. They'd been looking at places together, having agreed that they spent so much time in each other's apartments that they might as well make it official. The co-op in Lenox Hill wasn't too far from his work or Quin's, the neighborhood was quiet and friendly, and he'd really fallen in love with the unit they'd seen. But Heath knew the proposal was for more than a fancy address on the Upper West Side. Marriage would come, joint investments, family gatherings—the whole shebang—but the proposal was perfectly them. And it meant their offer on the apartment had been accepted. "Can you throw in a puppy?"

Quin sighed dramatically and rolled his eyes. "Not one of those annoying ankle biters."

Heath couldn't resist leaning down for a kiss. The love that shone up at him from those deep-blue eyes was more than he'd ever hoped for. He couldn't have guessed when he agreed to come to the big city to help Joe that he would find the love of his life. "I like you so very much, Detective. Of course, I'll enter into a co-op agreement with you."

"I like you too, Cowboy," Quin promised. "More than I ever thought possible."

Quin stood and offered him the cookie. He bit off exactly half and held the other half up for Quin to eat. It was damn near perfect. "Now kiss me."

As Quin swept him close and covered his mouth, their audience erupted into applause. He felt Quin smile, felt the tremble in his shoulders as he tried to hold in his laughter, and then they both lost it. Their friends converged on them, showering them with well wishes and hugs, until Quin started tugging him toward the door. "Come on, Cowboy. You got the weekend off and we still have some negotiating to do."

Heath felt around on the bed next to him and frowned. Quin was a big-time cuddler, and mornings usually found him surrounded by Quin's heat. After the surprise at the shop, Quin ushered him out to his bike and they'd ridden up north to the little B&B they liked in Sleepy Hollow. They'd become regulars in the past year and Quin must have clued the owners in, because they'd been given the unofficial honeymoon suite, complete with a hot tub on the private porch. The old couple who ran the place gave them a knowing wink along with the key and promised to hold breakfast if they wanted to sleep in. Everyone, it seemed, was rooting for them.

"Quin?" He pushed himself up against the headboard and rubbed the sleep out of his eyes. They'd *negotiated* the finer points of their *agreement* until the wee hours of morning, so he doubted Quin had much of a head start on him. The bathroom appeared to be empty, and Quin's tux was still in a heap on the floor. "Detective, are we really playing hide and seek? I need coffee first."

That got an interesting response. Not a verbal one, but more like the rippling of water. Heath slipped from the bed, padded to the door leading to the porch and peeked out curiously. Twice in two days Quin had left him breathless. He honestly didn't think anything could top Quin in a tux, on one knee, proposing with cookie rings. But he was wrong. So wonderfully wrong.

Quin in a hot tub—with a cowboy hat pulled low over his face, a coffee mug in hand, and a curtain of steam between them—was the hottest thing he'd ever seen in his life. Heath eased the door open and Quin slowly lifted his head, ramping up the anticipation as he neared the hot tub. Heath climbed in, hyperaware of Quin watching his every move, and floated through the water until he was straddling his fiancé's lap. Quin adjusted to make room as he cuddled in and whispered, "You really do know the way to my heart, Detective."

Quin leaned down, the brim of the cowboy hat hiding them both as they kissed, and it was sexy as hell. Then he eased back and offered up the coffee mug. "With a hint of French vanilla, just like you like it."

With a weekend of heavy negotiations ahead of them and a lifetime of adventures to look forward to, a little morning coffee in the hot tub was the perfect way to kick things off right.

**The End**

## Author Bio

*“Wearer of Many Hats” is a title that was given to Jessie G by a former employer some twenty years ago. This dubious distinction, along with the job description “everything is her fault”, came after she fixed an electrical problem—during her interview—that the office had been having for years. After that, if anything went wrong, her coworkers immediately declared it her fault so she’d have to fix it. This position of importance inspired the owner to convert a closet into an office, thereby providing her coworkers endless opportunities to refer to her as “the girl in the closet”.*

*Today, Jessie is still the “Wearer of Many Hats”, and her family has readily jumped on the “everything is her fault” bandwagon. Most mornings start at five a.m., when she stumbles into her home office (which is a step or two up from a closet) to tackle her personal email, watch gay porn, and satisfy her Trivia Crack addiction. By six, she’s caffeinated and ready to take on the world. Wearing her favorite red power nightgown, she expertly designs websites, provides SEO and social media services, freelances as a bookkeeper, cooks, cleans and writes.*

*Writing has been the elusive, life-long goal that seemed to be getting further away as the years went by. It took thirty-plus years to achieve, but she’s decided that timing is everything. The world wasn’t ready for m/m romance back then, and now that it is, the girl in the closet has finally found her writing home.*

*Jessie is a firm believer in marriage equality, love at first sight, power dynamics, and happily ever after. She’s a lover of strong secondary characters and series filled with families, biological or chosen. All are themes you’ll find in her books.*

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