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Chapter 1

Eli slumped in a chair exhausted, pouring over the charts of the last six patients he'd seen. He was absolutely anal about making sure there were no errors. The administration was constantly riding the doctors' asses with threats of potential law suits, and horror stories of vengeful family members. He glanced up at the clock and sighed. Twenty more minutes, and he was out of there. Twenty more minutes until he could have a cigarette. It had been a damn long 17 ½ hours, insane by anyone's standards, except for his bosses. They probably thought he was getting off easy if he was at the hospital less than 23 ½ out of 24.

The door burst open and one of the nurses flew into the room, hands flapping. "Oh, Doctor. Thank God you're still here."

He rolled his eyes. Where the hell else would he be? It wasn't eight o'clock yet. "What is it? I didn't hear the call for an ambulance coming in."

She crossed the room and placed her hand on Eli's shoulder, giving him "the look", as he referred to it. He got it fairly often, mostly from the female staff, but the occasional male staff member tossed it his way as well. Eli jumped to his feet and put some distance between them, clutching the charts in front of him. "What?"

"A man brought in a small child with a head wound. He's panicked and the kid is screaming. I really don't want to call security, but he's insisting he see someone immediately." She took another few steps until she gripped his forearm.

He juggled the charts to his other arm in an effort to dislodge her, and then moved even further to the side. Why did everyone have to *touch* him? God! Could they not just back the hell off? He understood patients, sometimes. They were panicked and they wanted help, so they reached out and grabbed for the nearest life line, usually the doctor... him. But why did the staff have to be so goddamned touchy feely? Much as he wanted to tell her to keep her hands to herself, he couldn't afford to alienate the nurses. He was smart enough to know they were the ones who kept things under control in the ER; they were just humoring the doctors.

He needed a force field. Something that would keep people at least two feet away from him. Scotty could create something to keep the idiots at bay. Dr. McCoy didn't have that problem, did he? No one got all grabby-hands on his ass, did they?

He snapped out of his thoughts. "Where're Theodore and Martins?" Surely one of them could deal with this. They'd been on duty less than eight hours.

"They're with those car accident boys, the ones who wrapped their car around a tree."

Eli shook his head in disgust. Damn teenagers. Shit, he sounded like his dad. "Dr. Ngo will be here in fifteen minutes. Put the guy and the kid in a room and have him wait." He paused. "The kid's not seriously injured is he?"

"No. There's a lot of blood, but head wounds bleed. I tried to do that. I put him in a room, and the man just kept demanding a doctor. Now he's pacing around the waiting room and starting to annoy everyone." She stood staring at him as if this was his responsibility.

How many patients had he seen in the last seventeen hours? Thirty? Forty? More? There were at least three heart attacks, two gunshot wounds, a half dozen food poisonings, three hypochondriacs, an ear infection, and a miscarriage. He'd lost track of what else he'd dealt with. Couldn't the guy wait just twenty more minutes and give him a break? He heard a screeched cry of "*Mommy!*" from the waiting area and his head dropped as he took a deep breath. "Fine." He thrust the charts toward the nurse. "These are finished."

He straightened his shoulders and strode out into the hallway. One more. Just one more and he could have that cigarette. Hopefully a Scooby Doo band-aid would do the trick and he could go home.

James clutched Dedrick to his chest with one arm while he held a blood soaked towel to Dedrick's little head with the other. He tried not to think too much about the fact that his hands were covered in blood. If he did, he'd throw up. Dedrick kept screaming for his mother, and no amount of promised candy stopped him. Even the rash promise of a puppy went unacknowledged. Where the hell was the doctor? Was it really so difficult to get help in a damn hospital?

As he spun toward the admissions desk to demand, once more, to see a doctor immediately, he saw someone wearing a white coat and blue scrub pants heading toward him down the hall. That *had* to be a doctor. He opened his mouth to insist the man see Dedrick right now, when he finally *looked* at the doctor. Holy crap! *He* was a doctor? The guy wasn't overly tall, but he was drop dead gorgeous, and from what James could see under the lab coat, totally ripped. The doctor's pale blue t-shirt was stretched across a nice set of pecs, and the sleeves on his lab coat were straining from the size of his biceps.

James was still standing with his mouth hanging open when the god stopped in front of him and calmly looked at a still screaming Dedrick. "I believe you're the one demanding assistance?"

That snapped James out of his lust-induced stupor. The sky blue eyes were cool and remote. *Demanding* assistance? It was a freaking ER, wasn't that what they did? It's not like he was asking for something out of the norm. "Yes." He put on his 'don't mess with me' teacher voice. "I've been waiting nearly a half hour."

He glared at the doctor when he saw him roll his eyes. What a dick. The doctor, E. Zimmerman, according to his name tag, motioned down the hall, then walked ahead and pulled aside a curtain to reveal a narrow bed.

"Set your son down, please"

James was so busy trying to peel Dedrick off that he didn't notice what the doctor had said exactly. He swore the kid was part leech. Finally, with the doctor's help, and a promise to hold his hand, James got the little guy to lie down.

"What happened?"

"I don't know exactly. Well, he ran into a wall, the corner of a wall." James frowned when he saw the doctor's eyebrows rise. "I was in the kitchen and he was in the living room. Suddenly there was a thud and a scream. I ran and he was lying on the floor screaming, blood all over his face, and I freaked out and brought him directly here."

"Ran into a wall?" The doctor looked sceptical.

James stiffened his spine. "Yes."

"Where's your wife?" The doctor had lifted the towel off Dedrick's head and was gently prodding at the wound. Dedrick had settled down with something else to focus on, and was gently sobbing, but no longer screaming.

"My what?"

"Your wife? His mother?"

James wasn't sure if he was more insulted by the condescending tone the guy used, or by the assumption he was married.

"I'm not married to his mother."

The doctor froze in his movements, and closed his eyes for a moment. "Fine. Does he have a mother?"

"Of course he has a mother."

The doctor stood and grabbed the chart. "Look, Mr.," he paused, "McCray. Can you just answer the question?"

"What question?" James thought he heard teeth grinding.

"Where is the child's mother?"

"Oh, she's on a business trip. She's going to kill me."

"So you're staying with your son? You don't have primary custody?"

"What? I don't have custody at all." What was the guy getting at? "He's not my son."

James watched the doctor close his eyes once again and take a deep breath. He leaned out into the hallway and called for a nurse. When she arrived, he turned to James. "I'm going to have to speak to the child alone; can you just step outside the curtain for a moment?"

"Why? What's going on?"

The nurse patted his shoulder. "Don't worry, dear, just a formality."

"I'm not leaving." James wasn't sure what was going on, but he wasn't leaving Dedrick.

The doctor sighed. "Fine." He turned to the little boy. "So," he glanced at the chart, "Dedrick, can you tell me how you hurt your head?"

"I banged into the wall."

"How did that happen? Did you trip, or did someone push you?"

James' eyes went wide. Oh my God. They thought he'd hurt Dedrick. Before he could speak up, Dedrick beat him to it. "I was chasing Maxi, and I slipped."

"Maxi?"

"My kitty. He's fast."

"Hmm." The doctor just hummed as he continued to poke at his head. "Where was your daddy?"

"I don't have a daddy." Dedrick was looking up at the doctor, completely guileless. The doctor drew back and looked at James.

James cross his arms and looked down his nose. "I told you I'm not his father. I'm his uncle."

"Oh." The doctor gave him the once over, which confused James momentarily, but then he figured anyone that pretty living in San Francisco had to be gay. A dick, but a hot gay dick apparently. The doctor turned back to Dedrick. "Where was your uncle?"

"Making noodles." The doctor nodded.

"I think it could use a couple of stitches." Eli looked at the clock and sighed. Eight o'clock and he was starting stitches. Fuck.

Eli gave instructions to the nurse to get the things ready for the sutures, and looked up to see the kid's uncle staring at him with his arms crossed. Nice arms, very nice. Shit, he was so tired his mind was wandering. He might look at patients sometimes - hell, he wasn't dead, well, not quite yet. The guy had sandy brown hair cut super short - nearly buzzed - and the same chocolate brown eyes as his nephew. Even their hair was the same color, which explained his confusion as to parentage.

"I can't believe you thought I hurt him," hissed the guy from between clenched teeth.

"Look, Mr. McCray. I'm sorry, but we have to confirm these things. It happens, more often than most people would like to know."

"I'm a teacher." The indignant way he said it, clearly indicated he thought he would be above suspicion.

Eli tipped his head. Seriously, the guy had to know better. "Then you sir, should know that abuse comes in all forms. It's not just trailer trash hillbillies who hurt their kids. Upstanding working folk, wearing expensive clothes, do it too. Gay parents, straight parents, single parents, black parents, white parents, - abuse doesn't discriminate."

Eli took a deep breath. He knew he was on his damn soap box, but it was his hot button. Most of

the stuff that came through the ER he just turned off. You couldn't get emotionally invested in every case. Sure it was unfortunate when some teenager got caught up in a gang shooting or a middle aged guy left behind a wife and kids, but that was how it worked. However, seeing a baby with broken legs or a preschooler with third degree burns inflicted by a parent or caregiver was something that ate at him for days after. Eli didn't give a shit if he pissed off parents by asking probing questions - he wasn't going to be that doctor who sent a kid home only to have them back a week later, dead.

The guy lowered his eyes and the starch went out of his spine. "You're right. I know that. It's just when you're the one on the receiving end of the suspicions..." he trailed off with a shrug.

"Right. Well, seems like everything is fine here, just a freak accident. If the floors are hardwood you might want to keep him in bare feet so he can't slip."

"Yeah. Okay." James shook his head. "Really, she's going to kill me. I promised I'd take good care of him."

Eli got the nurse to hold the kid's head while he injected the freezing. "So, where's his ..." he glanced down. Sometimes saying "*mom*" was all it took to trigger a kid. "Where's your sister?"

"Germany. She's at some big trade show for her company. She won't be back until next weekend." James looked hopefully at Eli. "Will the stitches be out by then? Maybe she won't notice."

Eli raised an eyebrow. "Unless she's totally oblivious, she's going to notice an inch long scar on her son's forehead. Besides, the stitches won't come out for at least ten days." He snapped on his gloves and got ready. "You're up the creek."

When Eli finished, it was after eight thirty. He gave a few last instructions and took off down the hall before the kid's uncle could say anything. He needed a cigarette, and Ngo had better be on duty or he'd rue the day he met Eli.

As soon as he confirmed the other doctor was there, Eli grabbed his stuff from his office, tossed his lab coat on the chair, and was digging out his cigarettes and lighter before he was out the door. The minute it closed behind him, he lit up, took a deep drag, and paused to exhale before he headed to his car. Twenty hours before he had to be back and he intended to spend nineteen of it in bed, asleep.

He leaned against the car and took another couple of drags on the cigarette. He never smoked in his car; one of those things other smokers thought was weird. He rarely smoked in his apartment

either. Old habits die hard. Nate used to throw a fit if he did, and even though Nate'd been gone for two years, Eli still stood on the balcony to smoke.

For a few minutes he enjoyed the sounds of the city; it wasn't that bad here in California. Then another ambulance came screaming into the emergency entrance, sirens and lights blaring, and Eli shook his head. He was getting the hell out of Dodge before they called him back. "Beam me up, Scotty." He muttered under his breath. Ah, if only transporters existed. To be zapped home in seconds would be amazing.

James shook his head as he drove. What a clusterfuck of a night. He'd even stopped and picked up McDonald's as they'd never gotten to the noodles he was making. Abby was already going to kill him, so introducing the kid to some good old artery hardening transfats didn't seem like that big of a crime.

As Dedrick enjoyed his first taste of McNuggets in the back seat, James thought back on the experience at the hospital. He couldn't believe how long it had taken them to get help. That was outrageous. What was the point of having emergency rooms, if you couldn't get help when you had an emergency? And Dr. Snarkyass Hottie-dude? What a jerk. He'd actually thought James'd hurt Dedrick on purpose. That was ridiculous. He'd throw himself off the Golden Gate Bridge before he let anyone hurt his nephew or any of his family.

Logically, James knew the guy was right. As a teacher he'd seen his share of kids with unexplained bruising and mysterious broken limbs. He's even reported a couple to the authorities, as he was obligated to do, but it still sucked to have someone look at you with suspicion. On the upside, at least the guy gave a damn about kids. That couldn't be all bad. And his eyes were blue, really blue. And, oh my God, those arms. Okay, even if he was an asshole, he was still hot.

It had been too long since James had had anything regular. Sure he went out now and then and hit a club, but he just couldn't seem to get motivated to seriously look for someone longer term. He wanted a boyfriend, he did, maybe even kids – he glanced back and watched Dedrick smearing barbecue sauce on his car seat – but with his job and helping out Abby when she had to go out of town, he just didn't have time. Yeah, denial was a wonderful thing.

Oh well, he'd add the hottie doctor to the spank bank and just edit out the rolling eyes, snarky attitude and gritted teeth.

Chapter 2

Eli closed his eyes and leaned back against the wall outside of the hospital doors, well beyond the no-smoking limit. He slit one eye open as he watched the flame of the lighter touch the tip of the cigarette, then inhaled. The rush of nicotine through his system felt familiar and comforting, even as his lungs burned from the smoke.

It had been another shit day. The last three or four days had been crap, but today topped it off. He slammed his free hand against the brick wall at his back when he thought about the toddler with a skull fracture in intensive care. He knew they'd be pulling the plug in the next few hours, as soon as they could sober up one of her parents long enough to get them to sign off on the organ donation form. Both of them had sat there, eyes glazed, stupid smiles fixed on their faces, oblivious to being told they had killed their child. Neither one seemed to know what had happened or who had done it. Purely by chance the police had raided the drug den and found the child unresponsive, both parents in a drugged-out stupor.

Fuck, fuck, fuck. Eli wanted to go back in there and pump them so full of drugs they'd never wake up. He took a deep breath and tried to calm down when he heard a voice coming nearer, obviously talking on a phone. He didn't need to freak out the patients with his crazy doctor act. He relit another cigarette from the stub of the first. Since he had no clue when he'd get another break, he thought he should stock up on the nicotine while he could.

He glanced up at the speaker as he stubbed out the first cigarette, the new one dangling from his lips, when it hit him. It was the guy from a couple of weeks ago, with the kid who'd cut his head. What were the odds of him being here? He glared at the guy. If he was back with that kid, Eli intended to unleash the full force of Child Protective Services on his ass.

The guy looked up and noticed Eli glaring at him. His steps stuttered for a moment as he frowned, then his eyes lit up, oblivious to Eli's glare. Eli heard the last of his conversation.

"Okay, I'll come in and fill in the incident report after Kara's parents get here. Tell Barbara it doesn't look serious. The kid's parents signed the release, so she can relax."

Eli watched him roll his eyes at whatever the person on the other end said. It didn't sound like he was talking about his nephew - the kid had a weird name, but it wasn't Kara.

"Yeah. See you tomorrow." He disconnected his phone and smiled at Eli. "Dr." He paused, "Zimmerman, right?"

"Right. Um, sorry, but I see a lot of people." Eli shrugged self-consciously. Amazingly, it was rare he ran into former patients, maybe because they were freaked out and didn't remember him or they were just a steady stream of humanity he didn't notice.

The guy stepped forward and held out his hand. "James, James McCray."

"Oh right. Mr. McCray." Eli shook his hand. "Um, how's your nephew. Frederick? Cedrick?"

James laughed. Eli was fascinated by that. You didn't hear many people laughing in his line of work. Emergency rooms were not hotbeds of happiness and joy. Now, tears, screaming, sobs and wailing he was familiar with. Laughing was nice.

"Dedrick." Eli raised an eyebrow. With a grimace, James snorted. "Yeah. Tell me about it. We told Abby the kid was going to have to learn karate by the time he was two to ward off playground beatings, but she wanted to be 'unique'." He gave the word air quotes with his fingers.

"Well, she got that part. I can honestly say I've never come across anyone else with that name."

More laughter. Eli felt the tension in his shoulders ease. "I'll tell her you said that. She'll be thrilled." James shrugged. "He's great though. Ded takes the whole name thing in stride. In his neighborhood it's not all that weird. Nevaeh and her twin brother Heaven really have it rough."

Eli stiffened, a frown forming - Ded, dead, the kid. Fuck. Just for a minute the whole thing hadn't been in the forefront of his brain. Now he had to go back in there to see if the parents had sobered up... and if the CT scan showed any brain activity. He knew it wouldn't, but some small part of him hoped the first scan was wrong.

James frowned and tipped his head. Everything had seemed fine. He thought he might have even been flirting, well, borderline flirting, and the guy had been responding, then -- boom. Shut down. "Is something wrong?"

The doctor took another drag off his cigarette. He hadn't touched it since he and James had started talking. "No, nothing. Just a, well, every day's a bad day in an ER, isn't it?"

As the guy stubbed out the cigarette, James stepped forward, and quite out of character, touched the guy's arm. "Hey, it's not all bad. We thought one of my students broke her ankle on a hike at Big Basin today, but it's only sprained. That's good news for us, right?"

The doctor pulled away from him, his frosty demeanor suddenly dropping back into place. "Well, that's great. I have patients to see, Mr. McCray. I'm sure you remember the frustration of having to wait on a doctor?"

James felt his jaw drop. Oh, Dr. Asshole was back in a big way, but James refused to give the doctor the benefit of knowing he'd annoyed James. He took a deep breath and exhaled slowly. "It's James."

The guy spun back around as he walked to the door. "What?"

"It's James, Dr. Zimmerman, Mr. McCray is my father."

He tried not to smirk as he watched the doctor blink a couple of times. The guy looked freaking hot when he was struck dumb. Maybe the trick was to keep his mouth busy so he couldn't say something snotty. James could think of a few things to keep that mouth busy. He strolled past the doctor, heading back inside to see if his student's ankle had been stabilized and to wait for her parents.

When he got about a yard past the doctor, he heard a quiet, "Eli."

It was James' turn to pause. Eli? Oh, his name. He turned back and smiled with a nod. "Eli." The doctor looked puzzled, but they walked back into the emergency department side by side. As they reached the main waiting area, James paused. "Hope your day improves, Eli."

Eli just stared at him, and then sniffed, stuck his nose in the air and stalked off down the hallway. James couldn't help but chuckle. The guy had issues, but he was fun to look at it. If he unbent a smidgeon, he might be fun to hang around with.

Not that James had any hope in hell of seeing him again. Well, he hoped not. Not at the ER anyway. All last year not a single student had needed to come to the ER with an injury. Hopefully Kara would be the only kid this year. They took all the precautions they could on the field trips, but tree roots and teenage girls giggling with their friends just didn't mix.

Eli spent the rest of his shift frowning. Well, he usually did - he had permanent lines on his forehead that shouldn't have been on a thirty four year old man. But he wasn't frowning for the usual reasons. James McCray confused the hell out of him. He'd actually told the guy his name. What was up with that? He heard the guy laugh and practically spilled his guts. Well, in Eli's books telling the guy he'd had a shitty day was spilling his guts. Eli was the king of "Fine". How was your day? Fine. How are you? Fine. Any bad stuff happen at work? No, it was fine.

The guy was cute, in that bouncy puppy way that people who didn't deal with the crud he saw every day were. They thought the world was wonderful and amazing and full of possibilities. Eli knew those possibilities were death, disease and desolation. Crap, he needed another cigarette already. He pushed thoughts of James aside and focused on the football player's dislocated shoulder in front of him. He wasn't going to see the guy again anyway. Except for the regulars - the homeless, drug addicts and chronically abused and ill - you didn't see people twice in an ER, and with his hours, he sure as hell didn't have the time to go out socially. He chalked it up to a weird coincidence and put it out of his mind. Mostly. He only thought about James periodically, like when someone had brown eyes, or similar hair, or the same build.

Chapter 3

A little over three weeks later, Eli was nearly finished with his overnight shift. Another hour and he could go home and crash. It had been pretty quiet for a Friday night, and Saturday morning was usually slow. Most people were still abed and keeping out of his hair. He picked up the next chart on the counter waiting for attention. Male, possible broken wrist, insurance... he gaped at the name on the chart. James McCray. James T. Kirk McCray. No way. One of the nurses had to be fucking with him.

He grabbed the insurance form and looked at the print out. Those came straight from the insurance database and couldn't be altered. James T. Kirk McCray. It had to be another McCray. Age, twenty eight - that seemed about right.

As he approached the curtain, Eli heard voices. He stopped and listened - it did sound like James. He peeked through the gap and saw the guy sitting on the bed, cradling his arm against his chest and talking to a woman who looked close to his age or maybe a bit older. Her hair was the same shade of brown pulled back in a ponytail and Dedrick was sitting on her lap. Shit. What were the odds?

Eli took a deep breath and pulled back the curtain. "Well, Mr. McCray, we meet again. I'm starting to think you're stalking me."

He watched curiously as James' eyes opened wide, and then a smile of delight spread across his face. "Eli." The guy looked genuinely pleased to see him, which threw Eli off his stride, but he kept going.

"So what happened this time? Speedy cat? Tree root?"

Abby snorted. "Would you believe stepladder?"

James snarled at her. "It was that damn cat." When Abby rolled her eyes, James stuck his chin out. "It was. He would've gotten down on his own, but no, you made me climb up to get the damn thing off the top of the cupboards and look what happened. How am I going to do the surfing lesson next week with a broken wrist? And the stupid thing jumped down on its own, as I told you it would. It's a menace." He squinted at Abby. "It's already sent two members of our family to the ER. You're next Abs, you're next. Beware."

She just rolled her eyes again and drawled, "Right." She stood up and shifted Dedrick to her hip. Eli was surprised how quiet the kid was. "Now that the good doctor is here..." She gave Eli a

once over and waggled her eyebrows, "Dedrick and I will be in the waiting room or we may go and get some juice." She swept out of the room giggling as James muttered "Doom, doom, beware." behind her.

Eli tried not to smile. As a rule, he did not find things to smile about at work. James was completely throwing him. Every time he saw the guy, he made Eli feel off kilter. Eli's days were always the same, until James came swanning in with his adorable, weirdly named nephew and his overly dramatic cat-hating rhetoric, and left Eli floundering. He stiffened his shoulders and put himself back in his doctor mind-set.

"So, the evil cat?" Shit. That was not his doctor-mode question.

"Eh. I don't mind the stupid thing, but they dragged me out of bed to come over and get the damn thing off the top of the cupboard, where it had apparently been whining and chirping all night. I lost my balance on the ladder, put out my arm to catch myself and... ouch."

Eli gently took James' arm and pulled it away from his chest. It was already swollen and bruised, and as he carefully probed it, James winced. "Can you move your fingers?"

"Some." James wiggled his fingers slightly.

"Well, you definitely need an x-ray." He popped his head out the curtain and told a passing nurse to send someone to take James for an x-ray. As they waited, he fiddled with the chart. "Could you, uh, could you check this insurance form? Just make sure all the information is correct."

James frowned, but took the chart and looked it over. "Yeah, it's all good. I told them that at the front."

"Seriously? There's nothing unusual?"

"No." James was looking at him like he was losing it. Maybe he was.

"Your name is really..."

James looked at him for a minute, confused, and then, when it seemed to dawn on him what Eli was asking, he blushed scarlet. "Yeah, it really is."

"Why?"

The look James gave him said it all. "Obviously, because my parents named me that. It's not like

I'd legally change my name to that."

"But why not? It's totally cool."

He got another look. "A Trekkie?"

"Um."

James rolled his eyes. "God, my parents would love you. You go to conventions don't you?"

Eli felt his own face flush red. "No." He bit out, perhaps a bit too quickly.

The laughter rang out. "Not anymore, you mean."

"Shut up." Eli mumbled and looked for the orderly or whoever was supposed to be taking James down for x-rays.

"Guess what my brothers' names are - Len and Monte."

Tipping his head to the side, Eli thought. Len, Leonard. "Not Leonard McCoy McCray?" He was aghast. How could you name your kid McCoy McCray?

James just laughed and nodded, wincing when he jogged his arm. "Now Monte."

"Montgomery Scott."

"Yep."

"But... Abby?"

"Abigail Uhura. They didn't know Uhura's first name and my Mom refused to let my dad just call her Uhura McCray, so they compromised on her name."

"Wow."

"Yeah."

"Have you ever met him?"

James sighed as if indulging him, which Eli supposed he was. "Yes, a few times - my parents

used to drag us to conventions when we were kids."

Eli gazed off into space and breathed, "Wow." again. He heard James snort in response.

The curtain was pulled back and Eli seemed to snap back to his usual abrupt, cold self. He gave terse instructions to the woman with the wheel chair, scribbled something on a piece of paper and ripped it off for the woman to take with her. He glanced up at the clock, bit his lip, and then looked back at James. "I'll wait for your results."

James shrugged. "Okay." He was wheeled off down the hall.

With a shake of his head, Eli told the nurse that he'd be in the lounge with his charts. As Eli turned in that direction, he heard his name called and spun to come face to face with James' sister, the little guy's hand clutched in hers.

"Dr. Zimmerman?"

"Yes?"

"I just wanted to say thanks, for taking care of Dedrick when I was away. You can hardly see the scar. So, thanks anyway." She looked at the space where James had been sitting. "Is it broken do you think?"

Eli shrugged. "It didn't look good. I guess we'll know for sure shortly." He looked down at the little guy with a faint pink line on his forehead. "And you're, uh, welcome for the..." He waved at Dedrick.

She just beamed back at him. He kept repeating 'Abigail Uhura' in his head as he looked at her. An entire family. He should have asked what their parents' names were. He finally shook himself out of his Star Trek induced stupor. "I have to ..." He waved the charts in the air.

"Yeah. Sure. We'll be just outside if James is looking for us; Dedrick needs to burn off some energy. And like I said, thanks again." She caught the little guy's attention. "Say thanks to Dr. Zimmerman."

Dedrick looked up at him. "Sanks."

"You're welcome." This was the weirdest fucking day he'd ever had. People thanking him, smiling at him, happy to see him. What the hell? Maybe he was so overtired he was hallucinating. But then he'd only been on duty for eleven and a half hours and he'd even managed

to grab a couple of hours sleep. And then offering to hang around until the x-rays were ready? He was losing it.

Within thirty minutes, the nurse told him James was back, and yes, it was broken. Eli told her to get the supplies while he found a more subdued James slumped on the table. Eli didn't say anything as he looked at the x-ray. It wasn't too bad - just a small fracture - but James'd need a cast for about four weeks.

Eli was starting to get worried. James hadn't said anything or even looked up at him. "James? Are you okay?"

James' head snapped up and he glared at Eli. "No, I'm not fucking okay. I have a broken wrist." He waved his arm in the air, then gasped as the pain hit.

This was what Eli was used to dealing with in the ER. None of the happy smiley friendly crap. "It's a minor break and should be healed completely in four weeks."

"Do you know what my job is?" James was practically snarling now.

"Um. You said you're a teacher."

"Yeah, I'm an outdoor ed teacher. Do you know what that is?"

"You, uh, teach about the outdoors?"

James rolled his eyes. "Close. I'm basically a glorified gym teacher. I teach surfing, kayaking, wilderness camping, rock climbing. So tell me, which of those do you propose I teach with a fucking broken arm?"

Eli licked his lips and swallowed. Usually when patients got pissy, he just ignored them or put them in their place. He was having trouble doing that with James. His instinct was to give him a hug and tell him it would be okay, which was bullshit. "Camping?"

James shook his head in disgust. "You can't assemble a goddamned tent with a broken arm."

"Wrist."

"What the fuck ever."

Eli closed his eyes and took a deep breath. "I'm going to give you a shot to help with the pain. It will probably hurt when I set the bones in place."

James shook his head. "I don't think that's a good idea. I'm really sensitive and I get super-loopy." He did *not* need to get super-loopy in front of Dr. Studly.

He watched Eli prepare a syringe. "Trust me, loopy or not, you're going to want this." Before James could protest, Eli had pushed up his shirt sleeve, swabbed his arm and jabbed in the needle. Shit, Eli's bedside manner could use some work.

James winced and pulled away. "Christ, Eli. Be gentle with me when you stick it in." James noticed the nurse raise her eyebrows.

Eli just snorted and started doing whatever doctors did when you broke your wrist. James tried not to look - he had a feeling he'd freak out if he watched them. It did hurt like hell when Eli pulled his wrist straight, but James could feel the buzz of whatever was in that shot as the pain soon dulled to a low-level ache.

James stared down at the top of Eli's head as the doctor bent over his wrist wrapping plaster around James' arm. When Eli tipped his head, James could see his ear; there was a small hole in the lobe where Eli'd obviously had it pierced at some point. James was having trouble focusing, so he leaned closer to see if the hole had grown over. Closer and closer he moved, head spinning, eyes blinking. He reached out with his good hand and grasped the lobe of Eli's ear between his thumb and forefinger.

When Eli's head snapped back, James almost fell off the table. "What the hell?" Eli was standing in front of him and the doctor reached up to touch his ear. "What were you doing?"

James just grinned. Damn Eli was hot. He leered at him, looking him up and down. "Your ear is cute." James thought his voice sounded odd, like he was drunk.

Eli felt his face turn red. He looked at the nurse who turned away, her lips twitching in amusement. Fucking great, now the nurses would be talking about him in the break room. He cleared his throat. "Just sit still and behave. I'm almost done." Eli wrapped the last few layers of plaster, then looked up to see James stripping him naked with his eyes or going cross-eyed - it was hard to tell which.

"Do you want a colored one?"

"Colored what?" James was definitely slurring now.

"Cast, we can leave it plain or make it colored."

James' eyes lit up. "Pink."

"Um, I'm not sure pink is a good choice." The nurse was having more difficulty stifling her laughter now. "How about blue?"

"I hate blue; it's for boys."

"You are a boy. Okay, how about purple. That's almost pink."

"Okay." James was staring into space now, kind of humming and swaying on the table.

Eli and the nurse got him set up with a purple cast. James was swaying even more now, so Eli steadied him with a hand on his shoulder. "Maybe you should lie down for a minute." All he needed was James to fall off the examining table and hurt himself. He hadn't over-dosed him, but James hadn't lied about being sensitive. He was high as a kite. Eli was glad James' sister was there.

Just as he thought it, Abby poked her head through the curtain. "All done?" She looked at James lying on the table humming. "Oh God, you gave him a painkiller didn't you?" She started giggling.

"Yeah, sorry. I thought it was for the best, but..." he waved his hand weakly in the direction of James.

"This is brilliant. Did he do anything way embarrassing that I can blackmail him with later? Did he try to get naked? He did that when he broke his ankle in high school."

Eli was left blinking, imagining James stripping. He shook off the image. "Um, no, sorry. Beyond some wicked humming and swaying, he pretty much behaved himself."

"Crap." She looked at the cast. "Purple?"

"Well, he wanted pink, but I thought purple might be a compromise."

She broke up then, bent over laughing while Dedrick looked silently at them all as if he wasn't quite sure what was going on, which was probably true. "Oh my God. That is so perfect. Genius. I'm going to make his life miserable with that for at least a week. I can't wait to tell Monte."

Eli shook his head. He and his sister definitely didn't have that kind of relationship. They got along fine, they saw each other every couple of years at some family thing, polite, pleasant. She would never seek out information to use against him. This was kind of odd. Like those families you read about in books.

"Okay, well, I don't think he should be alone for a bit until the meds wear off. Here's a prescription for something less potent if he's in a lot of pain; in four weeks he should have his wrist checked and it will likely be good."

"No problem. I'll keep him at my place today. My fault anyway, well Maxi's. Stupid cat." He helped James off the table so she could put her arm around his waist to guide him out.

"Thanks again, Dr. Zimmerman. You're practically our family doctor already. I hope I'm not next." She grinned up at Eli and he couldn't help but smile back.

"Eli." He wanted to smack himself in the head. Why was he letting this weird family get under his skin?

She just kept smiling. "Okay, Eli. Take care."

James finally looked at him, eyes glassy and smiled crookedly. "Nice ear." Despite himself Eli laughed.

Eli watched them head down the hallway and looked up at the clock. Eight thirty. He was thirty minutes over - he could go. Once again, he grabbed his stuff and headed out to his car. It was a beautiful late-September day - the sun was shining, the sky was blue - the perfect postcard kind of San Francisco day. He took a deep breath and got in his car thinking he might hit the Wharf later after he grabbed some sleep. It was really too nice to be inside and he could go and say hi to the sea lions.

He was half-way home before he realized he hadn't had a cigarette the minute he'd left work. He scowled for a moment, and then blamed it on the freaky McCray family with their weird names. McCoy McCray. That practically required Child Protective Services intervention. He ignored the smile lingering on his lips.

Chapter 4

James still blushed when he thought about his time in the ER. He couldn't believe he'd grabbed Eli's ear. On the upside, he hadn't grabbed Eli's ass. He'd warned Eli he got loopy and the man still gave him the shot, so in a way it was Eli's own fault. And then he had to tell Abby about the pink thing? Eli was mean, that was all there was to it. He was a mean nasty snotty asshole. Who was so fucking hot James had been jerking off to fantasies of him for weeks. He was glad his left arm was broken, not his right.

But the cast was off now; he was perfectly fine, even if he'd had to have someone else teach the surfing unit while he'd supervised from the beach.

Next weekend was Halloween. His parents always had their big Star Trek themed Halloween party. It was wild, with the Trekkies really getting into it. It was like a Con but slightly smaller and with more booze. He didn't always go, although he had the requisite costume, actually more than one. Even Detric had a costume this year, a little tiny yeoman with a red shirt. Poor kid, he was doomed. The red shirt always got picked off first. Of course, he'd be in bed by nine o'clock anyway.

James had been thinking about Eli and the whole Trekkie thing. The guy was definitely uptight and stressed - he even smoked, which wasn't something James was into. Surely as a doctor he knew that was bad for him? But then he'd heard about doctors who were hooked on all kinds of drugs, especially high pressure ER doctors, so he supposed cigarettes was the lesser of several evils. He knew personally he'd rather have a doctor work on him who was hooked on nicotine instead of alcohol or oxycontin.

When he was at his parents for dinner, he'd picked up one of their Halloween invitations. The party was invitation-only - with suitably kitschy invites. James didn't make any promises, but he'd mentioned that Eli was kind of a fan and his parents were thrilled that they might get to meet the man who'd stitched Detric's head. His mom gave him a look and winked when he told them about Eli, which garnered her an eye roll. She was a matchmaker; his dad was oblivious.

Before driving over, James had called the hospital to see if Eli was working. Amazingly they told him he was. He'd expected to get the whole "we can't tell you that" speech. As James walked toward the ER entrance, he couldn't believe how nervous he was. He never got nervous about guys. Well, truth be told, he hadn't asked one out in... forever... and never one as hot as Eli. Before he got to the entrance, he glanced over - sure enough, Eli and his cigarette were skulking by a palm tree. Well, maybe not skulking, but hunched.

James turned with a big grin and headed Eli's way. The butterflies in his stomach were the good kind. "Eli, hi."

Eli's head jerked up. His expression was not exactly welcoming. "You *are* stalking me." He took a deep drag on his cigarette and exhaled.

James' feet stuttered, and he came to a stop in front of him. "Um. Not really. I phoned and they said you were working and I, uh, so..." He hadn't expected this kind of reception.

Eli knew he was snarling; it wasn't James' fault, but it had been a bitch of a day. Some idiot had decided to burn his house down with his kids in it rather than let his wife have custody. Both dead - the father survived, of course. Eli just couldn't cope with 'happy smiley the world is a great place' James. He wanted to wallow and scream and beat someone up. Preferably the asshole in the burn unit. He hoped that guy suffered...a lot.

He watched James drop his gaze to the ground and swallow. Shit. Now he felt guilty on top of being angry. "Oh, well," James continued to stutter, "well, I just wanted to give you this, I thought you might enjoy it. My parents have a big Trek party on Halloween, but whatever, just, anyway..." He trailed off and held out an envelope, which Eli finally took.

James backed up a step. "Don't worry - I likely won't go, so if you want to go you won't have to deal with me. You can take someone with you or whatever. Anyway, take care."

As James turned to leave, Eli spoke up. "James." James paused. "God, I'm sorry. It's not your fault. It's just, well, a bitch of a day. Sometimes..." He shrugged.

There was a moment of silence, then James turned around, walked to Eli and leaned back on the wall beside him. "Wanna talk about it?"

"No, it's fine."

"Bullshit."

"It's not something you want to hear about."

"Yes, I do. Spill."

No way was Eli going to tell James anything. He'd never shared this shit with Nate; Nate hadn't wanted to know after the first few times he'd tried to vent to him. Nate just started ranting about

how Eli should get into something else, like plastic surgery, which made way more money. "Did you hear about that fire on the news?" What the fuck? He was not going to talk about this. James nodded. "A custody battle. Dad decided he wasn't giving up custody to the mother, so he set the house on fire." Jesus Christ, he needed to shut his mouth.

"Holy shit. You had to..."

"Yeah."

"Well fuck. That sucks. No wonder you're in a mood. You're entitled. Everyone dead?"

"Not the father." His jaw was so tight it was starting to ache.

When Eli felt James' arm go around his shoulders and squeeze, he almost collapsed. "Oh hell." James kept his arm around him and Eli felt a little of the stress leave. "Sorry for my bad timing."

"No, it was good timing. I was ready to go back in there and set him on fire myself."

"I can understand that. Probably goes against that oathy thing you have to take, but I can see the urge."

Eli snorted. "Yeah, definitely against the oathy thing." He took a breath. "I better go back in; there are other people who need me. I just needed a break." Eli waved the invitation. "Thanks for this, and, well, I really wouldn't go if you don't. I don't know anyone in your family except Abby and Dedrick, so that would be a bit awkward."

He watched fascinated as James' face lit up. "You wanna go together? I could pick you up. My folks live in Oakland."

What the fuck was he doing? Eli glanced at the date - amazingly he was off. "Okay, yeah." He pulled out a pen and a prescription pad and scribbled on it. "Here's my number so we can figure things out."

James snatched the pen, wrote his number on the bottom half, and ripped it off. "Here, it's easier for you to call me since you work different hours. Anything outside of eight to three weekdays you can reach me."

"Okay." Eli watched James stride off with a bounce in his step. Well shit, he had a date with James T. Kirk – McCray. James was hotter than Kirk had ever been. Well, maybe not hotter than baby Kirk, Chris Pine. Seriously, that guy was - gah. Eli walked back into the ER with a half-

smile on his face. This definitely had been a weird day, but maybe not totally disastrous.

Chapter 5

Eli called James a couple of days later, completely in a tizzy over what he'd wear. He was trying to back out when James came up with the brilliant plan of Eli coming over to his place so he could use one of James' costumes. They weren't that much different in size except for height and they could drive from James'.

James wasn't quite ready to admit that the perfect plan meant Eli had to come back to his place after the party to get his car. He could hear the faint laughter of an evil genius in the back of his head, but he chose to ignore it. It just made more sense and he was all about logic. Now the laughter turned mocking. Bastard.

On Saturday night, Eli looked nervous when he arrived. James wasn't sure if it was meeting his family or the date thing. He knew Eli had worked that day - maybe there had been another shitty event. "How was work?"

"Fine."

James shook his head. "Fine? Really? You work in the ER, for God's sake. It's *never* fine."

With a shrug Eli turned away, looking around the apartment. "It was as fine as it can be. Normal."

James stepped up, gripped Eli's chin, and forced Eli to look at him. "Truth? I'm going to ban 'fine'. You're not allowed to use it with me anymore." He smirked. "Unless it's used in the phrase '*Your ass looks fine*'."

"Not allowed?" Eli was glaring at him.

With a smile, James nodded. "Yep. Not allowed. Don't argue." He left Eli sputtering and headed toward his bedroom. "Come on. Let's see what you want to wear."

When Eli walked into the bedroom, he stopped in shock. There were six outfits laid out on the bed - the traditional blue and gold outfits, even a red-shirt, a green jacket with gold braid and medals that had been for dignitaries, as well as the wrap-around style shirt along with the formal red and white admiral's uniform from the movies. He stood his mouth gaping. "Holy shit."

James looked at Eli in confusion, then back at the bed. "Oh yeah, well, my mom sews... a lot."

"Your mom made all these?" When James nodded, Eli continued. "I think I'm in love."

"Hey, my dad might take offense." He just shook his head as Eli fingered the fabric.

"So which one do you want to wear? They're all about the same size, but, well..." James looked at Eli's arms and tried not to drool. "The formal one with the medals doesn't stretch, nor does the Admiral's, and I think they might be kind of tight in your arms and chest." He swallowed.

Eli finally looked away from the costumes, blinking. "Oh, just the... yellow one I guess." He gave a little smirk. "I can't believe you have a blue one."

"Why not?" James wondered why Eli would say that.

"After what you said in the hospital?" James just continued to look at him curiously. "I believe you said, and I quote "I hate blue, it's for boys."" Eli was trying to stifle his laughter.

James buried his face in his hands and groaned. Oh shit. He peeked through his fingers. "Was this before or after the pink thing?"

"After."

"Oh fuck." He couldn't help snorting though. It was funny. They both stood there snickering like twelve year olds when James finally cleared his throat. "Okay, yellow for you, and I think I'll go formal with gold braid." He turned as he peeled off his shirt. He stopped when he realized Eli was staring at him. He suddenly felt very exposed. "Um, Eli?"

Eli licked his lips, and finally looked James in the eye. "Huh?"

Oh, that was an ego boost. "Get changed?"

"Uh huh." His gaze was roaming over James' chest. James felt his nipples harden at the look and quickly snatched up the jacket and pulled it on. Yes, Eli's interest was flattering, and damn, he was equally interested, but he wasn't really sure this was a date or something weird like more than a hook-up but less than a real date. Would a hook-up be so bad? Did he want a date? Shit, he should have thought this through better.

When Eli pulled his own t-shirt off, James lost track of his musing. Holy shit. The guy had a six pack to die for, amazing arms as he'd suspected, and a most lickable tattoo on his right bicep. Oh yeah, hook-up, date, whatever. Quick blow job in his parents' garden shed, that would work. He realized it was his turn to be caught staring and his face flushed. He didn't want Eli to think he

was some kind of party boy but then again, when faced with someone with a body like Eli, it was hard not to just drop your pants and bend over.

Speaking of pants, now he had to take his off. Crap. If he didn't turn around, Eli would definitely notice the turn his mind had taken.

Eli barely stifled a snort when he saw James' reaction. He was glad he wasn't alone in this - it would have been awkward to be the only one attracted. But James seemed to be scrambling to get dressed, so Eli guessed a pre-party blow job was out of the question. Even a quick grope would have been welcome. It had been months since he'd gotten even that much. But when James turned his back and slid his jeans off, Eli got the hint. Maybe the guy wasn't interested after all. Eli'd been out of the game so long he couldn't even read the signals anymore. He pretty much needed someone to come right up and say "Wanna fuck?" to get it.

He pulled the yellow shirt on and was surprised it fit as well as it did. It was a bit tight in the arms - maybe he should lay off the curls - but otherwise pretty good. James still had his back to him, so Eli quickly undid his pants and slid them down. Just as he stepped out of them and stood up, James turned back around and they both froze.

Eli stood with his jeans in one hand; James stood still with his hands on the fasteners of the shirt. James' gaze was very surely focused on his crotch. Uh oh. There was no way he was going to be able to keep Little Eli down with a stare like that aimed at him. When James licked his lips, that was it. Eli could almost visualize the bulge in his boxer briefs getting larger as he felt himself hardening. Suddenly, James' eyes flew up to meet Eli's gaze and they both just stood there for a moment. Eli was sure that James would step forward and kiss him or touch him or something, but instead the man stuttered something about tape and fled the room.

Well shit. Eli didn't know what to think. James couldn't be a virgin; he didn't come across as innocent. He seemed interested given his reaction. What the hell was going on? Eli shook his head and pulled on the pants. They were a bit tight across the crotch, but his cock hadn't settled down yet either. He was still thinking about James' ass as he'd bent over to pull on the black uniform pants. Nice, tight, round but not a bubble butt. Perfect really.

Eli took a deep breath to try and calm himself because the pants weren't getting any looser. James came back, blushing and holding a roll of duct tape. Eli wasn't sure what that meant. He'd been pretty sure the guy didn't have a serial killer vibe, but hell, he could barely tell who was gay these days. Maybe he was just kinky? Eli could work with that. He raised an eye brow.

James blushed. "For the pants." He waved the duct tape in the direction of the pants, which were

an inch or two long on Eli. "It's faster than hemming. Okay, actually I can't hem. But you know." He broke off looking embarrassed again.

"Sure. That works." Eli shook his head. James was really acting oddly.

As he knelt beside Eli, James gritted his teeth. This was totally unfair. He shouldn't have to have to be kneeling in front of the hottest guy he's seen in forever and resist. He still wasn't sure why he was resisting making a move on the man. Eli would go for it, but James wanted it to be a date.

James focused on flipping up the pants and tearing off the tape to fasten them. If he didn't think about it, he could get it finished and be done. As he tried to stand up, he knelt on his own pant leg and lost his balance, falling forward. He put out his hand to catch himself; his palm landed on Eli's thigh and his face smooshed into Eli's crotch as he tried to regain his balance.

Instinctively, he inhaled sharply and caught Eli's scent. Oh fuck. He was so screwed. Eli's hand came down and smoothed over his hair. "James? Are you okay?"

James needed to move, he really did. He needed to pull his face away from Eli's crotch. Yes, he would, shortly, as soon as he memorized that scent. When he felt Eli's cock start to harden under his cheek, he moaned and pulled back with a jerk. James leapt to his feet, his face scarlet. "Oh, God. I'm so sorry."

As James went to turn away, Eli caught his wrist. "James? What's going on?"

"Nothing. I'm fine."

"Oh, don't give me the fine bullshit. If I can't, you can't." Eli jerked on James' wrist, pulling him closer. "Have you changed your mind about tonight?"

James' eyes went wide. "No! Of course not." He looked down and swallowed. "I just... this is supposed to be a fun night out for you to get you away from the stress of work, and I'm practically throwing you down and having my wicked way you before we even get to the party."

Eli chuckled and James snapped his head up to look at him. "I wouldn't turn you down, you know." James just nodded. "But we don't have to do anything, I, well, I appreciate you even thought of this for me." Eli looked away. "Nate, my ex, well, he wasn't too tolerant of my Star Trek interest, so I've kind of steered clear. Then you, a total stranger – more or less – invited me to this because you knew I'd like it." Eli shrugged. "I just want you to know that it means a lot to

me."

James stared into Eli's blue eyes. Those gorgeous sky blue eyes - no longer cold and remote as they'd been the night he met Eli - his pupils growing wide as he stared at James. Without really even thinking about it, James leaned in closer and his lips oh so gently touched Eli's. Eli blinked quickly several times, then his hand released James' wrist to slide around his waist to draw him closer until their hips were flush. His other hand slid up James' arm to wrap his fingers around the back of James' head, tipping it slightly before he pulled James's head down until their lips touched again.

Eli gently sucked at James' bottom lip as James wrapped his arms around Eli's back; Eli pulled him in even tighter when he felt James respond. When Eli's tongue licked at James' lips, James opened his mouth to the invader with a groan, tightening his own arms around Eli. James could taste the faint underlying flavor of cigarettes, but over that was mint and Eli. Oddly James didn't find the cigarette flavor off-putting... or maybe it was just Eli's skill with his tongue that made James completely forget about anything but the smooth slick wetness in his mouth and the rub of Eli's hard cock against his own.

James seriously considered rubbing off on Eli. It would feel so good and only take a few minutes considering how hard he was. Then he remembered the day he'd invited Eli - seeing him stressed out, leaning against the hospital wall, upset about the dead kids - and he knew the man needed more than a quick BJ or hand-job. James was going to take Eli to the party and let him wallow in the Trekkiness, even if it wasn't really James' thing.

As James started to pull back, he had to pry Eli's hand off his head. He smiled down at Eli, whose eyes looked a bit glazed. "It's party time."

"Huh?" Eli was trying to pull him back closer. James was flattered, but he was taking Eli to that party if it killed him... and it may very well.

"You're a doctor, right?" Eli frowned at him. "So, can you die of blue balls?"

Eli tipped his head as he tried to process what James had said. Finally he snorted and playfully punched James' shoulder. "Idiot. Maybe you'll find out since you made us stop."

James smiled. "We'll see if you can resist my charms once I apply myself." Eli's eyebrows rose skeptically. "Come on." James walked to the closet and started digging on the top shelf. "You need this."

Eli stepped back as something small and furry flew at him. He caught it and looked at the fake

fur ball. "What the hell is this?"

"It's a tribble."

He turned it over in his hands a few times before he started laughing. James smiled; it felt good to hear Eli laugh. He had a feeling Eli didn't laugh that often.

"I always wanted one of these."

"It's a real one." Mystified, Eli looked between the tribble and James. "It was actually on the show. My parents got a whole bunch of them back in the day. My uncle worked on the set, and when they got rid of a lot of props and stuff, he picked up a box of the things."

Eli's eyes widened. "But then I shouldn't take it. What if I lose it?"

James shrugged. "Whatever. There're more." He snatched it from Eli's hands and flipped it over. "Besides, my mom attached Velcro." He reached out and jammed it on Eli's shoulder where it stuck. "So he'll just stick to you."

He leaned in and gave Eli another quick kiss. He liked being able to kiss Eli whenever he wanted. "Come on. If you want to see Yeoman Dedrick, we have to get there before he conks out for the night."

With a grin Eli followed him out of the bedroom, then did a double take when he got a look at them in the mirror. It was freaky to see them in Star Trek uniforms; despite how many cons he'd gone to in his younger days, he'd never been brave enough to wear a costume. He felt like an eighteen year old kid again.

They chatted about their common interests in the car on the way to the party. Eli told James more about his family and James continued with the background on his siblings as well. Eli was obviously not as close to his parents as James was, but his parents were proud they had a doctor in the family. What Jewish mother wasn't? They thought his sister had married well, and while they knew Eli was gay, Eli always had the feeling that his mother hoped he'd see the light, find a nice Jewish girl and have a half dozen babies.

Since Nate left, odd e-mails from Jewish dating sites had been showing up in his inbox and he was pretty sure they weren't random spam. However, as was typical in his family, it just wasn't discussed. His sister Johanna knew he was gay and seemed okay with it. She'd never said anything negative, but they just didn't talk about it. It was far too personal and intimate to be

discussed with family, which, given what he was finding out about James' family, seemed odd.

James was the third child. His younger brother Monte lived in LA and worked in the film industry as an editor. Len, the oldest, was in Portland working as a construction contractor. Abby was a software programmer in the gaming industry. Len was married and had two boys, while Monte had a steady girlfriend but wasn't in any hurry to get married or have kids. Eli had been a bit afraid to ask about Abby as sometimes single parents had issues with exes, but Abby just got tired of waiting for Mr. Right, so she had Dedrick with the help of a sperm bank. She wasn't dating anyone now, but wasn't against getting married someday as long as the guy was okay with Dedrick. From the way James talked, the guy would also have to be approved by the three brothers, who weren't about to let some guy treat Abby and Dedrick with anything less than the utmost respect. It was freaky - he knew more about James' siblings and their feelings about family, kids, their jobs and life than he knew about his own sister.

Eli tentatively asked James' parents' names. James told him it was Sarah and Carl. When Eli raised an eyebrow, James laughed. "I know, I know. My dad tried to convince my mom to change their names after I was born. My mom put her foot down. So my dad had to be content with us kids having Star Trek names. My mom loves the show and everything, but she figured changing her name was taking it just a bit too far."

"Huh." Eli's dad golfed and worked. His mother played tennis and would rather slit her wrists than golf. His father was not allowed to discuss golf in her presence. In fact, he wasn't sure they ever discussed anything when in each other's presence. They must have. You couldn't go for thirty five years without talking could you?

They pulled up to a large two story house in a suburban neighborhood. Cars lined the street, but they found a spot reserved for family in the driveway. Eli was nervous now. He was going to meet James' family. What if they hated him? What if they thought he was weird? Or too Jewish? It had happened.

They walked in the front door without knocking and James grabbed Eli's hand, leading him straight into the kitchen. Eli was struck dumb. All around them, in the living room and passing them in the hallway, where people dressed up like Star Trek characters - new Star Trek, old Star Trek, and even some Cardassians and Klingons. It was liked he'd fallen asleep and was having the best dream ever, especially given that a hottie named James T. Kirk had tangled their fingers together and was dragging Eli down the hall behind him.

They burst into the kitchen to shouts of "James!" and Eli stopped short, trying to disengage his hand, but James just tightened his hold. Eli finally focused enough to look around and saw Abby, standing at the counter in one of the super short uniform dresses and high boots, cutting some fruit. Dedrick was standing next to her wearing a little red shirt uniform, bouncing from foot to

foot and tugging on her dress. He seemed more like a normal kid than he had at the hospital, when he'd been abnormally quiet and well behaved.

Abby smiled at Eli and waved. She then said something to Dedrick, who looked over at him and kind of waved back. Eli just smiled blankly, perhaps in terror, as James pulled him over to a woman wearing a long caftan type gown, with her hair in an elaborate up-do.

James finally let go of Eli's hand and embraced the woman. "Hey, Mom." He pulled back and grabbed Eli again. "This is Eli Zimmerman, well, I told you about him." Eli watched fascinated as James blushed. "Eli, my mom, Sarah."

Before he knew what hit him, Eli found himself in the embrace of the older woman who smelled like flowers. "Dr. Zimmerman. It's so wonderful to meet you, the man who stitched up our Dedrick's head." He watched her give James a slightly scolding look as she pulled back. James just rolled his eyes.

"Eli. Please, Mrs. McCray. It was nothing."

James spoke up. "Yeah, what about my wrist? He fixed my wrist too. You don't even care about your poor injured son." James brought up a good pout.

As Abby walked behind Eli carrying the small plate of fruit she muttered at Eli, "He's such a freaking whiner." She then darted away with a smirk as James took a swing at her and complained, "Everyone is so mean to me."

"Of course, dear." His mother patted James on the shoulder. "And it's Sarah. Just Sarah. I'm going to take Eli and find your father. You put out the Romulan Ale, will you, James? Be a good boy."

She tucked her hand in Eli's arm and led him away. Eli looked back at James, not sure if he should be afraid, and found James staring back, mouth agape. That didn't give Eli a lot of confidence. But he was a doctor; he could handle high-stress situations. This was definitely one of them.

They walked out onto the patio and Eli was stunned to find the large backyard filled with more people in costume. He gaped around. "Is *everyone* in costume?"

James' mother patted his arm. "Oh yes. It's the rule. You can't come without one." She paused looking around. "Now where is Carl? Oh, there he is."

As they made their way down the stairs and across the lawn, James' mother began what Eli decided was the grilling. "So you're an ER doctor."

"Yes, ma'am."

"Don't ma'am me. It's Sarah. Where did you go to school?"

"Chicago, where I grew up."

"So what brought you to the foggy shores of San Francisco?"

Eli paused. Obviously she knew James was gay. She probably suspected Eli was, given that he seemed to be James' date and had been holding his hand. "Um."

"Ah, a boy. It's always a boy, isn't it?" Eli just nodded dumbly. "I moved here from Boston, of all places, when I met Carl. He was going to school in Boston at the time, and... here I am." She smiled over at him. "A happy ever after and all that." Suddenly she frowned. "You're not still with..."

Eli quickly shook his head. "No, that didn't really work. It, uh, ended about two years ago."

She patted his arm. "Oh, I'm sorry dear. But I suppose for James' sake I shouldn't be. That probably makes me an awful person, but one does have to look out for one's family first." She grinned at him and Eli just swallowed. His freak-out-o-meter was going through the roof.

They stopped in front of a man with Spock ears and a very realistic hair piece. James' mother patted him on the shoulder. "Carl, I want to introduce you to someone."

James' dad turned and smiled at them. Eli could imagine James looking like this in thirty years or so, minus the Spock ears. "Carl, this is Eli, Dr. Zimmerman, who James and Abby told us about."

James' dad smiled even wider and held out his hand, giving Eli a hearty handshake. "Ah, the good doctor who stitched up Dedrick." The man nudged an older man wearing a long white robe next to him. "Stan. Stan. This is the doctor who fixed up Dedrick. Dr. Zimmerman."

The man in the robe smiled and shook Eli's hand, too. "Good job doc, good job. It looks fine."

Eli found himself blinking dumbly. "Um, thanks." He cleared his throat. "I, uh, also helped with James' wrist." He felt compelled to get the guy some sympathy.

Carl was waving his hand in the air. "Damn fool should never have been up on the ladder. It's a cat for chrissakes, it would come down when it was ready. Kids." He smiled again. "Hope you enjoy the party, Eli." He gave a little wink. "That tribble seems to have taken a liking to you." With a laugh he was off across the lawn with Stan discussing dilithium crystals.

Once more Eli felt compelled to defend James. "It really could have been quite bad you know. He was lucky it was a minor break."

James' mother patted his arm. "You're a sweetheart. I know. We were very upset at first, but he shouldn't give in to Abby or Dedrick. I swear, every time they say jump, he asks how high. He needs to get some interests of his own, something, or someone, to keep him busy and occupied with his own life." She stopped then and looked directly at him.

"Oh, yeah, I suppose."

She rolled her eyes. "I'm trying to be subtle here, Eli, since I don't know you that well, but really, he needs a man. Think about it." She pulled him forward. "Come, we'll get you a drink and find James. He should be suitably freaked out that I've had you to myself for this long. Tell him I asked about your annual income and condom preference."

His mouth hanging open, Eli entered the house behind her to find James pacing the length of the kitchen. When he saw the shell-shocked look on Eli's face, he turned to the kitchen cabinets and started banging his head against them. James' mother just laughed some more and kept walking.

James watched Eli walk up to him with trepidation. God only knew what his mother had said to the man, but from the look on Eli's face, it hadn't been good. Eli stopped in front of him. James cleared his throat. "Um, do you want to leave?"

His eyes going wide, Eli looked startled. "No, of course not. Why?"

"Well." James just kind of waved his hand towards the backyard.

"Oh, no, it was fine. Weird, but fine."

"You desperately want a cigarette though don't you?"

"Yes. No. Well, whatever, I didn't bring them with me so I'll be fine."

"Eli."

"What?"

"Fine?"

Eli huffed. "Sometimes fine fits. I go long hours at the hospital without smoking, I'm not going to have a nicotine fit, and your mother was very nice. I'm just not used to... well, families I guess, or being grilled by someone's mother."

"Oh, God." James grabbed two beers off the counter and pulled Eli by the hand outside. He found a quiet spot near the corner of the house and handed one of the beers to Eli. "So what did she say?"

Eli smirked as he took a swallow of beer. "She said I'm to tell you she asked about my annual income and condom preference."

James felt his face go hot with embarrassment and he closed his eyes momentarily. "Oh, shit. What did you say?"

"I told her I'm quite capable of keeping you in the style to which you are accustomed, and ribbed for receiving. Anything will do for giving."

His eyes wide, James coughed. "You didn't." Then he paused and frowned. "I don't have any ribbed."

Eli's grin grew wicked and wide as he stepped into James' personal space. "Well, then..."

James nodded mutely. His mind was already spinning off into a fantasy of Eli fucking him, somewhere, anywhere, even right here in the garden. Eli stepped even closer until their chests were touching, then leaned forward and breathed into James' ear. "Do you like that idea, James? Do you like the idea of me fucking your divine ass?" Eli's hand slid down James' side and around to grip one of his cheeks. James almost swooned right there. "It's been a long time for me. I can probably go two or three times. Think you can handle that?"

James' let out an unmanly whimper, then wrapped his arms around Eli, pulled him in tight, and swooped in for a kiss. It was hard and impatient with teeth clashing and tongues tangling together as he thrust his hips against Eli. He was once again considering the option of rubbing off against the man when Eli pulled away. James tried to pout and pull him back, but he finally realized there was someone beside them. A little someone.

Dedrick was tugging on Eli's shirt. The little guy looked up at them both. "Can I play with your tribble?"

Eli looked at James, who nodded, and Eli plucked the tribble off his shirt and stuck it on the front of Dedrick's. "Don't lose him or Uncle James will be lonely when he goes to bed later."

James gave him a smoldering look. "I don't think that will be an issue."

Dedrick's interruption cooled things down a bit between them, so they spent the rest of the evening enjoying the party. Eli couldn't keep the grin off his face as he watched people in elaborate costumes discussing plot points and the scientific possibilities of some of the show's gadgets. It was better than Disneyland. He got sucked into a discussion about whether Voyager deserved to be a part of the Star Trek universe and how Janeway's hair could maintain its hold for that many years. How much hairspray could they manufacture on that ship? It was the most fun he'd had in years.

Finally, early in the morning people started to drift off. James grabbed Eli's hand and pulled him toward the door. James had barely been more than two feet from Eli all night, constantly touching him, smiling at him. Eli thought it was kind of nice to be the focus of someone's attention without a medical purpose for a change. Eli pulled back on James' hand. "Hey, we have to say good-bye to your parents."

James whined. "Why?"

"Because it's the polite thing for me to do as a guest in their home, doofus. Come on."

They quickly found Sarah and Carl in the living room and James dragged them over. "We're saying good-bye."

His mother started laughing and Eli rolled his eyes. "Thank you for the invitation. It was definitely an experience. I had a great time."

She smiled and squeezed his other hand. "We're so glad you could come, Eli. I hope we'll see you again sometime soon."

James huffed out a "Mother."

She just grinned wider. "Have a good night, boys."

James' father offered the Vulcan salute and a very serious, "Live long and prosper". Eli couldn't stop grinning.

Chapter 6

All the way back to his place in the car, James' kept sneaking glances at Eli out of the corner of his eye. The man just sat there with a satisfied grin on his face, saying nothing. James wasn't exactly sure what that meant. When they pulled into James' parking spot, he shut off the car and sat gripping the steering wheel for a second. "Um, so do you want to come up for a drink?"

"No."

He spun his head to look at Eli. Had the man changed his mind? "I'm coming upstairs so I can suck your dick down my throat and then fuck you until you beg me to let you come again."

James' mouth dropped open, then snapped shut. "Yes, please. Get out of the damn car." The last was growled out.

They both leapt from the car and dashed for the stairs.

As James tried to get the key into the lock, Eli pushed up against him from behind; his hands went around James' waist and wormed their way under his shirt, roaming over James' stomach. "Stop it, Eli. I can't get the key in the hole."

"Oh, I'll help you get it in the hole, baby."

James burst out laughing. "That was so bad." He finally got the key in and they stumbled into the apartment, slamming the door behind them. Eli peeled his shirt off and tossed it aside, but when he grabbed for James, James stepped back. "Wait, my mom will kill you if you rip this." He quickly undid the fasteners on his shirt and tossed it aside with Eli's.

All of a sudden Eli froze. "Oh shit, I forgot your tribble."

James snorted. "That tribble is the least of my worries. I'll get it back." He grabbed Eli's hand, jerked him against his body and planted a sizzling kiss on him, his tongue plunging deep into Eli's mouth. When James pulled back he was panting. "You had a cigarette."

"I bummed one in the yard. Is that a problem?"

His head to the side for second, James finally answered. "No. Not now." He kissed Eli hard again. Eli's hands were kneading James' ass, pulling James tightly against him. "Bedroom. Now." James mumbled against Eli's mouth.

"Uh huh."

They staggered down the hall, neither willing to give up his grip on the other. When they got to the bedroom, James groaned in frustration at the costumes still spread across the bed. He should have been thinking ahead. James finally forced himself to pull away. "One minute. And get those pants off." James dashed to the bed and gathered up the costumes, putting them on the chair in the corner. He pushed his own pants down; when he looked up, Eli was standing in all his naked glory. His mouth dropped open. The guy was absolutely gorgeous. How could he not have had sex for months?

James quickly kicked off his own pants and met Eli in the middle of the bedroom, bodies slamming together, hands roaming, lips traveling over faces and necks, biting, nipping and sucking. Eli wrapped his arms around James, tumbled them onto the bed, then rolled them around until he was sitting up, straddling James' hips. Eli stared down at James, those sky blue eyes intense as he ran his hands over James' chest, stopping to gently pinch James' nipples until James arched his back.

Eli bent to kiss his way down James' chest, then gradually worked his way down James' body, coming ever closer to James' cock. James' hips thrust up trying to get some friction, but his hands remained clutching the covers. When Eli's tongue was finally hovering over James' cock, he looked up and met James' eyes; with a grin, Eli winked and swiped his tongue up from the base to the tip and quickly sucked on the head. The sound out of James' mouth was rather a strangled squeaking shriek.

Eli went to work, his tongue seeming to move in one direction while his mouth was going in the other. His hands were involved as well, one gently rolling James' balls while one finger rubbed behind them. With his other hand, he stroked the base of James' dick. James' hands were on Eli's head now as the man bobbed over his cock. James knew he was close - he could feel it creeping up on him. Despite what Eli had said about him coming first, he wanted to wait until Eli was inside him. He knew if he came first, they'd have to wait until his body recovered and he didn't want that.

He tugged at Eli's hair, until Eli finally pulled off and looked at him. "Now. I want you in me now. When I come."

Eli paused for a moment, licking around the head a bit, like a lollipop. "You sure?"

James couldn't help but lift his hips to try and get more friction, but Eli just kept licking, tongue tickling the slit. "Hell, yes." He pulled up on Eli's head again and stared at him hard. "Now."

As Eli pulled himself upright and moved to the bedside table, he raised a questioning eyebrow as he went. James nodded and spread his legs wide. When Eli turned back, he stopped and blinked, and then that dirty grin he'd used in the garden was back as he knee walked between James' thighs. Eli ripped open the condom and rolled it down his cock. James was a bit disappointed he hadn't yet explored that amazing part of Eli, but he figured there was still time. It looked exactly the size and shape he liked... or maybe just because it was Eli made it the perfect size. He wasn't about to analyze it too much at that point.

Pouring some lube into his palm, Eli used his other hand to gently rub some of the slick gel around James' hole. James tried to wiggle closer to get more friction, or maybe even a finger inside him. "Patience." Eli admonished him as he continued to add lube.

"Fuck patience."

"No, I'm going to fuck you, although you were one of my patients."

"Oh my God. You need help with your humor. I *was* your patient. I'm not now, so fuck me already."

"Yes, boss." Eli smeared the remaining lube over his cock, and then leaned forward. He slowly pushed, stopping about halfway in while James caught his breath. "You okay?" Eli looked down, his eyes wide and tense.

James wrapped his legs around Eli's waist and pulled him closer, his heels pressed into Eli's ass. "I'm fine." Eli snorted. "Shut up and fuck me." James was starting to giggle and question his moratorium on fine, but when Eli pushed in all the way and then swiveled his hips, James' laughter turned into gasps. James reached up, wrapped his hand around Eli's neck, and pulled him down for a wet sloppy kiss. Eli's hips ground against James; while the feel of Eli's hot sweaty chest rubbing against him had James' entire body feeling like he was stretched too tight. James' voice came out in a rasp. "Now, fast and hard."

Eli settled back onto his knees, his hands wrapped around James' thighs to hold him close. He started a punishing rhythm, barely giving James a chance to catch his breath. James put his hands up to brace against the headboard. He wasn't sure he was grunting out words or just random sounds, but Eli didn't seem to mind either way and he never faltered. James wasn't sure how long they went on that way. It could have been five minutes or five hours, but finally, James reached down with one hand and started stroking himself. He was close and he knew he should probably try and last longer, but shit, he'd been ready to go off since Eli had peeled his shirt off before the party. Now, watching that buff body strain over him, the muscles in his arms flexing as he pulled

James close, was too much.

As he arched into Eli's thrusts, James' stomach muscles contracted and he shot up over his chest, some even hitting his chin. It had been a while since he'd had that much velocity. As his body relaxed back on the bed, he looked up at Eli whose neck muscles were corded with strain. "Do it. Now." His breath coming in shallow gasps, Eli plunged forward, let out a long drawn out "fuck" and then collapsed on James.

James smiled as he ran his hands up and down Eli's back. "Mmm. Nice job."

"Uh huh." Eli hadn't moved yet. Eventually he rolled over and took care of the condom. They lay side by side for a few minutes catching their breath. When Eli looked over at James, his breath caught in his chest. What the hell was he doing? James was everything he wasn't. He was open and carefree and had a close, albeit slightly odd, relationship with his family. He had a normal job and probably normal life aspirations. This couldn't end well. Nate was a prime example. Nate had worked in banking; he'd gone to work, came home, wanted to go out on the weekends and have a good time, but Eli had been working. There was always an excuse. After a while Nate got tired of the excuses, so he went out with friends, without Eli, and well, that ended badly, hadn't it? Nate was still with the new guy though, so he couldn't really hold it against him.

When James reached for his hand, Eli sat up quickly. "Um, I need to, uh, clean up." He saw James frown, but he headed for the bathroom as fast as he could. He grabbed his jeans on the way past. After he washed up, he found his cigarettes and quietly slipped out onto James' balcony. He lit a cigarette and inhaled deeply. James was nice, too nice probably, and this likely was a bad idea. He was leaning both arms on the rail, playing with the cigarette in his fingers, when he heard the balcony door slide open.

He didn't move or look behind him, but started slightly when James' arms circled him and James leaned against his back. "Hey." James kissed the side of his neck. "What's up?"

"Nothing, I'm..." before he could get it out, James gave him a squeeze, practically the Heimlich maneuver. "Jesus. Easy."

"You were going to say it. Truth."

"I'm just, well, I'm just not sure I'm good dating material." It was easier to say when he didn't have to look in those brown eyes, all warm and chocolaty.

"So, you're abusive?"

Eli's body jerked. "No. Shit."

"You're a serial cheater?"

He pushed back with his butt. "No."

"You intend on stealing my ATM PIN and cleaning me out?"

Eli couldn't help but snort. "No. You're a teacher. I should probably be worried about my ATM PIN."

"You should, Mr. 'I can keep you in the manner to which you are accustomed'." James squeezed Eli lightly and smoothed his hands over Eli's bare stomach, tracing the muscles there. "Maybe I'll become your trophy husband."

"Hmm. You're cute enough, I guess." That got him harder squeeze.

"What then?"

"My life is whack. I work crazy hours, all days of the week, all times of the day. I see some pretty miserable shit and I can't help but bring that home. Trust me; it doesn't lead to good stuff."

"I know. I know all that. And I think you need to take a breath sometimes. Stop, forget the hospital and the crap, and just be you, Eli, the Trekkie nerd." Eli looked over his shoulder at James and frowned. "I love Trekkie nerds, my parents are the ultimate Trekkie nerds." Eli looked back over the dark street below and stubbed out what was left of his cigarette on the rail.

When Eli turned around, James plucked the butt from his fingers and grimaced as he threw it on the patio table. "We have to work on that. But let's just see what happens 'kay?" James snuggled Eli more closely against his body as Eli put his arms around James. "And no 'fine', no lying to me about how you really feel or when you've had a bad day. I can take it, I'm a big boy, and I promise I'll take you hiking and rock climbing, and drag you to Trek parties, and maybe even get you in to meet The Shat sometime. Or at least Mr. Spock."

James pulled back a bit and tipped Eli's face up to meet his eyes. "If it doesn't work out, it doesn't work out. But hey, you know, it just might. And then what? Kids, marriage, a house in the burbs?" Eli grimaced. "Okay, no house in the burbs, but I think it's worth a try."

Eli nodded. "Okay, but don't say I haven't warned you."

James laughed out loud and Eli couldn't help but smile. He loved James' laugh. "Yes, Doctor. You warned me. Now come back to bed. It's cuddle time. Besides, you promised me two or three times and I'm holding you to that."

Eli smiled and followed James back inside. He could handle cuddle time and more sex. He'd even forego his ribbed rule tonight. It had been a long time since he'd had someone in his life. Maybe he *could* stop and take a breath once in a while. James was right, it wouldn't hurt to try - and maybe, just maybe, James would be the boy who made moving to San Francisco worth it.

End

Author bio: Tam is a single mom to a teenage daughter who lives in Ontario, Canada. It was the encouragement and dares of some friends that inspired her to start writing m/m romance. Traveling as much as possible with her daughter, reading, writing, and playing around on-line keep her busy, in addition to her day job.