

Chapter Fifteen

Nicolas woke with the first light of dawn trying to make its way past the blinds. He was always an early riser and despite the late night this morning was no different. Safely spooned against him Aubrey slept on. Perhaps it was this highly anticipated moment that made him wake.

She was here...in his arms. Finally.

He wanted to lie there forever but he heard the door of the guest room open and the pitter patter of feet to the bathroom. Moments later the toilet flushed and his other guest headed for the living room. The woman in his arms was not the only one who had come home with him.

Carefully extracting himself from his slumbering goddess Nicolas hurried to his private, master bathroom to relieve himself and prepare to face a new day. He slipped on a pair of jeans and a t-shirt not putting much thought into his attire since it was the weekend.

Letting Aubrey sleep he quietly headed to the living room where he found Jamie on the couch still wearing his t-shirt. It was Saturday so he had turned the channel to cartoons. Sancho lay across the boy's lap purring loudly. It was the first time Nicolas had seen the cat warm-up to anyone aside

from himself but he wasn't jealous in the least. He hoped the pair would be fast friends.

"Morning, little man," Nicolas greeted. "I see you've made friends with Sancho."

"Is that his name?" Jamie asked petting the purring feline.

"Yeah, he's my little partner," Nicolas sat down next to him not sure how close the boy would allow him to get.

"We have cats at home too," Jamie said.

"Yeah? What are their names?"

"Jim, Rosa, Booker, Celia, Katherine and Jackie," Jamis listed with ease. "Jim's the only one who comes in the house though."

"Why is that?"

"The others are wild. They are okay with me and Ya-Ya but they are skittish with everyone else. We feed and take care of them so they trust us."

"And Ya-Ya is...your great-aunt, right?"

"She's a witch."

"That's not really a nice thing to say."

"But she is," Jamie insisted. "She makes charms from the gifts her *lwa* give her and she tells fortunes and makes healing balms and stuff."

"Wait...what is a *Iwa*?"

"Spirit guides," Jamie rolled his eyes that Nicolas wouldn't know such basic information. "Ya-Ya has crows."

"Right," Nicolas said slowly digesting the information. Lucas mentioned Aubrey's aunt was unconventional.

"Don't worry she's a white witch," Jamie said.

"A white witch?"

"She only practices white magic," Jamie explained, "no black magic or curses."

"Of course. That's good," Nicolas agreed. He sensed Jamie was trying to reassure him by telling him his aunt was a *good* witch and not an evil specter. "So...I suppose we got a big day today. We need to get your things for the hotel, have breakfast and get you two settled...How long do you think your mom will sleep?"

"Till noon," Jamie said.

"Really?"

"She's not good about waking up in the morning."

"I hate to wake her up...but hotel checkout is usually nine or ten," Nicolas pondered. "And I'm sure you want clothes that fit."

Jamie looked down at the t-shirt he wore. It was big enough to be a dress. After a moment he said, "We could just go."

"You remember the hotel?" Nicolas asked.

"We were in room 228."

"We still need a name."

"It'll be on the keycards," Jamie said rolling his eyes. "Mom put them in her purse."

"Right." Nicolas nodded with a self-deprecating chuckle. "What about a car? Did she rent one?"

"No. Mom doesn't like driving in New York. We took a cab."

"Okay. So...why don't we get you changed and pick up your stuff? Then we can stop somewhere for breakfast and let your mom sleep."

"O-kay." Jamie nodded.

Sancho grumbled as the pair decided to move. Nicolas fed the feline to appease it before helping Jamie redress in the pants and shirt from the party leaving the jacket and bow-tie. Grabbing the keycards from Aubrey's clutch, his phone and keys Nicolas hoisted the boy on his hip carrying him out into the hall.

Once the door closed behind them Nicolas suddenly hesitated, "I should have left a note or

something so your mom doesn't worry."

"Leave a message on her phone," Jamie suggested.

"I don't have her number."

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Jamie snorted, "504-555-2769."

"What's that?"

"Mommy's phone number."

"Right." Nicolas fished his phone out of his pocket entering the number into his contacts and typed out a quick message: *Aubrey, this is Nick. Save my number and message me when you wake up. Don't*

worry Jamie is with me.

By the time they reached the elevator the message was sent. They rode down to the garage in silence. Reaching it they stepped off to see a sea of cars.

"Are all these yours?" Jamie asked.

"No," Nicolas chuckled.

In truth he wasn't much of a *car guy*. His brothers, especially Ethan, were car fanatics. They were always competing over who had the rarest and most sought after vehicle. For Nicolas there was only one car he had ever truly wanted.

"This one is my car," Nicolas announced as he carried his son to his parking spot.

"Oh cool! It's Bumblebee!" Jamie exclaimed.

They stood in front of a bright yellow *Chevrolet Camaro* with wide, black racing stripes on the hood. As Jamie said it was exactly like the car from the movie franchise. Nicolas had grown up watching the cartoons and as a kid received a number of them as toys. He had kept them all, saving them from his brothers' destructive tendencies. Perhaps Jamie would appreciate the collection if he was also a fan.

"You like those movies too huh?" Nicolas asked.

"Yeah! They are so cool!"

"I agree," Nicolas chuckled.

What wasn't cool was how difficult it was for Nicolas to squeeze into the back and buckle Jamie in. As much as he loved his car it was not a family vehicle. The night before Aubrey hadn't said anything and they made due but that wasn't enough.

"We definitely need to stop somewhere and get you a car seat," Nicolas said.

With a sigh he put back the passenger seat and circled to the driver's seat. Nicolas looked at the keycards for the hotel name and entered *Edison Hotel* into his phone's map settings.

"Hey, it's in Manhattan. Pretty close," Nicolas smiled at the patient boy. "Shall we?"

Jamie mimicked his smile and nodded. Smirking Nicolas started up the car and drove through mid-morning traffic to park along the curb in front of the hotel. He collected Jamie from the car and pulled open the door. Checking out shouldn't take long.

They headed to the elevator and rode it to the second floor. Nicolas followed signs down identical hallways to reach 228. He looked at Jamie who nodded. Nicolas held his breath and swiped the card to see the lock flash green.

Right one!

Nicolas stepped inside giving Jamie a sheepish grin and earned the boy's unimpressed frown. He set Jamie on his feet as they entered. Jamie immediately darted for his suitcase eager to change into normal clothes. Nicolas paused taking in the room. It was small. The bathroom was on his left. The rest was a single room with a pair of double beds with small end tables on either side. There was a small desk with a television mounted directly to the neutral colored walls.

With a frown he looked at Jamie as the boy rifled through a very old Samsonite suitcase on the floor. On the desk was a duffle bag. While the suitcase was well-organized the duffle's contents had been tossed about. Clearly Jamie did not get his organizational skills from Aubrey.

The beds were clean and neat. Nicolas wasn't sure if it was due to the fact Aubrey and Jamie hadn't returned last night or if the maids had already been through. It probably didn't matter in any case. He walked over to where Jamie had chosen a pair of cargo shorts and a striped t-shirt. After helping the boy out of his formal wear and into the casual clothes Nicolas tried not to blush as he packed Aubrey's things.

"Don't forget the stuff in the bathroom," Jamie said.

"Is there a lot of stuff?" Nicolas asked and received an incredulous look.

Wary Nicolas headed to the bathroom to find an amazing amount of amenities spread out on the counter. With a sigh he packed it all in a small bag that matched the duffle. He wasn't certain how it would all fit but he managed...barely. Jamie had to show him how the smaller bag attached to the duffle's side. Once they repacked the boy's suitcase they were ready. Slinging the duffle over his shoulder Nicolas picked up Jamie holding him in one arm and carried the suitcase in the other.

Nicolas headed to the front desk to turn in the keycards. The concierge looked at him with a note of confusion as he also eyed the boy in his arms. Setting down the cards Nicolas said, "228 checking out."

The man at the counter tapped at his computer looking up the reservation before saying, "It was reserved for the weekend."

"I know. Situation changed."

"All right."

"Oh here," Nicolas withdrew his credit card. "Charge this card for the reservations along with any penalties for early checkout."

The concierge seemed wary until he saw the name on the card, "Of-of course, Mister

Worthington."

It took a few minutes before it was done and they headed back out to the car. Nicolas loaded the luggage into the trunk once again lamenting the lack of space. He definitely needed a different vehicle...but first. Buckling Jamie in, he got back behind the wheel and headed to the nearest shopping center.



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