

Ezra sat in his favorite armchair in his favorite coffee shop, *Moka*. What made it his favorite was that it was situated directly below one of the small, decades-old speakers that hung from the support beams. The owner had great taste in music and Ezra wanted a front-row seat. With a smile on his face, the lion had his head tilted back, one ear angled slightly up, as he enjoyed the clean, energetic city-pop that filled the shop. This was precision-engineered ‘Good Mood Music’ and it was working wonders.

Peeking open one eye, Ezra glanced at his watch. Ten minutes late. He frowned. This wasn’t a big deal in itself – he once had diva clients that showed up to meetings nearly an hour late and acted like it was *his* fault – but it wasn’t like Marcus to be late for anything. He tended to show up far too early, which was a mild pain in the ass for Ezra before they got to know each other. Then again, the rabbit had a family to look after, now. He couldn’t expect perfect punctuality while the guy was managing a pair of toddlers.

Ezra took a sip of his honey-vanilla latte and lapped the foam from the tip of his nose. The summer sun blazing through the window was slowly creeping its way across the floor, nearly reaching the tips of his pointed boots. The lion was dressed for the season in pastel-pink slacks and a blue Hawaiian shirt with the first two buttons left open. He usually kept it more professional for meetings, but Marcus was as much of a friend as he was a client.

The old-fashioned brass bell above the entrance sang as the door swung open. Marcus shuffled into the coffee shop looking like he’d been left out in the rain for several days. One long ear drooped over his shoulder while the other was unknowingly caught under the strap of the backpack he wore. Despite the heat, he wore a baggy pull-over hoodie in a color that Ezra feared had once been white. It was printed with a retro logo for the Super Nintendo and was covered in a rainbow of colorful stains. Below his shorts – which may have simply been a pair of swim trunks – he wore two different pairs of Crocs, one white and one yellow. The yellow one appeared to have been colored that way by a magic marker.

“*Sorry,*” Marcus gasped, slinging his backpack off his shoulders and dropping into the empty chair beside Ezra’s. Sinking into the cushions, he let out a long sigh and deflated, his body going limp. “The twins’ daycare is closed for a remodel and they didn’t send an email about it until like ten *last night*. I had to drop them off at the weird Jesus-y one connected to the church down the block.”

“Don’t sweat it,” Ezra said as he sat up in his chair. “It’s summertime, I’m in no rush. Have some coffee.”

“Thanks,” Marcus mumbled. Before Ezra could stop him, he picked up the lion’s drink from the table between them and gulped down half of it without taking a breath.

“Oh. Alright.”

“*God* I needed that,” Marcus said with a gasp.

“Glad to hear it.” Ezra pushed himself out of his seat. “Let me just...go get one for myself.”

Returning a few minutes later with a replacement drink in hand, he found Marcus digging through his backpack on his lap, taking out loose bags of fruit snacks, teething toys, and stuffed animals in search of something at the bottom.

“*Got it,*” he said, voice muffled inside the bag. Wrenching an arm free, Marcus dropped a plastic baggie full of USB drives on the table. “I finally had time to make some new stuff. It’s in there somewhere.”

Ezra picked up the baggie and held it up to the light, shuffling it in his hand. “Uh...which one?”

“Oh, the one that says *New.*”

The lion up-ended the bag and poured the contents into his lap. The first one he picked up was a cheap white flash drive with the logo of an insurance company and the letters *VZNS* scribbled on the side in Sharpie. This album, pronounced ‘*visions,*’ was Marcus’s best-seller and got him nominated for several awards. Ezra set it carefully back in its bag and placed it on the table, quietly remarking to himself that EDM artists were a different breed.

“Hey, Marcus?” Ezra turned to him and held up two identical flash drives, both of which had the word ‘New’ written on them. Marcus’s eyes darted between them, his mouth half open.

“Oh...shit.” Scratching his head, the rabbit took one of them, turned it over in his hand, then pointed to the one in Ezra’s. “I think...that one?”

“Well, let’s find out.” Reaching into his leather messenger bag, Ezra took out his small computer, more of a tablet with a keyboard attachment, and plugged the drive into it. On it was a collection of FLAC files, each one named things like: *I*, *1a*, *1a part 2*, *new song*, *asdfjkl*, *stupid bullshit*, *bad*, and *Untitled*. Ezra went to his settings, sorted the files by date, and played the most recent one. After wrapping his earbud around his right ear, he passed the left one over to Marcus, who was forced to simply hold it next to his head.

Putting a finger in his open ear, Ezra closed his eyes and focused on the music playing through the tiny speaker. He nodded to the beat, tapped his hand in a rhythm against his thigh, and allowed his body to make whatever small movements it wanted as he felt the music as much as listened to it. Then, almost as soon as it had started, it was over. Carefully, Ezra took the finger out of his ear and clasped his hands together, mentally digesting what he’d just heard. After a long, meditative moment of silence, he turned to Marcus.

“It’s okay.”

“*Fuck*.” The rabbit let out another sigh and put his head in his hand.

“It’s not bad, but it’s no single. If you really believe in it, we can-”

“No, no...” Marcus interrupted, waving a hand in Ezra’s direction. “I know it’s bad. It’s just the only thing I’ve been able to finish in, like, months.”

The lion frowned. Taking out his earbud, he stowed it and the tablet back in his bag, then turned his chair to better face Marcus. “So how’re you doing? How’s everything been?”

Marcus took a long time to answer, pausing to frown into the distance while finishing off his cup of unknowingly-stolen coffee. “I don’t know. It’s not like anything is *bad*, but it’s like...my head isn’t in it anymore. I’m not thinking about music like I used to. I’m thinking about, y’know, what I need to get for when the twins start school. Or if they’re up to date on all their shots. Or what room we’re going to need to give up when they’re old enough to want their own spaces.”

“What about Nick and Eddie?” asked Ezra. “Where are they?”

“That’s the other thing. Eddie wants to take the bar exam next month so he’s been studying non-stop. And Nick’s trying to open his own yoga studio, which is a dream of his. So I’ve been taking charge of the kids since I can work at home. And I don’t mind that, I really don’t, but...” Marcus ran his fingers through his hair and shook his head, his eyes wide. “There’s fucking *two* of them, Ezra! I don’t know how the fuck people are supposed to manage *one*.”

“How old are they now?”

“Five. Well, almost five.” Marcus rolled his eyes. “Their birthday is coming up soon, so that’s *another* thing I gotta be on top of.”

“That’s a lot,” said Ezra, nodding. “I can see why you’re so distracted.”

“I’m still trying.” Marcus shrugged. “I get some time and I try to make something new, but it never...*feels* right. It doesn’t flow the same way it used to. It feels like work. I spend the whole time wanting to get enough done that I can stop without feeling guilty. That’s what keeps me going.”

Marcus put down his empty coffee cup and picked up the plastic baggy, looking at the drive inside it that contained his best work.

“I don’t think I have it anymore,” he said under his breath. “I’m not an artist anymore. I think... it might be over.”

The two of them were quiet for a few long moments. The bustling sounds of the coffee shop around them seemed muted, hushed. Even the music overhead had stopped, as if to give them privacy.

“Have you tried...stopping?” asked Ezra.

Marcus glanced up with a puzzled frown. “That’s my whole problem. I can’t make music.”

“No, your whole problem is that you keep forcing yourself to do it when you don’t want to.”

“But I *do* want to.”

“Really?” Ezra raised an eyebrow. “Or do you *not* want to *not* be doing it?”

Marcus paused, his nose twitching. The music in the cafe had started up again, a jazzy little number that sounded familiar, but that Ezra couldn’t place. At the same time as his tail began to sway to the rhythm, he noticed Marcus’s foot quietly tapping along as well. The lion smirked. No matter what happened, Marcus still had that spark in him.

“When’s the last time you had a vacation?” he asked.

The rabbit blew a raspberry as he sat back in the chair, tucking his arms into the pockets of his baggy hoodie. “Probably when I played at Electric Forest last year.”

“No, that’s a work trip. I mean a vacation.”

“I guess...when me and Nick went to Denver?”

“But you were only there because you were playing Red Rocks. I mean a *real* vacation.”

Furrowing his brow, Marcus stared at the floor, picking at his fingers as racked his brain for the memory. “We...went to the beach for a few days, but that was for our Babymoon, back when I was pregnant. It...hasn’t been *that* long, has it? There’s no way...”

“You aren’t the first client of mine I’ve had this conversation with,” said Ezra. “Guys in a 9 to 5, they take vacations all the time because they don’t give a shit, it’s just a job to them. But artists – like *you* – keep going and going and going because it’s not just a job, it’s a passion. But you need breaks from that, too. I’d say you need it even *more*. I’ve seen this kind of burn out a hundred different times from a hundred different artists and the answer for all of them was to just enjoy some down time. And it always works.”

While he listened intently, Marcus’s pursed his lips and shuffled as Ezra spoke. This, too, was no surprise. Of all the other clients he’d given this advice to, many of them seemed just as uneasy with the idea. After devoting so much time and energy to his art, the thought of taking his mind off of it completely must have been very alien to Marcus.

“I guess...I could *think* about it,” the rabbit mumbled. He picked up the coffee cup again and tipped it to his mouth before remembering it was empty. “You think the twins are old enough yet? Even if they are, it’s not exactly going to be relaxing managing a pair of four year olds.”

“So what if they didn’t go?” asked Ezra. “You’re probably not the only one that needs a break from the kids.”

Marcus’s eyes widened as he violently shook his head.

“*No*. I *adore* the twins, they’re everything to me.”

“Course you do. But they’re *four*. New parents need some time apart once in a while. Wanting some space doesn’t mean you love them any less.”

Marcus took his hands from his hoodie and began fiddling with the tip of his ear, a nervous tic Ezra had been quick to notice. “Even then, who’s going to watch them? My parents aren’t in the picture, Nick’s are gone, and Eddie’s live too far away. And we don’t know any sitters well enough to let them stay for, y’know, *days*.”

Ezra paused to take a sip of his coffee, savoring it on the back of his tongue. When he swallowed, he surprised even himself when he said, casually, “I’ll do it.”

Marcus’s ears slipped out of his fingers as they shot upright in surprise. “No, you don’t need to do that. We can find somebody.”

“Or I could just do it,” Ezra said again. “It’s been a slow summer. Most of my job is over the phone, anyway.”

“You’re my agent, I can’t ask that of you.”

“That’s why I’m offering. It’s in an agent’s best interest to maintain the mental and emotional health of his clients. Besides, I’ve known those kids since *before* they were born. They know me.”

Marcus fell silent again, but he didn’t seem as hesitant as before. Possibly, the thought of Ezra

babysitting the twins was the missing piece he needed to feel okay with the idea. Slowly, a smile began to form on the rabbit's face as he rocked back-and-forth in his seat.

"Well...I've been looking at pictures of this resort lately..."

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There was plastic tricycle turned over in the middle of the driveway, flipped with its wheels to the sky. Marcus sighed. Unwilling to get out and move it, he simply parked on the curb outside the house and braved the oppressive summer heat on his way to the front door. He was sweltering underneath the hoodie, but didn't want to take it off until he was inside. Gabe, who Marcus was carrying with both arms, clung to the pull-over and chewed on the ends of the drawstring. This would probably be the last year his father would be able to carry him like this. Gabe's sister, Olive, bounced along behind them, babbling in an hour-long run on sentence about her day at the day care.

"And then Liam said, he said that, that, uh, that if you, that if you make a lot of *money* that uh that the uh the *president* comes and he *takes* it from you and you gotta uh you gotta--"

"That's not how it works," Marcus grunted, setting Gabe down in the grass to fish for his keys. "When you make money, the government takes a little bit of it to help pay for things like roads and libraries. Those are called 'taxes.'"

The moment Gabe's feet touched the ground, he began to make a long, low whining sound in the back of his throat, then reached up and made grabby hands at his father.

"No, Gabe. I can't carry you all day long."

With a tight, angry frown, Gabe balled his hands into fists and began to stomp his little feet on the ground, the whine turning into a groan. A tantrum was brewing, but Marcus suspected some air conditioning, a snack, and a nap would nip it in the bud.

"Daddy?" Olive asked as Marcus finally slipped his key into the front lock. "How can the government takes your money if you don't want them to?"

Marcus closed his eyes and sighed as he pushed the door open, the trickle of cool air like fresh breath in his lungs. "Let's talk about this later, okay princess?"

Stumbling inside, Marcus kicked the door closed with the back of his foot, sealing himself and the twins inside the cold embrace of their climate-controlled home. Nick was sitting on the couch, his long legs crossed underneath him, and glaring at his laptop on the ottoman in front of him. The rest of the couch was covered in crumpled papers, remnants of the notebook in his lap that he was scribbling in with a pen. Only when Marcus spoke did he respond to the sound of his own name, glancing up with a bleary look in his eyes.

"Oh, hey," said Nick. "G'Morning."

"It's two in the afternoon," said Marcus.

"What?" Nick rubbed his eyes with his index fingers, then checked the time on his phone. "Oh. I think I stayed up all night again."

After kicking off her shoes next to the door, Olive ran across the living room and clambered up the arm of the couch. The sight of her brought Nick back to Earth for the moment and he smiled as he pulled her close to kiss her forehead. She wasn't related to Nick biologically, but Olive had miraculously been born with blonde, curly hair to match his.

"Papa, can you do a ponytail?" Olive asked him, pulling at the elastic hair ties he kept around his wrist. Nick took one, reached behind his daughter's head, and bound her hair into a long ponytail that dangled between her floppy ears. She wouldn't allow anyone but her Papa lay a hand on her hair.

"Didja have fun t'day?" Nick asked, his words slurring slightly from exhaustion.

"Uh huh." Olive paused for only a brief moment to chew on the tip of her finger, then asked, abruptly, "Papa? What's a soul?"

Nick blinked like he'd just been pepper-sprayed. "Huh?"

"The lady at the uh the daycare said that uh that everybody has a *soul*. What's a soul?"

“Oh. Well, it’s...some people think that...huh.” Nick glanced at Marcus for help, but he could only shake his head.

“She’s jumping right for the hard questions, isn’t she?” Marcus said with a weary smile. A tiny hand tugging on his pant leg made him glance down. Gabe was there, his eyes to the ground, and pointing upstairs toward the twins’ shared bedroom. They were overdue for nap time and Gabe liked to stick to his schedule.

“Olive, it’s almost naptime, okay?” Marcus said as he led Gabe by the hand. “Papa has work to do.”

“I could use a break,” said Nick, clearing the scrap papers off the couch cushion so the little girl could flop next to him, giggling all the way down.

Upstairs, just before putting Gabe to bed, the door at the end of the hall opened. A sliver of light crept across the carpet as a large, shambling mass fell through it, shuffling like a reanimated corpse toward Marcus. It smelled of death as it approached, letting out a low moan as it clawed in the darkness toward him.

Letting go of Gabe, Marcus used both hands to half-catch Eddie as he collapsed into him, grunting underneath his husband’s weight. The larger rabbit made a soft sound like a cooing dove and wrapped his arms around him, nestling his head in the crook of Marcus’s neck.

“You doing okay?” he asked.

Eddie made another sound like a dying whale. This was the first time in days Marcus had seen him not studying. He wore the same pajamas he’d had on the last time, his hair was disheveled and greasy, and his ears had somehow become tangled in a loose knot. Struggling to keep him upright, Marcus reached under Eddie’s arms to untie them.

“You want another Monster energy?” Marcus asked in the same voice he’d used to ask the infant twins if they wanted their bottles. Eddie nodded, gathered enough strength to lift his own weight, and gave Marcus a peck on the cheek before stumbling for the stairs. “Let’s add a shower onto that, too,” he called after him.

Inside the twins’ bedroom, Marcus walked Gabe to his spaceship-shaped bed in the corner, helped him pull off his shoes, and tucked him in. Sitting on the floor, he stroked his son’s dark hair and watched him snuggle up to the large octopus plush he’d grown attached to. Just as he began to leave, Gabe made a low sound and grabbed hold of one of Marcus’s dangling ears, tugging on it. He may have still been nonverbal, but he was getting better at expressing his needs.

Once Gabe was fully asleep, Marcus pulled the blankets to his chin, gave him a kiss on the head, then quietly left the room. Downstairs, Nick looked half-melted into the couch cushions as he allowed Olive to style his hair. Eddie was standing in front of the fridge, the door in his hand, staring inside it while completely motionless. There was no telling how long he’d been there.

At the sight of him descending the stairs, Olive stood up and took a running leap off the couch, clearing a shocking distance, and landed with a hard *thump* just before Marcus. “Daddy, can I have a juice?”

“Go ask *Dad*,” he said, pointing to Eddie.

Olive scurried into the kitchen, the sound of her footsteps finally snapping Eddie out of his daze.

“Eddie? Can you get me a juice?” asked Olive. Across the room, Marcus sighed. He was ‘Daddy’ and Nick was ‘Papa.’ But, for whatever reason, Eddie had gotten stuck with his own name.

Reaching into the fridge, Eddie took out two drinks. One was a white can of sugar-free Monster and the other was a similarly shaped can of grape juice. He popped both tabs, paused for a moment in sleep-deprived confusion, then took a sip of the juice and handed his daughter the Monster.

“*No. No no no no.*” Marcus scrambled for the kitchen, snatching the energy drink from Olive before the four-year-old took even a single sip. Taking Eddie’s hands, he pushed the Monster into them and helped him bring it to his lips, practically spoon-feeding him like a patient in a hospital bed.

“Go drink that in your room, okay?” Marcus told Olive as he gave her the juice. She drank it with both hands, staining the fur around her mouth purple, and nodded as she carried it upstairs. Only once he heard the bedroom door shut did Marcus breathe a much-needed sigh.

Eddie had regained enough of himself to chug half the can in a single breath. He paused to breathe, belched, then looked at Marcus, the light returning to his eyes.

“I really needed this,” he said.

“I could tell. How’s it going?”

Eddie paused to drink from his can again, holding up a finger. With a gasp, he said, “I’m going to fail.”

“*Stop it.* No you aren’t,” Marcus snapped. “Bigger idiots than you have passed the bar. And it isn’t even until next month.”

“It’s like I’m trying to study for every exam I ever had all at the same time,” Eddie said, tugging at his ear. “I thought I was done with this after I graduated.”

“Seriously, take a break. Finish your Monster, have a snack, take a shower.” Marcus paused, his nose twitching. “Please...take a shower.”

Leaving the kitchen, Marcus went to check on Nick, who was staring at the ceiling with a blank look on his face. Marcus moved the laptop to the floor straddled the ottoman in its place. “You good?”

“As I can be,” Nick said.”

“How’s it going?” Marcus asked. Nick took a deep breath and released it with a long sigh.

“You remember how much of a pain in the ass it was to buy the house? Imagine that, but every financial decision you ever made in your life completely fucked you over and the only way to fix it would be to go back in time and kick your sixteen year old self in the dick until he learns he doesn’t need a credit card in high school. And also imagine that you’re dead and you’re in Hell. It’s kind of like that.”

Marcus paused, glancing between both his husbands’ exhausted faces, and thought about his conversation with Ezra. Standing up, he pointed at both of them and announced, in a decisive voice, “We need a fucking vacation.”

From the couch, Nick chuckled cynically. “Yeah, that would be nice.”

“No, I mean it. We *need* a vacation. Soon. I don’t think we’ve had a real one since the twins were born.”

“What about Denver?”

“For me, that was work. Besides, Eddie had to stay home.”

“Watching a pair of two-year-olds by yourself is no vacation,” said Eddie between gulps of his Monster. His words were coming out faster as the caffeine began to hit him. “Honestly, I wish I could, but I need to study.”

“The exam isn’t until the end of the month and you’re already working to exhaustion. Without a break, all you’re going to do is burn yourself out.”

“I’ll be fine, I’ll be fine.” Eddie tipped the can back to swallow the rest of the energy drink, then crushed it between both hands. His eyes were wild with artificial energy. “I’m already halfway there, I’m already studying torts. C’mon, ask me anything. Ask me anything about torts. Anything.”

“No.” Marcus turned to Nick. “And you’re still waiting on three more offers to get accepted. There’s no telling how long that’ll take. What are you going to do, just sit on the couch losing sleep until the phone rings?”

“I gotta be available.” Nick shrugged.

“Then bring your phone. It’s not like we’ll be going into the middle of the desert.”

Nick cocked his head in curiosity and leaned forward. “Is there somewhere you want to go?”

Marcus opened his mouth to speak and nothing but splutters and bashful mumbles came out. Blushing beneath his fur, he grasped one of his ears and began to wring it in both hands like a wet towel. “Um... Well I was... Kind of looking at... a few places but I... I don’t know if we... if you’d *want*

to..."

Nick's eyes widened for a moment before a devilish smirk spread across his face. Putting his computer aside, he sat forward with his hands clasped in his lap, his exhaustion momentarily forgotten. He knew how to push his husbands' buttons better than anyone, so a bashful Marcus was practically an invitation. "Go on."

"It's...this...*resort*." Marcus felt his face burning like he was a teenager again. He was struggling to get the words out. "It's...near Malibu. And it is...it's a..." While staring at his feet, he lifted both hands to make finger quotes. "It's a '*clothing optional*' resort."

"You don't *say*?" Nick's ears – among other things – twitched. "Are you feeling *adventurous*?"

"I mean, it's just one place I've been looking at," Marcus was quick to add. "There's others, but that was...I mean, it would be something different to..."

"I'm going to throw out a guess," said Nick, "and say that you've had the website open on your computer for a while, haven't you?"

"The tickets have been sitting in my cart for three weeks," Marcus mumbled.

"What's it called?" asked Eddie.

"Hideaway Cove."

"In Malibu?"

"Yeah."

Eddie nodded, then abruptly marched up the stairs without another word. Nick and Marcus watched him go, then exchanged a glance and a shrug. Eddie did weird things when he was over-caffeinated.

"What about the twins?" asked Nick. He was back to using his regular voice rather than his teasing one. "This sounds like a grown-ups only kind of vacation."

"That's the other thing." Marcus picked at his nails for a moment, his eyes glancing up at the twins' bedroom. "Ezra offered to come watch them while we're gone."

"Ezra?" Nick's ears twitched and he sat up just a little straighter. It was no secret to any of them that Nick had a slight crush on Marcus's agent. "Is that, like, appropriate?"

"It's not like he's a doctor. It's fine." Marcus scratched his head. "I *think* it's fine..."

"That's still a pretty big ask. I know he's a nice guy, but can he take care of kids?"

"He says he looks after his nephew all the time and he's around the same age."

There was an impatient energy to Marcus as he crossed the room and sat on the couch beside Nick. With a sigh, he allowed himself to fall over and slump against the taller rabbit's shoulder. Nick put his arm around him and squeezed.

"But I know how you feel," Marcus said. "I trust him, I really do, but I just don't feel *right* about it. I didn't want to tell him that because I don't have a good reason."

"I have a guess," said Nick. "If we go, it'll be the first time we're away from the kids since they were born."

Nick felt Marcus briefly stiffen underneath his arm. "Y'know, the first time I ever dropped them off at daycare, I cried at every stoplight on the way home."

"Yeah, I remember that." Nick shuffled on the couch and chewed on his lower lip. "I...uh...I called the daycare, like, six times that day just to make sure they were doing alright."

"You did?" Marcus craned his neck to look up at Nick. "You never told me that!"

"Yeah, well...That's because they...blocked my number, after that."

"Jesus Christ," Marcus laughed. "Well, don't do that to Ezra. I don't wanna find another agent."

Nick laughed, then thought quietly for a few moments. "...It'll probably be fine."

"Maybe it'll be good for them," Marcus said, though he followed it up with a deep sigh.

"Maybe it'll be good for *us*."

"We can't be with them *all* the time," said Nick. "They need to learn that sooner or later."

"Can I...I mean...Is it okay if..." Marcus tucked his legs underneath him on the couch and laid

his head in Nick's lap. "I love Gabe and Olive more than I've ever loved anything, but...what if I'm kind of sick of them at the same time? What does that mean?"

"Well, do you love me?" asked Nick.

"I do."

"And do you ever get sick of *me*?"

"...I mean-"

"*Yeah* you do. Don't lie."

"...Only sometimes."

"Exactly," said Nick. "Sometimes, people who love each other also need a break from each other. And I think, sometimes, the time apart reminds you of *why* you love them in the first place."

"Huh." Marcus pondered the idea for a moment. "That's very insightful."

"Sure is," said Nick. He then stuck the tip of his finger in his mouth, lifted Marcus's ear, and gave the rabbit a wet willie. "*Namaste.*"

Marcus made yelping sound, kicked both his feet against the couch's armrest, and swatted wildly at Nick's hand before jerking upright. "What the *fuck*?"

"Sick of me yet?" Nick asked, wiggling his eyebrows.

Marcus punched Nick in the upper arm as he rubbed the spit out of his inner ear. "I *should* be..."

The stairs across the house creaked as Eddie descended them, a sheaf of paper folded up in his hand. Approaching the couch, he passed Nick and Marcus each a page from the stack. "Here you go."

Marcus unfolded the page to find in his hand...a blank piece of paper. Glancing aside, he found that Nick had gotten the same thing. The two of them shared a puzzled look before directing it to Eddie.

"Oh." He looked at his own page, also blank. "I thought I printed them out..."

"What were these *supposed* to be?" asked Nick.

"Our tickets to Hideaway Cove." Eddie put his hands on his hips and beamed with self-satisfaction. "Five days, all-inclusive."

"*What*?" Marcus did a double-take to the page in his hand, remembered it was blank, then balled it up and tossed it behind the couch. "Already?"

"Kinda thought we'd talk about it, first," said Nick.

"See? I can be impulsive, too." Eddie's smirk abruptly vanished. Slapping both hands to his head, he gasped, "*Oh my God, the kids.*"

Nick and Marcus sat Eddie between them on the couch and brought him up to speed. To their surprise, he was unfazed by the idea.

"I like Ezra. He's responsible, he works hard, and he's been good to Marcus." He paused before adding, slightly under his breath, "Plus, it's in his best interest to take good care of his client's kids if he wants to keep his job."

"I'd never," said Marcus. "Ezra's my rock. He's family at this point."

"I know, I know. *But*..." Eddie shrugged, raising his eyebrows. "I'm just saying. If you wanted to. You *could* do better."

"Different conversation," interrupted Nick. "*Could* he babysit the twins?"

"I don't see why not," Eddie said. "He's a lion looking after a pair of rabbit toddlers. How much trouble could they be?"

"Have you *met* your children?" said Marcus.

"Worst-case scenario, we drive home early," said Nick. "It's just in Malibu."

Eddie let out a low, satisfied hum deep in his chest, laid his head back, and closed his eyes. "I want to get blackout drunk on the beach. I want to stop thinking about law. I want to drink a daiquiri bigger than my face. I want...to..."

In the middle of his sentence, Eddie trailed off, his mouth hanging slack. He let out a single,



deep snore from the back of his throat. Nick and Marcus had to lean past him to look at each other.

“I think Eddie’s onboard,” said Nick.

“Then let’s start packing.”