

Wouldn't You Like to Know?

*A Party Plot* short story

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Author's Note:

If you enjoyed this story and want to see what happens when Laurel and Casey meet up again, please check out their full-length book, *The Party Plot*, available on Kindle Unlimited and in paperback.

Content warnings:

- Explicit content
- Mild spanking/bdsm

Laurel had been stateside for less than eight hours, and he was already regretting it. He'd gotten off the plane to three voicemails from his mom, and since then, a host of text messages had accumulated to supplement them. Why couldn't he come home, just for a bit? It was only a hop, skip, and a jump away from Vegas by plane (it really wasn't; he'd have to fly into Atlanta and rent a car, but inconveniences only existed when they inconvenienced Denise). He had promised to see her when he returned from Belgium, but now she was pushing for him to come to Bonard before he saw his dad. And if he did, she'd regale him with stories about their miserable marriage, poisoning the visit before it even began.

So, he would stick to the feeble boundary he'd set. Which meant ignoring his phone, somehow.

Of course, a real boundary would have been not telling her he was going to be in the US at all. Or just avoiding the little town of Bonard altogether, like the plague sore on South Carolina's coastline that it was.

But then he'd be abandoning Melody, too. And Chip, and Jasper, his mom's long-suffering basset hound, and—

And, and, and.

Laurel downed the rest of his drink. God, he was in a terrible mood. Chalk it up to the jet lag. He had honestly been looking forward to Las Vegas, as much as one could look forward to the place. He didn't gamble much, but he would happily take in several shows and demolish a bottomless brunch. If he felt up to it, he might go to some of the dive-ier old casinos off the Strip, or check out that little hole-in-the-wall family-run Thai restaurant that had been featured on *Parts Unknown*. There was a grimy, over-the-top opulence to the place that he found strangely endearing, which was why he had booked the long layover in the first place. But the neon lights and jellyfish tanks weren't doing it for him right now, and the Venetian was hardly impressive when you had actually been to Venice; in fact, none of it was impressive when you had seen the real Eiffel Tower, and Rome, and the Pyramids—

Jesus Christ, he was unbearable. He had to get out of his own head.

Laurel looked around the room, hoping for a distraction. Like many of the luxury hotels on the Strip, this one had a casino bar, all wood paneling and glowing bottles juxtaposed with a chaotic array of ringing, dinging slot machines and video poker kiosks. Somewhere behind him were roulette and blackjack tables, but the overall vibe was less James Bond and more roadside attraction. He really had no desire to sit and feed money into a glowing box, watching cherries and dollar signs dance across the screen. What he really wanted was a nap, but he'd never been able to sleep after arriving in a new place. Even if Las Vegas wasn't exactly new. No, he needed something to occupy his antic brain. He needed company, someone to talk to. He needed—

Oh, God.

*That* was what he needed.

The man across the bar was slim, broad-shouldered, his bleach-blond hair glowing in the dim light. He was hunched over his drink, but he looked tall, even from here. A tan hand on a frosted glass, long fingers, the flash of a sharp cheekbone and jaw. That was apparently all it took to send shivers through Laurel's thighs and heat flashing across his face, his neck, his collarbone. It had been a long time since someone had made him physically react like that.

Without allowing himself to think about it, he got up.

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"You look like you could ruin my life."

Annoyance prickled down Casey's spine when he realized the man was speaking to him. And not just that; he'd apparently invited himself to sit down, settling onto the stool next door, his knee nearly grazing Casey's leg, his body radiating heat and a muddled scent of sweat and cologne. It was—not unpleasant, settling in Casey's sinuses, on his tongue, awakening a primal little itch in the back of his head.

But, for fuck's sake. He really didn't want to be bothered, or noticed. He had come here for anonymity, not to get aggressively hit on by some asshole. He raised his eyes, meaning to tell the guy off, and—

*Oh, Goddamit.*

He was stunning.

No, not stunning, Casey amended, trying to ignore the sudden dryness in his mouth, the way his pulse had picked up. Just okay. Cute, or whatever. Rumpled brown hair, freckles, a band of sunburn across his nose and cheeks. A wide, disarming smile that made Casey's stomach drop, and an expensive outfit that he wore like he couldn't care less about it. Casey had based his livelihood around making snap judgments about people, reducing them to their tropes and vulnerabilities, and his mind automatically categorized this man as rich. *Rich*-rich; there might as well have been a neon sign, like the ones in the casino behind

them, flashing above his head. There was a smooth, easy arrogance to the way he held himself, like he belonged here, like he'd never missed a meal or gotten a charity basket from the local church for Christmas. He came from money, and not flashy, new money, either, not like the people in LA that Casey had been accustomed to dealing with, who collected jewels and cars and botox like they could take it with them into the afterlife. No, this guy had so much money that it was just a given fact, not something to show off.

Casey hated him immediately.

He looked the man up and down, carefully, keeping his face cold. "Looking at you? I think I might want to."

He hadn't meant for it to sound so—so like a suggestion, or a promise, but the man scooted closer, his smile widening. One of his canine teeth was longer than the other, catching on his bottom, lip, and the indentation it left in his soft, pink skin made Casey feel a little crazy. His hand was resting on the bar, smooth and manicured and—Casey couldn't help but notice—ringless. Casey didn't have much of a moral code to speak of, but he respected himself too much to get involved with married men.

But nobody was getting *involved* with anyone, anyway. This guy was an inconvenience, and nothing was going to happen.

Even though he was close enough to touch, close enough that Casey could let his hand travel up the man's thigh, thick and defined even through his slacks, could let one of his fingers hook through the man's belt loop and yank him closer and—

His tie was an ugly pistachio shade that didn't go with his jacket. And who even wore a jacket and tie in a casino anymore? Old money douchebags, that was who. Casey chose to focus on that, over the heat pounding in his head.

"What's your name?"

Casey frowned. He was still settling into this new name, this new identity, *Casey Bright*, constructed before he'd fled LA, and he didn't want to give it to anyone yet. He cleared his throat. "You don't need to know my name."

"Oh no? Are you a spy, or something?"

"No. Are you a hooker?"

To his surprise, the man laughed. He had a great laugh, sun-soaked and easy, completely uninhibited. "No, just a very lonely boy. But if I were, you wouldn't be able to afford me." And he winked, which was just—awful, and made all sorts of hot, electric things happen to Casey's dick.

He pinched the bridge of his nose. "Well, go be lonely somewhere else," he said. "I'm not interested in company."

The guy ignored him. "You know, I kind of like it. No names, no strings. Just two ships passing in the night. Very clandestine and mysterious. Kind of fits the overall ambiance, don't you think? It's like a Frank Sinatra song."

Great. Apparently he loved to hear himself talk, on top of everything else. "Didn't I just tell you to go away?"

"Oh, come on. I thought you wanted to ruin my life."

Casey looked him over again, gaze lingering on his eyes, his lips, his throat. There were even freckles on the skin over his Adam's apple. "Or something."

"Well let me at least get you a drink. What are you having?"

"Diet Coke," Casey said flatly.

"Diet? That sounds abysmal."

*Abysmal?* Who even used words like that? Casey, apparently, because he fired back: "What's abysmal is your tie."

"Is it?" Again, he didn't seem offended. In fact, he almost seemed to enjoy the insult, eyes sparkling, that one tooth digging deeper into his lip. "I thought it had panache. Can't I get you something stronger? Top shelf, whatever you want."

It might be easier to have a drink. It might lessen the tingling in his fingers, slow his heartbeat. Or it might make things worse. "No," Casey heard himself say. "I think I need a clear head around you."

"Well. I'm flattered. Must be my intense animal magnetism."

He had an accent, Casey realized. Just a slight one, the hint of something dreamy and Southern, only coming out on certain words, but it brought a vicious little torrent of memories to the forefront of his brain. Memories of boys, boys in rowing blazers, boys with nice cars, boys who had come to the McDonald's he'd worked at as a teen and always trashed their table, because why wouldn't they, because they owned everything and never had to clean up after themselves. None of them had spared him, with his acne-studded skin and mop of messy black hair, a single look.

*But you're looking now.*

"Yeah, no." Casey wasn't sure who he was saying it to, himself or the stranger.

"No? Must be something else keeping you here, then."

Casey gestured to his drink. "The only thing keeping me here is the rest of this. And then I'm going to get up, go to a different bar, and forget you ever existed."

"Are you?" The man leaned forward, elbows on the counter. "Let's see. I can wait."

Casey rolled his eyes. "Take the hint, man. I can tell you weren't raised right. No one ever told you no, or spanked you enough."

"Maybe you should make up for it." He said it with light innocence, but the words sent a wave of electricity through Casey, so intense that his fingers stuttered on his glass and whatever jagged little comment he'd had prepared got caught in his throat. He coughed.

"You know." The man shrugged. "If you're into that."

Oh, he was into it. A steamy, obscene blur of images paraded behind his eyes. This man, face down, ass up, hair a mess. What would he look like naked? Was the nape of his neck freckled? The small of his back? Would his ass cheeks get as red as his face when—

Casey pinched the bridge of his nose. His fingertips were cold, and he prayed some of the coolness would seep into his brain. "Look," he said. What would be more satisfying? Telling this guy off? Teaching him that he couldn't always get what he wanted? Or...

*Or making sure he'll never forget me?*

"I think I've made it clear I want nothing to do with you," Casey said, but it didn't sound very clear to his own ears, or very convincing.

"Okay. Finish your Diet Coke, then. Move along."

"I was here first. You move along."

"Yeah, I don't think I will." He moved a little closer, gaze fixed on Casey's. God, his eyelashes were long, casting crescents of shadow onto his cheeks. Casey could almost feel the individual particles of air between their legs under the bar. "I'm comfortable right where I am."

God, it would be nice to make him uncomfortable, to make him squirm, to wipe that self-assured grin off his face.

"The longer you stay here, the more I hate you," Casey said.

"Hate me? You don't even know me."

"I think I know enough. You're spoiled. You think you're smart. An Ivy League fuckboy with money to burn."

"God, you have such a beautiful way with words." The man propped his chin up on one hand, looking entranced.

"I'm serious."

"I bet I could get you to like me. At least for a night."

Without thinking about it, Casey's hand was on the other man's knee, thumb tracing slow circles. He wasn't sure how it had happened, but it felt too nice to stop. "I think I'd like you more if you stopped talking," he murmured.

The man blushed charmingly, red spreading down his neck and beneath his collar. "Well, damn. Should I just skip the pleasantries and tell you my room number, then? I've got a suite."

"Of course you do." *Asshole*. Casey wondered how far the red went. Wondered what it would be like to trace the path of the blush with his tongue while the man writhed and gasped.

Fuck it. Fine. Why not find out? It wasn't like they'd ever see each other again. Casey's head was buzzing, and there was a taste like ozone in the back of his throat. He had always wanted boys like this, after all. In school, across the room at parties, lust and envy making a strange brew in his gut. The guy looked to be about the same age as Casey, but it was easy to think of him as a boy. There was something youthful and unstained about him, just like there was about all of them. Life hadn't touched him, except to shower him in blessings and undeserved confidence, and Casey wanted it. Wanted to bask in it, or ruin it, or both.

"One night." He dug his fingers into the man's leg, hard enough to hurt, and a hot little *oh* escaped his mouth as Casey's lips brushed his ear. "Whatever I want, like you said."

Laurel was in over his head. Off the rails, down the rabbithole, through the looking glass and out the other side, and he was honestly pretty delighted about it.

He wasn't sure what he had expected, approaching the mystery man at the bar. Maybe some light flirtation, maybe a quick hookup in the casino bathroom, but whatever he'd been expecting, it wasn't this. They were standing side-by-side, watching the lit elevator buttons slowly, agonizingly tick their way upward, and Laurel's entire body was buzzing like he was made of pop rocks and Coke. A snippet of the lyrics from *Hey, Big Spender* was running on loop through his head, had been ever since the man had suggested he was a hooker—which really should have been offensive, as should half the other things he'd said (seriously though, what was wrong with his tie? It was a nice, unremarkable medium color of some kind). This guy seemed to loathe him, and Laurel was oddly excited about it, which was maybe a little pathological and something he should deal with—

Later, he told himself, sneaking a glance at the other man. That little scrap of music spun up again: *good-looking, so refined. And wouldn't you like to know what's going on in my mind?*

Of course, he hadn't actually gotten to sing any of the song when it had been included in his high school musical revue years ago; that performance had been female-only, which had seemed a little reductive for a teacher as progressive as Mr. Petrowski, but had probably been the work of the school board, who apparently had no problem with a bunch of teenage girls singing about turning tricks, but God forbid any boys should—

On second thought, maybe it was for the best that the man couldn't tell what was going on in his mind. He was nervous; his thoughts were skittering from topic to topic like water droplets in a hot pan.

Laurel cleared his throat. "Long elevator ride," he said.

"Yeah, well. Somebody has a *suite*." The man made it sound like an unfortunate disease.

"Some of us like a little space to stretch out after a long trip. A bit of luxury after being crammed into a narrow airplane seat. You can't fault me for—"

"Didn't I tell you to stop talking?"

And then he couldn't talk anyway, because he'd been slammed up against the elevator wall and the man's mouth was on his, his hand anchored in Laurel's hair, and Laurel was glad that whatever cheeky little no-strings, no-names agreement they'd come to apparently didn't include no kissing, because God, this guy could *kiss*. Laurel saw stars; he saw the two of them, briefly, in the mirrored ceiling, the man's lips on his throat, his own expression a shameless look of dazed lust, and then it was back to darkness and sweet heat as their lips met again, the man's tongue invading his mouth, flicking against his own, at once soft and forceful, insistent and languid. He kissed Laurel like he owned every inch of him, like he knew exactly what they both needed but was in no hurry to get there. Laurel



could hear himself making little whimpers, hear the metallic clash of their belt buckles scraping as the man dug his fingers into Laurel's ass, pulling him closer.

He didn't care if anyone else got into the elevator. He didn't care if the cables snapped and the whole thing fell into the basement, or if the building dissolved around them; all he cared about was the hard press of the other man's erection against his through their pants, so achingly, tauntingly close. His lips weren't enough, and Laurel was yanking the man's shirt untucked, tasting the smooth skin of his lower belly, kissing a line along his fly, the marble floor cold under his knees. He barely even knew how he had gotten here. His heart was pounding in his ears, and he felt drunk, a liquid urgency flowing through his veins. He was fumbling with the stranger's belt, had it undone, and the need to taste him was almost primal, a craving, his tongue feeling heavy, his mouth watering.

The ding of a bell came from somewhere, dimly. The man was pulling him up by the lapels of his jacket, and somehow Laurel found his feet again and they scrambled out into the hall. He heard the scuff of feet, and an embarrassed giggle from far off. Had someone seen them? He wondered what they must look like, faces flushed, buttons undone, too caught up in each other to care about anything else. The image sent a shiver of adrenaline through him, a tingling sensation starting up in his fingertips.

"Jesus, you're desperate." Somehow they had made it into the hotel room. Laurel couldn't remember getting his key card out. His thumbs were hooked under the man's waistband, his mouth trailing kisses along the line of his neck, his jaw, his earlobe. "Are you in some kind of hurry?"

"No, I—yes, I—" Laurel could feel the heat rising in his face. "Look, I want your dick in my mouth. Is that too much to ask?"

A surprised laugh. "I mean. When you put it so nicely." There was a sofa in the front room, and Laurel pushed him down onto it. The stranger's eyes were sparkling with amusement, but they changed as Laurel knelt before him, flooding with velvet heat. His expression stayed the same. Nonchalant, almost bored. It was just the eyes that gave him away, dark as a moonless night, and the small uptick in his breathing as Laurel pulled his pants down fully around his ankles.

He traced a knuckle over Laurel's cheek, his bottom lip, and Laurel couldn't help letting out a little groan. "Well go ahead. I'm not stopping you. Let's see what you can do."

So Laurel showed him, starting out slow, lavishing kisses over the tip of his cock and down his shaft, nibbling at his inner thighs, cataloging each little breath the man took, the involuntary twitch of his knee, the tightening of his fingers in Laurel's hair. Getting to know the taste of his skin, the shape and heft of him, what little flick of the tongue or tightening of the lips made him shift in his seat, made his head fall back against the cushions. Laurel had expected this to go fast, had expected it to be as frenzied as their kisses in the elevator, had expected the guy to just go ahead and fuck his mouth—this was an anonymous hotel room hookup, after all—but he seemed content to let Laurel set the pace. So Laurel took his time enjoying him, drawing it out, breaking away every so often to lick a trail across his lower

belly, murmuring compliments, or glancing up to meet his eyes—hooded, burning, filled with something like wonder. The man's lips were parted, pink against his tan skin, his chest rising and falling quickly. Every so often he would let out an exasperated little noise of pleasure, and his nails would dig into Laurel's scalp.

"God, fuck, I can't—you—you have to—"

This was really his favorite part. Feeling the man's thighs start to shudder and his abdomen tense up, feeling his cock twitch against the roof of Laurel's mouth as Laurel took him deeper, so deep that his throat spasmed and his eyes watered. White lights were bursting behind his eyelids, his hand digging into the couch cushions, and the only sound was the pounding of his own heartbeat and the slick, rhythmic sound of the man's cock sliding between his lips, faster and deeper, a feverish pace, and his face was burning and his jaw ached and he felt like he might explode, might boil alive—

Until finally the other man was coming, his release hitting the back of Laurel's throat as one of them—both of them—let out a strangled sound of relief.

"Wow. Okay," the man said after a moment. He ran a hand through his hair, mussed by the couch cushions. "You're surprisingly good at that."

Laurel leaned back against the coffee table, not bothering to hide his satisfaction. He might not be the most athletic, or the tallest, but he had his hidden talents.

"Do they give blow job lessons at Fancy Douchebag Academy, or something?" The man's face was settling back into amused disdain, the dazed look of pleasure seeping away. But it had been there, Laurel thought. It had definitely been there.

"It's an elective," he said.

Another surprised laugh, and Laurel filed it away with the man's unraveling, with the parted lips and the gasps and the little tick in his jaw as his head had tipped back.

"Well, we're not done. Get up. And take off your clothes. It's my turn now."

"I mean, I feel like *that* was mostly your turn," Laurel said, but he was standing up, shucking his jacket to the floor, fingers fumbling with his own shirt buttons. He felt giddy, the blood pounding in his cheeks, the nape of his neck damp with sweat. "Unless your concept of turn-taking is somehow different from mine. I guess it *would* be polite if you wanted to reciprocate in some manner. I do have something of a situation arising—"

The man grabbed him by the shoulder, turning him toward the bedroom. "Go on." He slapped Laurel across the ass, not hard, just enough to sting pleasantly, tingles spreading down the back of his thighs, the aforementioned situation in his pants becoming suddenly more urgent. Any other words Laurel had been planning to say dried up in his mouth. "Get on the bed."

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The freckles did go all the way down, it turned out. Casey mapped them out with his mouth, pausing to tease at a nipple until it was red and swollen, scraping his teeth over ribs

and hip bones, leaving feathery little blooms of irritation in his wake. He had never been with anyone who had such reactive skin, and there was a deep, animal satisfaction to it, to sinking his teeth in and leaving a mark on the man beneath him, seeing the patchwork of red blotches on his chest and hearing his shuddery little moans.

He was already hard, cock flushed and heavy, lines of tension standing out in his thighs. Casey gave him a few thorough, lingering licks, just enough to know the taste of him, to have him squirming, before pulling away. He didn't want to make this too easy, or too quick.

"Turn over," Casey murmured.

To his surprise, the other man didn't talk back. For once. All he said was, "God, yes," and did as he was told. His voice was thick, almost drugged-sounding, his face bright red as he buried it in the pillow.

Casey ran a finger down his spine, carefully, one vertebra at a time, and felt the man shiver. He let his hand go lower, between the cheeks of the man's ass, finding the notch there and lingering on it. Rubbing, but not pressing. Not yet. He kissed the nape of the man's neck, tasting his sweat, and wondered what it would be like to feel him open up beneath his tongue.

"You—you can—"

"Hold on. I have an idea." That ugly pistachio tie was hanging off the side of the bed, flung there sometime during their rush to get fully undressed. Casey grabbed a hold of it.

"Oh." The man let out a gasp and a muffled curse as Casey pinned his hands behind his back, wrapping the tie around his wrists. He craned his neck, looking up from the pillow. All Casey could see was the flushed curve of his cheek, one eye, so dilated it was nearly black.

He kissed him there, on his burning face, and then on his shoulder, sucking another bruise into his skin, smoothing it out with his thumb. "You look good like this," Casey said against the man's ear. He hardly recognized his own voice. His head was buzzing, his fingertips numb. It seemed like he was here in the room but also far away, like this was a dream.

*I don't usually do this kind of thing*, he thought about explaining, as he looked down at the creamy plane of the man's back, the perfect globes of his ass and the cute little dimples just above them. But then, he didn't want the guy to think he was special. For all he knew, Casey tied strangers up in hotel rooms all the time. Or—whatever it was he was doing. He let his fingers drift down between the man's cheeks again, feather-light.

"What should I do with you now that I've got you trapped?"

"Please. Anything. I—" His voice was muffled, body taut beneath Casey's touch. Casey could see the flush spreading down his neck, the muscles trembling between his shoulder blades.

"Don't move." Casey patted him on the ass, then pressed a soft, lingering kiss to each of the dimples in his lower back. "I'll be right back."

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It occurred to Laurel that this might have been a very bad idea, as the stranger's feet padded away across the carpet. The cold rush of the air conditioning washed over him, stranded there with his sweaty face making an imprint in the pillow and his ass in the air. Of course, he wasn't truly incapacitated, but still. What was keeping this guy from just walking out? Snagging Laurel's wallet and phone from—wherever he had left them, pocketing the Rolex he had carelessly left on the bathroom counter and disappearing off into the night? Stupid of him, to be so trusting.

He guessed it would make a good story to tell Melody, either way.

Still, he couldn't hold back a little sigh of relief when the man came back into the room.

"I thought you might have left," he said.

"Oh, no. I'm nowhere near done with you yet."

Laurel suppressed a shiver. He was desperately, distractingly hard, had been for awhile, his muscles taut, his body stretched out like a guitar string. The man's hot breath on the nape of his neck sent electricity down his spine and another aching spike of *want* through his dick, his jaw clenching, the pillow hot against his face. He bit into the fabric, trying not to make a sound, but some kind of garbled curse escaped him regardless as he felt wet roughness between the cheeks of his ass. A washcloth. The man was cleaning him up, massaging the damp terrycloth against his skin. Every individual brush of its plush fibers left a stinging little tattoo of pleasure.

"You're so cute and pink back here," the man murmured.

"Gosh, thanks." Even face down with his entire body feeling like it might burst into flames, Laurel apparently couldn't help himself. "I try."

"I wonder what you'd look like all stretched out for me."

Laurel choked a little on his own spit, but managed to say, "Only—only one way to find out."

"Shh." A delicious bite of pain as the man pinched him. Then the washcloth was gone and his lips were brushing Laurel's spine. Laurel was vaguely aware that he was babbling, or at least making noise, his own hot, frantic breaths seeping into the pillow as the man's mouth traveled lower, his tongue flicking against the small of Laurel's back, teasing the tiny, soft hairs there. Then he was between Laurel's legs, and oh God, oh Jesus—*oh, my stars*, as the ladies in his hometown would say—there was nothing else in the world but this man's mouth and the wonderful, terrible things it was doing to him.

The smell of cotton was in his nose, his sweaty forehead buried in the sheets, his eyes squeezed shut. Laurel's legs were shaking, his abs drawn tight, his hips thrusting back shamelessly against the stranger's tongue, seeking more, seeking every single spark of sensation he could get. Everything was heat and slickness and the pounding of his pulse

behind his eyelids, the heavy throb of his cock and the tingling pressure in his balls, like his body was some creature of its own, existing only for this man to play with, to enjoy, to bring to greater and greater heights.

Laurel whimpered in protest when the man pulled away, pressing a final kiss to the small of his back, then another to his shoulder as his hand cradled Laurel's skull, trailing across his jaw, fingers invading his mouth. Laurel sucked without being asked, as deep as he could, tongue cataloguing every little callus and ridge of skin.

"There you go." The man's voice was hot and shivery, his breath coming fast against Laurel's ear. "Get them ready for me."

He did as he was told, slicking them up as much as possible, but there was still a bright, silvery sting of discomfort as the man's fingers slid into him. Laurel pressed back against it, deepening the feeling, turning it into something heady and dark and luxurious. He moaned, turning his head to nuzzle against the man's cheek, seeking his lips.

"I—" the stranger sounded a little breathless. "I was just—"

"I don't care. Kiss me. I want you kissing me."

Their tongues melted together as the man's fingers moved inside of him, finding that spot that sent stars cascading through his body, made the soles of his feet tingle and his nails dig into his palms and his brain feel numb. Laurel would probably propose if this went on much longer, or give the man his social security number or the password to his savings account; he was gasping out garbled phrases between each kiss, asking the man where he had been all his life, begging him to stay the night, begging in general—

"You talk too much." The brush of lips against his forehead, sweet, almost chaste. The movement of the man's fingers anything but, filthy and relentless. "Go ahead," he said into Laurel's hair. "Go ahead and come for me."

That was really all it took. Laurel's hands twitched; he tried, instinctively, to reach for himself, and the pressure of the tie around his wrists, the reminder that he was still bound, had him coming all over the bed, untouched, all the pressure that had built over the course of the night reaching a scorching, shuddering peak, his mind going white and the shaky muscles in his legs giving out as he slumped forward onto the sheets with a helpless groan.

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"You made my abs sore."

"Yeah?" Casey shot him a look. "Complain more about how I just rocked your world." They were lying side-by-side on the king bed, the other man still splotchy and wrung-out, his hair a sweaty mess, the imprint of a seam fading from his cheek. He looked so wonderfully destroyed that Casey felt a jolt of lust, his dick growing a little heavier against his thigh.

"I mean it. I don't even know if I can get up."

"Hmm." Casey propped himself up on one elbow, reaching over to massage the man's lower belly. "I bet you can."

"Oh yeah?" He smiled, and Casey's heart flip-flopped. "Still got plans for me, huh?"

"I don't sleep over," Casey warned.

"I didn't say anything about sleep."

Casey continued making little circles with his thumb, connecting the dots between freckles and love bites. A ridge of fingernail marks stood out on the man's left hip, where Casey had tried to hold him in place as he writhed and shuddered.

"God," he heard himself say. "You're a peach."

"Well gee. I'm flattered. But I'm really not. I'm actually kind of terrible."

"No, I mean—you bruise so easily."

He shrugged. "Memories. I'll take a little bit of you to Belgium with me."

"Hmm," Casey said again. He knew nothing about Belgium. Just as well that this guy was jetting off somewhere else, disappearing into the blue. It wrapped everything up neatly, tucked in the edges.

He thought about asking what was waiting for him there. Another lover? A vacation? Some vague business conference or networking event that only the disgustingly rich knew about?

Better not to know. This was one night, one little slice of time that he could file away neatly when it was over. And maybe—

*Kiss me. I want you kissing me.* The taste of him, the way he'd trembled.

—and maybe take out for special occasions.

"What about you? Where are you headed after this?" the stranger asked.

"Uh-uh." Casey shook his head. "No details."

"Jesus, maybe you really are a spy."

"If I was a spy, I wouldn't be wasting my time with you."

"You don't know." The man grinned. "Maybe I'm full of state secrets."

"Are you kidding? You haven't been able to keep your mouth shut all night. I bet you're shit at keeping secrets."

"You're right." The man flung himself back dramatically against the pillows. "All it takes is a tall, handsome stranger with very talented fingers, and I'll sing like a canary."

"Please don't sing."

"I actually am pretty good at singing."

Casey frowned. "Try it and I'll leave."

"Oh, come on. Don't go. I think we've got kind of a spicy little rapport going on." He stroked Casey's arm, running the pad of his thumb over a vein. "You could be the Bogie to my Bacall. The Verlaine to my Rimbaud."

"I don't know who any of those people are."

"Not a classic movie buff, I see. Or a French poetry fan." When Casey didn't say anything, he continued. "But seriously, who are you? Is this a normal night for you? Do you

just go out hunting for wayward Ivy League fuckboys? Or maybe you're here to scratch an itch. Maybe you're a pastor at some mega church out in the desert, and you come here to indulge your darkest vices."

Casey made a face. "Please. What part of me says 'mega church' to you?"

The man traced a line up his arm. "I don't know. You're so put-together. Buffed and polished. Controlled. But it's a mask, isn't it?"

"I just like control."

"When I saw you across the bar, I thought, *there's a guy who has secrets.*"

"No you didn't. You just wanted to get laid."

"Hm. That too. See? I'm an open book."

Casey didn't reply, looking around the room. He hadn't really had a chance to take stock of it before. The far wall of the bedroom was a sheet of glass, the city gleaming below. Light-up signs hanging like statement jewelry in the night, tacky and somehow compelling. He felt, suddenly, very small and out-of-place, a chill awkwardness seeping into him. Maybe he really should leave. It was late, and there was no point in getting to know each other.

The other man's stomach rumbled, loudly, beneath his hand, startling him, breaking the tension. Despite himself, Casey laughed.

"Sorry." He turned red again, for the thousandth time, and it was strangely adorable. "Should I order room service?"

"I'm not super hungry." It would feel weird, a little too *Pretty Woman*—a movie reference that Casey *did* get—lying in this plush California King with Las Vegas glittering at their feet, letting the guy buy him dinner.

"Well I am. Let's see what's in the mini bar."

Casey had never stayed in a hotel room with a mini bar. He'd been in some with a mini-fridge, which had seemed like the lap of luxury at the time. He lay back, gnawing on a cuticle, wondering again what he was doing.

The man returned, looking pleased with himself, arms full of snacks which he dumped onto the sheets between them. Peanuts, olives, chocolate truffles, some kind of artisan crackers, and a tin of cat-food-looking pâté. Little bottles of champagne and scotch. A strip of condoms in gold foil and a packet of lube.

You really could have it all in Vegas, apparently.

"Seems like you've got some ideas for the rest of the night," Casey said.

He shrugged, still blushing slightly. "Just a few suggestions."

They ate; or, more accurately, Casey watched the other man eat, taking him in. The sweaty tangle of his hair, the sharp angles of his profile, the way his eyes half-closed in pleasure as he bit into a piece of chocolate.

"Have some."

Casey allowed himself to be fed a few peanuts and cocktail olives, sucking the salt residue off the man's skin, kissing his palm. Then he was kissing his mouth again, chocolate

and salt and the tang of alcohol from the champagne, the green glass bottle sweating cold drops as it pressed against his chest.

"Do you want a drink?"

"You drink it." He didn't want to explain his thing with alcohol, with any substances, didn't want to show weakness and especially didn't want the phantom of his dad there in the room with them. Casey pushed the bottle away, maybe a little too hard, and then it was spilling over the man's chin and neck, trails of bubbles sparkling like diamonds on his chest, and Casey was following them down, licking and kissing, the taste sweet and also bitter.

It didn't really count as drinking if you drank it *off* someone, right?

Anyway, a few sips weren't enough to get him drunk, even though he didn't feel sober. The buzzing in his head was back, white-hot and unrelenting. He pushed everything out of the way, wrappers crinkling, bottles clattering against each other, and then he was straddling the other man, had him pinned to the mattress, their bodies flush, lips slotting together. They kissed like that for what felt like hours, hours of heat and skin and friction and softness, the rough texture of the man's hair between Casey's fingers and the breathless little sounds he made, the insistent rhythm of his hips, grinding against Casey's until they were both hard again.

Eventually Casey got up, pulling the other man with him wordlessly, and led him into the bathroom. He'd taken note of the shower earlier: one of those giant glass-walled stalls that could have hosted a small concert, a rainfall shower head, everything pristine tile and chrome. If he was going to make a night of this, he might as well take advantage of everything the suite had to offer.

He wondered, later, if that was the moment it had become a little more than just physical, the hushed intimacy of the shower, the two of them kissing lazily under the water. His hands massaging body wash into the stranger's skin, the scents of sandalwood and amber making Casey think of Church, of holy places. There was something sweet and strangely *careful* about it, about mapping the lines of his body, helping him rinse out his hair. The man's body wasn't perfect, not the gym-trained, regimented collection of muscles that Casey had come to expect in LA; he tried to remind himself of that, tried to put that little wall up against getting too starstruck. It didn't work. There was something endearing about every imperfection, something delightful about being with someone who would probably choose a lobster roll over a protein shake for breakfast.

Not that he didn't have muscles. His thighs and ass were amazing.

And not that Casey liked lobster, anyway, or would ever be having breakfast with the guy—

—the guy, who was tracing water droplets down Casey's skin with his tongue, causing the rest of his thoughts to evaporate with the steam from the shower. As Casey watched, hand anchored loosely in his hair, the man sank to his knees and took him in his mouth again.



Casey let himself float there for a while, his brain as empty as a cloudless sky, feeling every stroke, every texture, every little change in pressure, eyes locked on the sight in front of him. Until it was almost unbearable, and he had to squeeze his eyes shut and tilt his head back against the glass, seeking some kind of coolness.

"Get up," he said. God, his voice sounded embarrassingly shaky. "Th—that's enough. I want to fuck you."

"God. Yes." The man's pupils were huge, lashes clumped together, lips glistening. Casey had to look away again, trying not to come on the spot. "How do you want me?"

"Against the window."

The stranger chuckled, standing up. "I should have guessed. It's like Chekhov's cityscape, right? Sooner or later, you have to fuck against it."

Casey rolled his eyes. Another reference he didn't recognize, unless the man was talking about that Russian guy from the old *Star Trek* episodes his friend Jamie had made him watch, growing up. Which he almost definitely wasn't. "Go on. I'm waiting." He gave him another slap on the ass, not too hard, but hard enough to make blood bloom up under the man's skin. Just for good measure. Just for, once again, thinking he was so smart.

The guy didn't seem to mind, flashing Casey a look over his shoulder that was half amusement, half naked heat. That one tooth was digging into his lip again, and Casey felt like he might die if he had to wait much longer to be inside of him.

He didn't bother to towel himself off, barely remembered to shut off the shower. Snagging the condoms from where they had ended up on the floor, Casey followed the man to the window. He was already pressed against it, an offering on a platter, his hands splayed out across the flashing kaleidoscope of lights, his breath fogging up the glass. The long stretch of his back was like a carving in ivory, stark and gorgeous against all the neon.

"You know, you could do it again if you wanted to." The man didn't look over his shoulder, but Casey could see the shells of his ears turning red, bright as the lights below them.

"Do what again?"

"Uh. Spank me. Like, within reason."

"Within reason?" There was a teakettle whistling in his head, must be, because Casey could hardly hear himself think, let alone talk. It had been a joke, mentioning it in the bar. It had been a joke, but it hadn't, full of dark promise.

"Yeah. Could be fun."

*Could be fun?* "What—" he cleared his throat. "Do you have, like, a safe word?"

"Oh, no. Do you think I need one? I've never done this before."

"Never—you don't even know my *name*."

"I mean. I feel like I do know you, though. At least biblically. We've got a certain understanding." He glanced back at Casey, marquee lights dancing in his eyes. His expression was hard to parse. Flushed, anxious, wanting. His teeth teased at his lower lip.

"You are the weirdest guy." Casey smoothed a hand down his back, squeezing one of his cheeks. Assessing the weight of it, how good it felt in his hand.

"You don't have to if you don't want to."

"No, I want to." He was almost surprised at how much he wanted to, his cock fully hard and pulsing against his lower belly. "Ready?"

He could hear the other man suck in a breath, hold it. Casey was holding his breath, too. He drew back his hand. And then he swung.

The sound was satisfying *smack*, ricocheting off the walls. The man let out a strangled little grunt of pleasure. Casey saw his fingers scrabble against the glass, saw a vein standing out in his temple. His eyes were squeezed shut, like he was praying.

*Fuck*. It was too much, the look on his face, the tingle in Casey's palm, the way the man's skin was beginning to redden from the impact. Casey ran an admiring hand over it. He could see the tiny hairs on the nape of the man's neck, see them prickle and stand up, and he pressed his lips to them.

This wasn't real, right? He was at once there and not, watching himself from far away. Through the blood roaring in his head, he heard his own voice, liquid and strangely calm. "I think I've wanted to do this since you sat down next to me at the bar."

"Oh, I know." A grin, over his shoulder, eyes full of deviant heat.

"Don't get too full of yourself." Casey smacked him again, on the opposite cheek. And again.

The man squirmed, squeezing his legs together, forehead pressed against the window. "Oh God. Ohgoddon'tstop—ohIlikeit—" he was babbling, his words tangling together, steaming up the glass.

Casey didn't stop, overlapping strikes, seeing how much the man could take, what made him tense up and what made him whimper and melt, thighs trembling, head thrown back. His hand was stinging; there was a ringing in his ears, and the sound of each impact made his cock throb like an aching heart. He was talking, too, he realized. Ridiculous things, humiliating things. Telling the man how gorgeous he was like this, how good he was being, how cute he looked all marked up and falling apart.

The man craned his neck, their gazes catching, something like anguish on his face. "Please," he said. "Please, I need—"

"I know." He felt it too. Casey was glad the other man couldn't see him fumbling with the condom wrapper, or the tremor in his hand as he slicked himself up with lube. He felt like he was floating, pins and needles dancing up and down his calves, the balls of his feet barely skimming the carpet. He didn't think he could draw this out any further. There had been too much anticipation already, too much trembling on the razor's edge, too much teasing and exploring this man's body and wondering if the tight, fluttering heat of his ass would feel as good around Casey's cock as it had under his fingers, his tongue. His thoughts were a red-hot fog as he spread the man's legs, cupping the tender cheeks of his ass, smoothing over the irritation there. The man sighed, pressing back into his touch. Then

Casey was pushing into him, not slow and easy but fast, desperate, a little clumsy, the two of them slamming fully into the window as the man's arms gave out, a breathless groan escaping him.

"Yes. Jesus. More. Everything." The stranger's voice was ragged, pleasure-soaked, so different from his glib self-assurance earlier. Casey pressed a kiss to his scalp, taking a moment to breathe him in.

"Everything," he agreed. And then he was moving, the other man arching his back, angling his hips to take him deeper. It was as good as Casey had imagined, better, their hands squeaking and sliding against the glass, the dirty, rhythmic slap as their bodies met, the man craning his neck to brush their lips together, kiss after swooning, trembly kiss. Casey was spinning out, breaking apart, the lights of the city blurring and popping like fireworks across his vision. He reached for the other man's dick, almost laughing about it, the weird, debauched gloriousness of jerking someone off all over Vegas, all over the fake Eiffel Tower and the lit-up fountains of the Bellagio and the classless eyesore of the Trump International (that one, especially). The laugh snagged in his throat, turned into something else, into a tortured groan that he hardly recognized as his own, and then he was coming too, biting into the shoulder of the man beneath him as they both slumped against the windowpane.

\*

Laurel's first thought upon waking up was that the stranger hadn't left. His second was that maybe he should try to clean the window before checking out. Dawn was starting to trickle across the sky outside, revealing the streaks and handprints and God-knew-what-else all over the glass, and it would be terrible manners to leave it that way.

Even if he kind of wanted to, as a mark of pride.

He glanced at the man next to him, admiring the dark fan of his lashes, the way his equally dark eyebrows relaxed in sleep. *I don't spend the night*, he'd said earlier, as they had lain tangled together, his hand drawing patterns on Laurel's chest. But here he still was, in the hazy light of the new day.

*You might be everything I need*, Laurel thought. *Or the worst mistake I've ever made.* He shifted in the sheets, his ass still smarting a little bit. Like a mild sunburn, the discomfort was a reminder of good times, and he felt a delightful little frisson of arousal, remembering everything they had done last night. What would his dear mother think if she knew? It had felt like a kind of madness, a bender, all his inhibitions out the window, and he hadn't even been drunk. God, was it melodramatic to wonder if it would ever be that good with anyone else?

It didn't matter; he didn't date, not since a maudlin, pathetic heartbreak in his twenties. But the stranger had broken his own rule, so maybe—

No. The guy didn't even seem to like Laurel much; as fun as all the simmering animosity and sexual adventurousness was, it didn't make for an actual romantic connection. And he *was* hiding something, probably had a wife or kids or some job that didn't allow him to be out (not that Laurel really had any right to say anything on that matter, but)—

He shook his head, sighing. Not worth thinking about it. There was no reason to taint the whole encounter with baseless speculation. He got up, snagged another mini-bottle of champagne from the bar, and wandered, still naked, out onto the balcony, where the hot tub sat steaming, taking care not to close the sliding glass door too loudly.

Some time later, the sky was flush with pinks and oranges, the city still dormant far below, and Laurel was soaking in the tub, in a jetlagged, slightly buzzed daze. He was no longer quite sure where he was or even what was real. When the man stepped out onto the balcony in a hotel robe, crisp and buffed and flawless despite the wild night, it only heightened his sense of unreality. This was just a fantasy, right? An elaborate wet dream. He was still on the plane, rattling around somewhere over Iceland with a too-small pillow scrunched under his head and his mouth tasting of complementary cocktails.

"Hi," he said hoarsely.

"I was wondering where you went."

Laurel shrugged, the water sloshing. "Join me?"

The man disrobed and climbed in next to him. Laurel catalogued every inch of his body with his eyes, not bothering to hide his admiration. He was thin, thinner than Laurel had expected given the width of his shoulders, his clavicles elegant and pronounced, his ribs nearly visible. His golden skin stretched on for miles, unblemished, nearly hairless (did he wax?). His legs were long and graceful, his cock—just the right size to have left Laurel with a delightful, lingering throb between his legs—heavy and tumescent.

"How are you feeling?" the man asked.

"A little sore."

"Can't imagine why."

Laurel grinned. "It was worth it."

"You're crazy. Like, certifiable. Are you just going to keep staring at me?"

"Well." Laurel slid closer, letting a hand drift onto the man's hip. "I don't *just* have to stare."

They kissed as the sun came up over the city, dry desert heat on Laurel's shoulders, the humidity of the hot tub rising. There was no rush to it, just a slick, lazy sensuousness, the movement of tongues and hands, the textures of water and skin. At some point, Laurel pulled the man onto his lap, cradling him there, hands running over his body. It seemed like there was no one else in the world but the two of them, that everything was water and warmth and holding and being held.

"Stay here," Laurel murmured against the man's lips. "We can sleep in. Order room service."

"Sorry. My morning skincare routine is more important than you."

"Ouch." Laurel nuzzled at his cheek, nipping his earlobe. His hand traced over the man's lower belly and between his legs, and what he found there seemed more pressing than a skincare routine. "Well at least have the decency to take me inside and make love to me one more time."

The man made an exasperated little sound. "I'm not—"

"Oh I'm so sorry. Did that offend your delicate sensibilities?" Laurel squeezed his hardening dick, licking a drop of sweat off his throat. "Take me inside and fuck my brains out one more time. Does that work for you?"

It must have; he grabbed Laurel's hand, pulling him up, and then they were toppling into the bed, hot skin and rumpled sheets and the smell of chlorine. Face-to-face this time, as daylight filtered into the room, gilding the stranger's hair, his strong, tanned arms, his eyelashes. His eyes were so dark, promising and secretive like a night on the Carolina coast, like the richest Sacher torte. Laurel found himself searching them, looking for some kind of explanation. *Why do we fit so perfectly when I know nothing about you? Why does it feel like I could spend hours teasing you, and being teased?*

There wasn't one, of course. This was just a chance meeting, a good story once it was over. Frank Sinatra, *Strangers in the Night*, like he'd said in the bar. So Laurel closed his eyes, letting himself enjoy it, scattering kisses along the other man's throat, his jaw. Memorizing the smell and taste of him, memorizing every thrust as the man moved inside of him, lazy and tender at first, then fast, and faster, and more frantic, sweat and stuttering breaths and the man's nails digging into Laurel's hip, Laurel's feet sliding around helplessly in the blankets.

It wasn't exactly making love, in the end. But it wasn't exactly fucking, either.

\*

"You really, really have to go."

"I have an early checkout," Casey lied. He was actually booked at the hotel for a few more days, but now he really would be leaving. No sense in running into the stranger again, in the hotel bar or out on the Strip.

His eyes were cast down as he focused on zipping up his pants, but he couldn't help sneaking a glance at the other man. He was a mess, wonderfully disheveled, cheeks flushed, a bite mark on his shoulder. His hair had gotten progressively curlier throughout the night, and now it was an adorable tangle, flopping into his eyes. For a moment, Casey ached to climb back into bed with him, press his lips to his tortured skin and do the whole thing all over again. They could spend the day wrapped up in each other, hang a Do Not Disturb sign on the door.

It was a stupid idea, even if he'd had the stamina for it.

"I bet. Off to save the world? Or seduce another feckless bachelor in another city?"

"Who seduced who, again?" Casey raised an eyebrow, buttoning up his shirt.

"At least let me buy you breakfast."

"I have to get on the road." He allowed himself one last, long look at the man's face. His big, brown eyes, his disarming smile, the charming scatter of his freckles. Casey's stomach shivered, a strange, unsettled feeling coming over him. "Work," he added.

"Ooh, he has *work*."

"Sales," Casey said. Another lie; he wasn't sure why he'd said it. *Keep it simple*. He heard his dad's voice in the back of his mind. *When you get nervous, when you add too many details, that's when you start to slip up*.

But he wasn't nervous. There was no reason to be.

"Answer one question for me before you go." The man stretched out in the sheets, still naked, frustratingly inviting and obviously pleased with himself.

"I'm not telling you my name."

"Oh no, of course not. You'd blow your cover. But tell me—what was so wrong with my tie?"

*Seriously?* See, this was why he wasn't going to stay. The man's endless, insistent *talking*. "It's not a good color on you."

"Really? My personal shopper picked it out."

Casey pinched the bridge of his nose. "Of course you have a personal shopper. God. And I was almost starting to like you."

"Oh goodness. Don't hurt yourself."

"I'm leaving," he said. "Really."

"I'll miss you. I'll never forget you. I'll dream of you always."

Casey laughed. Half exasperation, half amusement. "Don't hurt yourself," he said, not unkindly.

In the elevator, watching the buttons light up and still smelling the stranger on his own skin, he realized he'd been in such a hurry to leave that he hadn't even thought about where he was going. Obviously California was out, probably the whole West Coast. And parts of the East Coast, too. He couldn't go anywhere he'd risk being recognized, couldn't run into anyone who ran in the same social circles as his old boss.

Somewhere insulated, even a little backwards, where people were gullible and threw parties and had money to spend.

Maybe the South, he thought, remembering the little thread of Georgia or the Carolinas that had run through the other man's voice.

It was beautiful there in the springtime.